



European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)
Confédération européenne des syndicats (CES)

ETUC Resolution: More investment in lifelong learning for quality jobs

Adopted at the Executive Committee on 1-2 December 2010

The European Union needs a paradigm shift. The model of ‘free and deregulated’ markets pushed forwards by Member States competing with each other in the European internal market place has failed us. What we need instead is a greater emphasis on European cooperation on quality jobs, common sustainable industrial policies, a more substantial European budget, moves towards an economic union alongside a monetary union, and common European approaches to financial regulation.

In order to contribute to a greater emphasis on European cooperation on quality jobs for both working men and women, the ETUC supports the goals of European education and training policies which promote flexibility between academic and vocational pathways. The ETUC is convinced that learning without setting appropriate socio-political objectives will ultimately fail and so calls on the EU, Member States and employers throughout Europe to invest more in lifelong learning.

1. Context

Europe’s social and economic well-being is dependent on having a well educated and highly skilled population, and education and training play an essential role in giving citizens the knowledge, skills and competences they need to participate fully in society and the economy.

Global competition, demographic developments, technological progress, climate change obligations and shifts in patterns of employment individually and collectively are having a dramatic impact on labour markets and the need for new knowledge, skills and competences. If the EU is to meet these challenges, it will need to create more and better jobs and enable working men and women to improve their skills and more specifically match them to short-term and long-term labour market demand.

The alarming nature of the financial and economic crisis has led many Member States to introduce a series of austerity measures and reduce public sector funding, which in turn has led to the further loss of jobs and insecurity for millions of men and women, particularly those on temporary or part-time contracts and engaged in seasonal work, adds a formidable supplementary challenge.

Global competition and company restructuring have led to the loss of employment in manufacturing industries in the European Union, particularly amongst the low skilled. The situation is evolving dramatically however, and emerging countries have recognised the need

to invest heavily in upgrading their own skills base. China, for example, is putting a priority on the development of the highly skilled and is producing significantly more researchers per year than the EU (+9.9 % per annum for China and +3.1 % per annum for the EU over the period 2000 to 2006), and coincidentally it has become the largest exporter of high-tech products in the world due to the growth of its computers and office machinery exports. (A more research-intensive and integrated European Research Area - Science, Technology and Competitiveness - key figures report 2008/2009).

Significant demographic developments are taking place. According to Cedefop figures, the workforce will be getting older in the decade leading up to 2020, and 'only the number of 45-54 and 55-64 year olds will increase... Continuous efforts to increase labour market participation, in particular of women and older people, are needed to keep the decline in the labour force lower than that of the population'. (Skills supply and demand in Europe - Medium term forecast up to 2020).

Technological progress, particularly in the form of new information and communication technologies, biotechnologies and nanotechnologies, has already led to the redundancy of certain skills and the launching of new knowledge-based industries that require a highly skilled work force.

Meeting climate change obligations through sustainable development has significant potential for the creation of new jobs, which in turn will require the improvement of existing skills, requiring workers to become familiar with new practices and techniques that will enable them to work in a low-carbon economy.

Patterns of employment are continually changing, with the gradual but constant decline of employment in the primary sector and manufacturing and the constant increase in employment in the service sector. Cedefop figures show that by 2020 a further 2.5 million jobs will be lost in the primary sector and a further 2 million in manufacturing and production industries. Growth in employment will lie in the service sector, and there will be a shift in demand towards more skilled workers. 'As a result, demand for highly-qualified people is projected to rise by almost 16 million. Demand for people with medium-level qualifications is projected to rise by more than 3.5 million. Conversely, demand for low-skilled workers is expected to decrease by around 12 million'.

All these changes are taking place at a time of great economic uncertainty and at a time of high unemployment. The latest Eurostat figures (31 August 2010) show that just over 23 million men and women were now formally recognised as unemployed within the EU, an increase of just over a million compared with July 2009 figures - that is 10% of the working population in 2010 as compared with 9.6% the previous year. The lowest employment rate was to be found in Austria (3.8%) and the Netherlands (4.4%) and the highest in Spain (20.3%). The unemployment rate for men rose from 9.2% to 9.6% during this period and for women from 9.0% to 9.6%. The most shocking figures relate to the unemployment rate of young people (under 25s) - 20.2%, with a figure of 8.1% in the Netherlands and 41.5% in Spain. As in previous downturns, young people are the hardest hit, and the NEET group (not in education, employment or training) is set to grow, and their employment must be a priority.

