



ETUC Resolution on initial and continuous vocational training for a European employment strategy

Adopted by the ETUC Executive Committee on 17–18 March 2009.

1. Preamble

The Commission has just published two Communications on education and training:

- [An updated strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training \(COM \(2008\) 0865 Final\)](#), 16 December 2008;
- New skills for new jobs. Anticipating and matching labour market and skills needs (COM (2008) 0868 Final), 19 December 2008.

On 26 November 2008, meeting in Bordeaux, the European education and vocational training ministers, the social partners and the European Commission adopted the Bordeaux Communiqué that reviews the priorities and strategies of the Copenhagen process, in which they pinpoint the major challenges to be met and present a new strategic vision for European vocational training policies:

- take into account the objectives of social cohesion, equity and active citizenship;
- promote competitiveness and innovation;
- make the concept of lifelong learning and mobility a reality.

2. A few elements of analysis

The financial and economic crisis, as the Commission states, heightens the exceptional unpredictability of the future of the global economy. Global competition and restructuring measures are a reality today for millions of European workers;

The global conditions of this competition are problematical because they build on wage earners (at global level) who, according to ILO figures, do not have an employment contract (nearly 70%) and do not have social cover (nearly 80%). Inequalities are being exacerbated both in Europe and in the rest of the world. The example of China gives a very good idea of the situation: on the one hand, it has the world's biggest pool of researchers, and on the other, part of its population lives in conditions worthy of the middle ages.

The crisis reinforces the necessity to solve bigger problems than ever. Climate change, as well as the management and security of energy and food resources, will help accelerate a

low-carbon economy by strengthening new technologies, ICT and the emergence of nanotechnologies. We need to build a knowledge-based society. Jobs requiring high levels of knowledge are expected to represent nearly 60% of jobs in 2012.

Today, due to the economic and financial crisis, loss of jobs and threats to employment are creating a high level of insecurity among workers and citizens.

As the ETUC has declared on a number of occasions, full employment should be ensured by combining policies that encourage quality jobs and social progress. Lifelong learning is a crucial instrument for promoting these objectives.

Greater coherence needs to be ensured between competences, the sectoral distribution of jobs - which varies considerably from one region to the next.

3. Lifelong learning is an essential tool to ensure full employment, while combining policies promoting quality assurance and social progress

The challenges are huge.

- Youth unemployment remains high (15.5% in 2007), as stated in the social partners' joint labour market analysis. Some 15% of young people leave school without a diploma and nearly 30% of young graduates are hired for jobs that do not correspond to their qualifications. This situation had a bearing on the recent unrest among the young population in Greece.
- The low level of qualifications of the working age population (24-64) is still very high (78 million) and has remained constant since the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) first published this figure. This represents nearly 30% of the European labour force.
- Wage earners aged 50 years and over account for only 3% of vocational training a year.
- Vocational training expenses for businesses between 1999 and 2005 dropped from 2.3% of the cost of labour in 1999 to 1.6% in 2005. The biggest decrease occurred in medium-sized companies. Increasingly, individuals and the state have to cover part of the financing of training, which often involves new taxation systems, loans, training cheques, etc.
- The important structural changes that are taking place will change the labour market even further and consequently training systems as well.
- Global competition is intensifying, resulting in greater economic pressure and a drive to build innovation capacity in the emerging economies (Brazil, Russia, India and China).
- Demographic developments, and in particular the ageing of the population, need to be taken further into account.
- Increasingly fast technological progress, the development of new information technologies, nanotechnologies, and technologies linked to climate change and the low-carbon economy demand the anticipation of new skills and ongoing adaptation of the labour force through lifelong learning.

At a constant success rate, the number of upper secondary vocational training graduates is expected to decline by 500,000 between 2015 and 2030. The biggest decrease is likely to occur between 2009 and 2015.

The decline in the number of new labour market entrants with vocational training qualifications, in parallel with the strong demand for replacement, notably in intermediary qualifications, increases needs for higher skills, with serious consequences on labour supply. Nearly two million teachers will retire in the next 15 years.

Cedefop states that there could be around 100 million vacant posts between 2006 and 2020, with the creation of 16.9 million new jobs and 80.4 million jobs becoming vacant due to retirement or people leaving the labour market.

Europe could experience an extremely serious skills deficit in 2020.

