

JOINT RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL PARTNERS ON PROMOTING SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP IN EMPLOYEE TRAINING



KEY MESSAGES

- Rapid labour market changes such as the industry 4.0 revolution, digitalisation, social, demographic and environmental transitions and global challenges require joint actions on improving employee training. A skilled workforce is one of the main assets of the European social and economic model and this should be further developed to cope with the challenges posed by the future of work. Education, training and lifelong learning was reaffirmed as a priority by European heads of state and government while proclaiming the European Pillar of Social Rights in November 2017. Support for training to adults provides benefits for workers, employers and the whole of society.
- There are many different national laws, rules and approaches to the organisation and provision of employee training. Some countries have wide-ranging and strong vocational training policies set in legislation, while in others training provisions are set by collective agreements, at various levels, or agreed directly between employers and employees in the workplace. Opportunities to access training can also be dependent on the size of the company/workplace. Access to effective employee training should be facilitated while respecting the diversity and flexibility of systems, which vary according to diverse industrial relations practices.
- Financing levels and mechanisms of employee training vary significantly across Europe. This reflects the different levels of economic development in the Member States, but also different choices and responsibilities of the actors. Whatever the financing model, an important success factor is the involvement of social partners and the cooperative attitude between them when it comes to the management of funding, time and human resources. Improvements to national education and training systems could be further fostered through targeted financial support to Member States as part of the European semester process.
- Employee training can contribute towards creating a good working environment, which ensures employees' well-being in their work, motivates them, and enables them to progress in their career and earnings. In turn, employers benefit from the enhanced motivation and productivity of their workforce and overall businesses performance. This means that there is a shared interest and a shared responsibility of employers and employees to contribute to upskilling and reskilling, leading to successful enterprises and an appropriately skilled workforce.
- Because they take an active role and have direct knowledge and experience of both labour and training markets, social partners are well placed to foster a diversified offer of training options in the search for the best possible fit with employers' and workers' needs on the labour market.
- **Social dialogue and collective agreements**, in particular at the sectoral level, play an important role in the governance of training systems and in creating training opportunities and improving the relevance and provision of employee training. This includes social partners working together to foster transition and career paths between sectors. The establishment of training funds has occurred in several Member States and can play an important role.
- Paid time off for work-relevant training and a right to training are established practices in some Member States. In such cases, social partners play a role in facilitating employees' effective access to training. This could provide inspiration for other countries, depending on the national context.

- Employee training should be of **high quality, effective** and equally relevant for the worker and the employer. It should respond to the need for improving **professional, soft and transversal skills** and contribute to **workplace and industry-related career development**. Employee training offers should also respond to new and emerging developments in labour markets and enterprises. These offers should be tailor-made, innovative in terms of new training methods, take into account work organisation and be delivered online, where appropriate, and in a work-based environment. In addition, it should be **accessible** and benefit from pooling/mutualised resources within and between sectors.
- Training provisions must be designed in a way that fosters and supports mobility between and within sectors. Securing these transitions benefits workers' employability and employers' capacity to attract new recruits.
- The **changes and transitions in the labour market** require effective upskilling and reskilling, according to identified needs, and defined by labour market intelligence tools and social partner involvement at all appropriate levels, so as to respond to the existing and future skills demand identified by employers and trade unions across sectors and occupations. A good match between the training offer and enterprises' need for an increasingly skilled workforce is a key condition for employers to offer training and for workers to access training and **remain in quality employment while continued digitalisation**, automation, and artificial intelligence changes their everyday work.
- Employee training should be seen as an overall approach within which there may be a need for a targeted approach to specific groups. In such cases, and as part of the wider approach to active labour market policies, Member States should provide effective and systematic support including financial resources for training that supports the integration of the low-skilled, unemployed and socio-economically disadvantaged groups in the labour market, in particular migrants and refugees, via employee training and adult apprenticeships. The training needs of older workers and of NEETs in particular should also be taken into account. As part of this, Member States should ensure the implementation of the upskilling pathways Council recommendation with the effective involvement of social partners, as applicable.
- Training schemes, developed with the involvement of the social partners, should aim to decrease the **gender gap** in certain professions, **support women's career development**, and to ensure that they can also reach high-level and managerial positions where they are disproportionately under-represented. It is also important to encourage more women to study STEM subjects.