Because of the alarming financial and economic crisis, the potential for job growth over the next ten years is poor at best. Cedefop figures forecast that the situation will only marginally improve over the next ten years. Demand for labour should increase by 0.3% per annum over the next ten years, but the 2008 figure will most likely not be reached.

2. The EU response

The EU response to this financial and economic crisis has been to move from the Lisbon Strategy, whose professed aim was for the EU 'to become the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010 capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion and respect for the environment', to another 10-year initiative *Europe 2020 – A European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*. It proposes 5 headline targets for 2020, two of which are directly linked to education and training and labour market policy:

- 75% of the population aged 20-64 should be employed
- The share of early school leavers should be under 10% and at least 40 % of the younger generation should have a tertiary degree.

As things stand at the moment the EU average figures for 2009 were, as follows:

- 69.1% of the population aged 20-64 is employed (75.8% of men and 62.5% of women)
- The share of early school leavers is 14.4% (16.3% men and 10.7% women), and 32.3% of the younger generation has a tertiary degree (28.9% men and 35.2% women).

Some countries are already hitting these targets, but for others a vast effort will be required.

In order to meet these global targets the EU is proposing seven flagship initiatives, two of which are directly linked to education and training and the labour market, 'An Agenda for New Skills and Jobs' and 'Youth on the Move'.

The professed aim of 'An Agenda for new skills and jobs' is 'to create conditions for modernising labour markets with a view to raising employment levels and ensuring the sustainability of our social models. This means empowering people through the acquisition of new skills to enable our current and future workforce to adapt to new conditions and potential career shifts, reduce unemployment and raise labour productivity'. One element will be the launching of the European Taxonomy of Skills, Competences and Occupations (ESCO).

The professed aim of 'Youth on the Move' is 'to enhance the performance and international attractiveness of Europe's higher education institutions and raise the overall quality of all levels of education and training in the EU, combining both excellence and equity, by promoting student mobility and trainees' mobility, and improve the employment situation of young people'.

The EU has entered a new stage of the Copenhagen Process, whose aim has been to encourage more citizens to make wider use of vocational learning opportunities, whether at school, in higher education, in the workplace, or through private courses. From Copenhagen to Maastricht, Helsinki and Bordeaux, a European vocational and education training area has been built. The next step will be the adoption in December 2010 of the Bruges Communiqué on the future priorities for enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training. The EU has also produced a Communication 'A New Impetus for European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training to support the Europe 2020 Strategy'.

The EU has moved from a 'learning process' approach to a 'learning outcomes' approach, based on what learners are expected to know, understand and be able to do, and has moved forward with the implementation of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc44_en.htm, EUROPASS <http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/>, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

(ECTS) http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc48_en.htm, the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc50_en.htm and the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) <http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/home.aspx>. The EU is also in the process of modernising the Professional Qualifications Directive (2005/36/EC).

In parallel EU Member States, in conjunction with another 20 countries, have launched the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), previously known as the 'Bologna Process', in March 2010, to ensure more comparable, compatible and coherent systems of higher education in Europe.

3. The ETUC response

The Worsening Crisis – Europe at Risk was the subject of a resolution adopted at the ETUC Executive Committee in June 2010. <http://www.etuc.org/a/7373>

The Europe 2020 strategy has also been the subject of a joint statement with BUSINESSEUROPE, CEEP and UEAPME. In this statement the ETUC and the employers' organisations underline, inter alia, the importance of promoting the knowledge triangle (education, research, innovation). <http://www.etuc.org/a/7327>

Europe must further strengthen its potential in terms of skilled workers, science, research and technology and thus its capacity to innovate as a key element of competitiveness. In any case, the knowledge triangle must remain at the heart of the EU2020 strategy. In this context the notion of innovation has to be widened to all kind of non-technological innovation including "social innovation" in order to increase social capital which is important for both competitiveness and social cohesion. Insufficient investment in innovation and further education is exacerbating economic problems and affecting labour productivity.

Looking ahead, our work patterns are changing. So are employers' needs for skills in the work force and the needs of workers to combine productive employment with family life and personal development. Europe must not only upgrade and update skills levels; it must also make sure that workers have the skills that are needed on the labour market and that these skills are fully used in high-quality jobs.

Comprehensive lifelong learning strategies are required to ensure employability of workers. It is important to establish effective concepts for initial and further training, create jobs, not least for those who are excluded from the labour market due to, for example, shortcomings in their education, and to take effective steps to remove discrimination as far as access to and remaining in the labour market are concerned. Well educated workers and the capacity to innovate are key elements of competition and a prerequisite for prosperity. This is indispensable for the creation of productive and highly-skilled jobs.