This evaluation of employment is also based on other parameters, with the ongoing loss of jobs (2.9 million) in the primary sector, stabilisation in construction and the manufacturing industry, and a loss of 800,000 jobs in spite of the rise in engineering.

There will continue to be a high number of jobs in the processing industry. The services sector – services to business and services to persons – will develop further.

It is obvious that this estimate, which was made before the financial and economic crisis, must be re-evaluated. The crisis further reinforces our demand for a coherent and sustainable industrial policy (see also the [ETUC Resolution on a strong European recovery programme \(129 Kb PDF\)](#) of 3 and 4 December 2008: saving jobs from depression and deflation, defending wages, collective bargaining and pensions).

4. Commission proposals

The Commission proposals are structured on four options:

- lifelong learning and learners' mobility;
- improving the quality and effectiveness of education and training and of learning outcomes;
- encouraging fairness and active citizenship;
- encouraging innovation and creativity, including entrepreneurial initiative.

The Commission points out that many of the European Union's key competitors have higher rates of people with higher educational attainment: for those between 25 and 64 years of age, the average rate in the EU is 23%, compared with 40% in Japan and 39% in the USA

Furthermore, private investment in higher education is 0.76% of GDP in Japan, 1.29% in the USA and 0.23% in the EU.

The Commission's instruments are as follows.

- The EQF, or European Qualifications Framework, which the ETUC supported, makes it possible to establish crossovers between types of learning and encourages the implementation of national qualifications frameworks (NQF).
- The validation of experience outcomes becomes a priority decision. EUROPASS, used in 32 countries, serves as a European CV.
- The European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET) has just been adopted. It establishes a system for the transfer of learning credits. Its

implementation will require a great deal of cooperation and investment based on the pilot project method.

- Quality assurance to enhance the quality of learning outcomes.

The Commission should rely on the participation of the social partners for follow-up and evaluation within a common framework and on the guidelines of the European Strategy for employment.

Progress is patchy, however. Most of the objectives set by the Council for 2010 will not be attained, for example, the objective on young people and adult education.

The two communications identify and focus on the main challenges. They confirm the requirements and the pressure that will be put on lifelong learning and qualification systems as a result of economic and demographic changes, social integration and the evolution of immigration.

5. ETUC position

The ETUC considers that the framework proposed in the Commission's communication confirms the priorities shared at European level:

- transparency and compatibility of skills;
- recognition and validation of formal and informal learning;
- quality assurance mechanisms for training.

ETUC acknowledges that, to date, the Copenhagen process has been crowned with success but that it is too early to assess the usefulness of the results of all the work undertaken. The Copenhagen process offer instruments for the development of vocational training and lifelong learning in Europe. Implementation proper is not carried out at EU level, but at national and regional level. The results of European cooperation are effective if they can be used at the workplace or in the institutes where training is provided. European cooperation must support initial training at fundamental level. From the trade union point of view, the national measures aimed at developing qualifications frameworks, the validation of learning and quality assurance mechanisms show that decision-makers have come to understand the importance of education and initial training and of vocational training in the framework of the Lisbon strategy objectives.

ETUC has identified five key priorities in lifelong learning and vocational training, which can also reach higher education levels for certain workers as skills demands increase.

1. Equal Access to training for all those who must develop their skills and aptitudes.
2. Recognition and validation of aptitudes and skills irrespective of how they were acquired and their recognition in the company.
3. The financing of training and employers' responsibility in this area.
4. The anticipation of future skills needs.
5. The participation of the social partners in vocational training and lifelong learning.

We are calling for a real right and an equal access to lifelong learning for all.

- ***Equal Access to training is essential and has to be based on a initial training of quality***

Our first priority is to ensure access to training for all those who need to develop their aptitudes and skills. It must be based on the initial training of quality for all. Participation in lifelong learning is higher among younger age groups and gradually declines in the older age groups. Participation is also higher among men than women.

All the Member States must develop and put in practice methods for the recognition and validation of the skills acquired outside of formal education or training. Learning occurs daily at the workplace and in other environments. Adult participation in unofficial education is three times higher than in official education.

The learning must be made visible and transferable through validation. However, it is not enough to validate existing aptitudes because success on the employment market requires new skills. Continuing training and learning must make their contribution. This priority is parallel and complementary to access to training.

The lifelong learning strategies developed in the European Union Member States are necessary but not sufficient. Workers and citizens must have real and equal opportunities to participate in training and to see their skills recognised.