RECOMMENDATIONS

WITH THESE KEY MESSAGES IN MIND, THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL PARTNERS HAVE THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE FUTURE OF EMPLOYEE TRAINING POLICY:

- 1** EU social partners call for the future ESF+ to support investments in education and skills to adapt to the current and future needs of the economy. The future Erasmus programme should also support the modernisation and reform of education and training systems.
- 2** Member States and social partners should work on a tripartite and bipartite basis to enhance access to and participation in employee training. This should be developed in a way that benefits all workers, enterprises/workplaces as part of a lifelong learning perspective that draws on the potential and actual needs of a diverse workforce in the public and private sectors and in small, medium and large companies and workplaces. The way in which training in the workplace is organised and undertaken needs to be jointly agreed between employers and employees through a mix of collective and individual arrangements. This involves training taking place preferably during working hours or, where relevant, outside of working hours (in particular for non-company-related training). Employers take a positive approach to employee training. When a worker asks for, or has an entitlement to training, employers have an interest in discussing such requests to ensure that it supports the employability of the worker in a way that is also in the enterprise's interests.
- 3** Social partners need to ensure that the way in which they approach employee training is coherent with broader societal, educational and employment-related challenges, such as the need for governments to ensure that all Europeans have a minimum level of basic skills when leaving school, or the objective of improving the use of public resources dedicated to upskilling or retraining the unemployed as part of active labour market policies.
- 4** National social partners, in discussion with governments, are best placed to organise training provision in a way that will increase access and which will simultaneously focus on effective training, based on learning outcomes. Consideration of concrete measures, arrangements and tools needs to occur at the appropriate level in the Member States.
- 5** Social partners should work together to maximise the role of social dialogue to achieve effective access to training with appropriate capacity building and financial support, especially at the sectoral level. Mutual learning between governments, social partners and training providers could further support a more effective use of available resources for skills training nationally. Quality and effective employee training is conceived in a way that responds to the identified training needs of the employer and the worker, possibly through workplace training plans, elaborated by social partners.
- 6** Employee training should be based on **appropriate skills assessments**, designed according to the needs of workers, where relevant, and employers, and founded on **forecasting the changes** and developments in jobs, of the work tasks and the whole industry in general. This assessment should be part of a worker's competence development cycle, to be re-evaluated regularly. The European skills passport could be helpful in presenting a person's skills and competences.

7 Member States, social partners, and education and training providers and local and regional authorities, as appropriate, should work together to improve mechanisms for identifying data on skills needs and the link between them and its use in education and training systems content. In many cases the sectoral and regional level is the most relevant for gathering reliable data on skills needs. Work is being undertaken by Cedefop in this regard and should be used as inspiration for further actions.

8 Member States, social partners and education and training providers should work together to develop national strategies that ensure digital skills are taught on all levels from basic digital skills to advanced levels according to sectoral and industry needs and to all workers, whether low-, medium- or high- skilled. European and national social partners (cross-industry/sectoral) can play a supportive role for enterprises in their efforts to set up skills plans to accommodate ongoing and future changes.

9 Member States, employers and employees should see employee training as an **investment and not a cost**. Therefore, appropriate financial inputs from different sources, including social contributions, are essential to support upskilling and reskilling, guidance and career counselling, raising awareness among employees and companies/workplaces, and social partners' actions on the issue, especially at the sectoral level. Member States could also introduce alternative financial models to pool/mutualise support to employee training between companies and sectors. In addition, Member States should ensure tripartite cooperation on the allocation of available public resources to employee training.

10 One of the major challenges of employee training is the cost for employers, in particular for SMEs. It is therefore necessary to explore the role of various types of incentives (including financial) in encouraging employers to offer training to their employees and employees to invest in their employability.

11 Another very relevant issue concerning employee training is the adequacy, quality and relevance of the training offer. Social partners very often play the role of training providers together with many other institutions. An adapted training offer, taking into account work organisation is a necessity, especially for small businesses with a limited number of staff, to further promote and encourage employee training in all sectors and in businesses of all sizes.

12 Trade union representatives can play an active role in encouraging workers to take up training and/or benefit from career guidance services, and provide support services to employees for using the potential of validation of non-formal and informal learning. Trade unions should provide their representatives with the appropriate resources and training to do so. Employers should seek to ensure that their career guidance and HR support services are available to all workers and that they keep workers informed of training opportunities.

13 Member States, social partners and education and training providers, should design employee training in a way that is based on the learning outcomes approach and that is compatible with the validation and certification of skills, as defined in national practices and which provides access and help to acquire further and higher qualifications. In addition, non-formal and informal learning should be better acknowledged as part of career progression and be validated as part of employee training.