Prior to this, the ETUC Executive Committee passed a resolution in March 2009 on initial and continuous vocational training for a European employment strategy. <http://www.etuc.org/a/6078>

The ETUC also signed a Framework Agreement on Inclusive Labour Markets with BUSINESSEUROPE, CEEP and UEAPME in March 2010. <http://www.etuc.org/a/7076>

In this agreement the ETUC and the employers' organisations agree that *'labour market inclusion is an essential condition for cohesion, including the fight against poverty, and economic success'*. They recognise, inter alia, that *'they have a responsibility to deepen their reflections and engage themselves to find solutions and mobilise their members.'* An emphasis was put upon the following, inter alia:

- *'cooperating with education and training systems in order to better match the needs of the individual and those of the labour market, including by tackling the problems of basic skills (literacy and numeracy), promoting vocational education and training and measures to ease the transition between education and the labour market'*
- *introducing individual competence development plans (in line with the framework of actions for the lifelong development of competences and qualifications) jointly elaborated by the employer and the worker, taking into account the specific situation of the employer, particularly SMEs, and worker. These plans identify the required competences of the worker in a given work situation; and, with shared responsibilities according to the individual situation, actions to develop the worker's competences*
- *improving transparency and transferability, both for the worker and for the enterprise, in order to facilitate geographical and occupational mobility and to increase the efficiency of labour markets*
 - *by promoting the development of means of recognition and validation of competences*
 - *by improving the transferability of qualifications to ensure transitions to employment*
- *promoting more and better apprenticeship and traineeship contracts'*

4. The ETUC lifelong learning agenda

The ETUC lifelong learning agenda has the following key points:

1/Supporting top quality initial education

Education is a fundamental human right and essential for the exercise of all other human rights. Initial education is not only important for personal development but it also lays the basis for active citizenship, for social inclusion and for success in the labour market. The latest OECD survey notes that 'education plays a major role in keeping individuals in the labour force longer' and that 'people with higher levels of education have a better chance of finding and keeping a job'. (Education at a Glance 2010). Educational attainment is even positively associated with self-reported good health.

Top quality initial education provides a fundamental start in life, and the ETUC calls on Member States to support publicly funded and properly regulated institutions of initial education, covering pre-primary, primary and secondary schools, vocational training and tertiary education, with well qualified and well trained teaching and support staff on good pay and conditions.

In the light of the Europe 2020 strategy the ETUC calls on the EU to propose a Recommendation for reducing the numbers of early school leavers based on prevention, intervention and compensation and also a Recommendation for achieving the 40 % figure for the younger generation with a tertiary degree.

2/Enabling equal access to education and training

Equal access to initial education and training is essential to launch citizens on their way, but equal access to continuing education and training is essential to respond to citizens' changing circumstances and aspirations on the one hand and the needs of the labour market on the other.

The ETUC considers that all workers should have equal access to education and training at all levels, regardless of their age, gender, employment status, or nationality, and particularly groups with low participation, such as the low-skilled, older workers and workers on temporary or part-time contracts, so that they are able to acquire, update and develop their knowledge, skills and competences throughout their lifetime. Those that need training the most should not be the least likely to obtain it.

The ETUC calls on the EU to underpin this access with a workers' right to training.

The ETUC considers that employers, and particularly SMEs, should support lifelong learning initiatives by making learning more accessible during working hours, and better suited to workers' needs, either through the individualisation of learning plans, the shift to competence-based training, the move to modularisation or the use of distance learning.

3/Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning

Participation in non-formal and informal learning after leaving initial education is essential for citizens, both men and women, to improve their knowledge, skills and competences. The validation of non-formal and informal learning provides opportunities for integration into society in general and into the labour market in particular. It helps reduce the possibility of unemployment for those that have the skills but not the paper qualifications. It avoids repetition of learning which has already been done.

The ETUC calls on the EU to put forward a Recommendation, with full involvement of the social partners at European and national level, on the validation of non-formal and informal learning which improves validation practices, where they exist, and which introduces new legal structures and policy frameworks to support non-formal and informal learning, where they do not.

The ETUC calls on Member States to consider ways in which the validation of non-formal and informal learning can be integrated into National Qualification Frameworks and to establish rigorous and credible instruments with social partners for the recognition and transferability of skills obtained via non-formal and informal learning.

The ETUC calls on employers to examine ways of recognising the validation of non-formal and informal in the workplace, by means of career development and salary increases.