- ***The key instrument is respect for workers' right to financing for training***

Without adequate and targeted financing, unqualified or older workers and the jobless will not have sufficient possibilities to develop their aptitudes and skills.

ETUC recognises with the European Council (13 and 14 March 2008) and the Communication of 16 December that “investing more effectively in human capital and creativity throughout people’s lives is a key condition for Europe’s success in a globalised world.” This affirmation should be implemented in the Member States on the basis of national budgets granted to training institutes and companies. European public investments in human capital are implemented principally at national or regional level. EU funds are important but they simply supplement the national budgets. European cooperation to develop education and training, in particular vocational training, also constitutes a major initiative to encourage investments in human capital. ETUC considers that lifelong learning is a necessity in Europe. Furthermore, the trio of education, research and innovation must be strengthened. We share the Commission’s analysis with respect to the European Institute of Innovation and Technology, whose activity can reinforce and enhance education and research by encouraging multidisciplinary, private and public partnerships, better targeting workers’ skills and needs for the labour market and innovation.

- ***Private enterprises and public employers have the responsibility to develop their workers skills and competences.***

Private companies and public employers have the responsibility to develop their workers’ skills and competences. Employers also have the responsibility to train workers in case of restructuring measures. Public financing is also needed because not all education and training is related solely to present-day work and professions.

Vocational training at the workplace during working hours is an essential aspect of lifelong learning. Participation in continuing vocational training varies considerably from one country to the next. Participation also presents major differences depending on the size of the company. The third study on continuing vocational training systems (CVTS 3) reveals that large companies that have more than 250 employees are more committed to staff training. Workers in small companies have fewer opportunities to obtain training.

According to the study on vocational training, in 2005 in the EU25, 27% of the labour force benefited from paid training or training provided by the employer, or self-financed in the case of self-employed workers. Employers train their permanent staff. The study reveals that employer-paid training was provided to 32% of workers having an open-ended contract, 29% of workers with a fixed-term contract and 18% of temporary workers, 10% of these workers having a primary-level education and 40% having pursued higher education.

It is necessary to foresee skill and competences needs, notably in order to match the training offer and the labour market needs, particularly for young men and women and unemployed people.

Skills needs must be anticipated in order to diminish the gap between available training and labour market needs. ETUC welcomes with interest the initiative 'New skills for new jobs', which provides an initial evaluation of the labour market and skills needs up to 2020, maps out anticipation instruments that already exist at national and European level, and proposes a more effective approach to ensure anticipation and to match workforce supply and demand through synergy between policies on employment, training and education.

According to Cedefop, 30% of European enterprises provide vocational training to young people. The social partners have a key role to play in the development at national level of individual qualifications and skills.

The guidelines set out in the jointly developed framework for action must be implemented.

6. Lifelong learning and education's challenges

The challenge of initial vocational training offer opportunities to all young people and at the same time develops excellence in aptitudes and skills. Young women and men have different skills and different possibilities for developing their qualifications. One-size-fits-all solutions do not meet the needs of learners, whether young or old men or women. Vocational training and education must be developed to take account of learners' personal needs. Occupational and generic skills are important, but training and qualifications must be composed in a way that takes account of different needs. The task is demanding but not impossible. Vocational training must meet the direct needs of working life. Vocational training and education open possibilities to young women and men entering the labour market. In addition, initial vocational training must prepare the learner for the labour market and lifelong learning.

ETUC and its members will use social dialogue and collective agreements to guarantee workers' right to training. This right must be accessible for all citizens independently of their age, gender, employment, social status or nationality. Access to training, the financing of training and the use of working time for training are essential aspects of agreements. With today's economic crisis, training should be encouraged and developed. That is why we are calling on a real right to lifelong training and why we strongly encourage bipartite and tripartite social dialogue. We welcome the Commission's recognition of the necessity of social dialogue, in particular at sectoral level.

Common European instruments, principles and guidelines are necessary to improve lifelong learning opportunities for workers and citizens, but they are not enough. European cooperation on lifelong learning should have a clear strategic objective that links education and training in a changing labour market and society.

Education and training are the keystone of Europe's growth and the well-being of its citizens. That is why the ETUC has given itself the ambition of ensuring that:

'All workers and citizens on the labour market in Europe have the right and the opportunity to develop their aptitudes and skills in order to meet the needs for their work and also for their "non economic" aspirations.'