4/Easing the transition from initial education to working life

If working men and women are to take advantage of employment opportunities, both nationally and Europe-wide, they need to have the right knowledge, skills and competences and to match them to labour market needs. They need a combination of transversal core skills with the specific skills needed for a job on the basis of initial education and vocational training and they need to develop them further throughout their working lives on the basis of

continuing vocational training and adult education. For this they need to be able to move flexibly between academic and vocational pathways. They also need to know which jobs are available and what skills are needed, or will be needed and recognised to carry them out.

The ETUC calls on the EU and Member States to continue to invest in socio-economic research and to develop more reliable systems for the anticipation of future skill needs and skill shortages, with the active participation of social partners. The fruits of this research need to be disseminated in a clear and user-friendly way.

The ETUC calls on Member States and employers to make greater provision for fully-funded on-the-job training and apprenticeships.

The ETUC calls on Member States to develop greater permeability and mobility between academic and vocational education systems within the context of National Qualifications Frameworks.

Finally the ETUC calls on Member States to establish integrated guidance and counselling services and efficient job placement services which are closely linked to the needs of the labour market.

5/Providing adequate and targeted funding for top quality education and training

Europe's social and economic well-being is dependent on having a population that is highly qualified and able to understand the world in which we live, and this requires adequate and targeted funding. It is counter-productive for European governments to cut funding for education and training during the financial and economic crisis, as a growing economy is dependent on the supply of highly skilled workers and on the mobilisation of the skills and competences of the unemployed. Employers are constantly on the lookout for skilled working men and women, and they need to recognise their own responsibilities and treat continuing vocational training as an investment for development in the long term.

The ETUC demands that Member States do not take advantage of the financial and economic crisis to make public spending cuts which will have a deleterious impact on the provision of top quality education and training.

The ETUC calls on Member States and employers to invest in working men and women and to increase expenditure per employee for continuing vocational training.

6/Participating in social dialogue on lifelong learning

Trade union participation in social dialogue on lifelong learning is a key element for the successful design, management, monitoring and assessment of public policies and of national and EU vocational training systems. In this way training programmes that emanate from this process correspond to the needs of the labour market but also to the needs of working men and women.

The ETUC calls on the EU and Member States to support the participation of trade unions in this process of tri-partite social dialogue on lifelong learning at all levels.

The ETUC calls on the European Commission to set up European sector skills councils within the context of the 'An Agenda for new skills and jobs' as a means of support for European Social Dialogue.

The ETUC calls on employers at all levels (European, national, regional and workplace) to recognise that trade union organisations and employers have shared interests in terms of the development of a highly skilled work force and to engage in a process of collective bargaining and/or social dialogue with trade unions, particularly at the workplace with union representatives and union learning representatives, on the subject of continuing vocational training.

7/Making the best of European education and training initiatives and instruments

The EU is in the process of implementing a series of initiatives, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), EUROPASS, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) and the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET), and in the process of modernising the Professional Qualifications Directive (2005/36/EC)

The EU has a number of instruments for supporting education and training activities. On the one hand there is the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) which is working to strengthen European cooperation in vocational education and training by providing information on and analyses of vocational education and training systems, policies, research and practice. On the other there are funds and/or programmes which can be used to support the development of education and training activities:

- the European Social Fund, which contributes to the integration into working life of the unemployed and disadvantaged sections of the population, mainly by funding training measures (with a budget of ca. 75 billion euros for the period 2007 to 2013). http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/esf/
- the Lifelong Learning Programme, with its four sub-programmes which fund projects at different levels of education and training - Comenius for schools, Erasmus for higher education, Leonardo da Vinci for vocational education and training, Grundtvig for adult education (with a budget of ca. 7 billion euros for the period 2007 to 2013). http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc78_en.htm

The ETUC calls on the EU and Member States to ensure that these European initiatives, which have been designed to facilitate transparency, to encourage mobility and to improve overall quality, follow a similar 'learning outcomes' approach and are successfully implemented so as to respond to workers' education and training needs, with social partner involvement at the European and national level.

The ETUC calls on the EU and Member States to ensure that these European instruments are safeguarded and developed further in the next EU funding period (2014-2020).

8/Training the next generation of trade union members, representatives and officers

If European trade unions are to succeed in facing the challenges caused by global competition, demographic developments, technological progress, climate change obligations and shifts in patterns of employment, they will need competent and effective trade union members, representatives and officers.

The ETUC supports the provision of trade union education programmes and initiatives which will then ensure that trade union officers and representatives have the appropriate knowledge, skills and competences to defend the interests of their trade union members.

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In order to contribute to a greater emphasis on European cooperation on quality jobs for working men and women, the ETUC calls on the EU, Member States and employers throughout Europe to invest more in lifelong learning.

