

---

## Consultation

---

### Updated Skills Agenda for Europe

*The European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (CESI) is a confederation of more than 40 national and European trade union organisations from 20 European countries, with a total of more than 5 million individual members. Founded in 1990, CESI advocates improved employment conditions for workers in Europe and a strong social dimension in the EU. CESI's particular strength lies in the public sector but CESI also represents private sector workers. Most of CESI's affiliates are employed in the fields of central, regional and local administration, education, training and research, security and justice, healthcare, postal services and telecommunications, defence and transport. In the field of education, CESI represents almost one million teachers from all educational levels and is a recognised additional social partner in the European sectoral social dialogue 'Education'.*

#### 1. Do you agree with the challenges presented?

The European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (CESI), representing more than 5 million employees, many of which directly concerned by VET, further education, re-skilling and upskilling needs, as well as representing almost 1 million teachers at all schooling and training levels in charge of equipping the workforce across all economic sectors and the public services with the skills necessary to fulfil their job functions, agrees overall with the challenges presented by the European Commission in its background paper of January 20 on an update of the skills agenda for Europe.

CESI agrees in particular with the objective of an updated skills agenda, believing that well-trained workers are important for the sustainability of the labour market, making them more attractive and competitive for the future. At the same time, CESI calls to avoid an excessive focus on a 'utilitarian' focus on education as a mere provider for technical skills needed in the labour markets. Instead, education must remain a stronghold for youngsters to be equipped with the 'humanitarian' background necessary to become open-minded, responsible and engaged citizens that appreciate the value of liberal democracy and pluralist societies.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cesi.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/CESI-EDUC-2018-Position-on-EEA-2025-EN-final.pdf>  
<https://www.cesi.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/EN-21x21-BD.pdf>

CESI stresses the importance of sufficient investments, especially public investments, in education and training in order to keep them performing. Europe, as a continent relatively poor in natural resources, has no choice but to invest heavily in the capacity of its people and workforce in order to remain internationally competitive and well-equipped for the future. CESI has argued for long that expenditure in education more than pays off in the long term and should as such not be regarded as a cost but as an investment.

Next to public investments, CESI also highlights the responsibility that lies with employers to embrace training for workers and invest in the further training and re-training of employees. The employers benefit greatly from the training of its workers; hence, next to monetary investments, they should also take a proactive role and ownership in terms of making training possible during working time.

## **2. In which ways can Social Partners concretely support the update of the Skills Agenda and modernisation of VET?**

CESI regrets that it was not invited to participate in a dedicated consultation hearing on March 4 organised by the European Commission, although it represents 5 million workers in Europe among which almost 1 million teachers, and although it is a recognised additional partner in the European sectoral social dialogue 'Education'.

Notwithstanding the central role of the horizontal European social partners, CESI believes that, not least if the European Commission wants to give flesh to its stated objective to strengthen social dialogue at the European level, the European Commission should be more sensitive to make sure that members from all European trade union families and sectors are formally invited to send at least one delegate to hearings which address topics that are of significant concern to them.

Regardless of this, CESI and its national members stand ready for further in-depth consultations and meetings beyond this initial opportunity for written input. Likewise, CESI stands ready to raise awareness to relay the agenda's objectives, especially where they are ambitious, to its national member unions and their affiliates as well as to the applicable national social partner fora and negotiations. CESI deems such awareness-raising on skills and training needs and opportunities among trade unions and workers at grass roots levels of key importance.

## **3. What new action could be taken to empower workers to up/reskill, taking an inclusive approach?**

In order to up- or reskill workers according to an inclusive approach, sufficient public investments as well as ownership in training opportunities by employers are of utmost importance. Systematic and tailor-made training-on-the-job schemes are a very cost-effective measure. Programmes to incentivise employers to upskill their workers should be further developed. Long distance and online training schemes can be innovative training instruments that should be envisaged where appropriate. To ensure the inclusion of disadvantaged groups of our society, more scholarships and financial support for training and skilling measures should be awarded. Trade unions and their academies/training centres should be supported to reach out to more vulnerable workers. Especially where the employers are not having resources for trainings, trade unions often support in up/reskilling.

#### **4. How further progress can be made in the area of validation of skills?**

Government strategies coordinated with social partners and employers should be further developed. Such strategies should be followed by analyses and monitoring of adopted measures to boost skills and talent. Lifelong learning should also be more encouraged from all levels. In order to be successful there should be a clear and concrete delineation of which skills are likely to be the most important ones in the future in which sector and type of worker.

#### **5. Do you consider the Blueprint for sectoral cooperation on skills and the Platforms for Centres of Vocational Excellence as a good basis for further work to break silos between different skills stakeholders?**

The Blueprint for sectoral cooperation on skills and the Platforms for Centres of Vocational Excellence are a very good basis to further break silos between different skills stakeholders, since they favour updating of skills as well as the possibility to grow professionally. Nevertheless, CESI member organisations consider that they experienced a late uptake of such measures and a lack of support from the employer's side, often coupled with a lack of sufficient communication.

#### **6. What do you think should be the future priorities regarding skills intelligence?**

Future priorities regarding skills intelligence should include (1) the acquisition of practical knowledge as well as (2) the creation of learning areas to develop competences adequate to a changing work environment. There is a need of developing life-long-learning skills. In terms of topics, artificial intelligence and the skills for digital world should be prioritised.

#### **7. What new action could be taken to address skills mismatches?**

There should be an improvement in the opportunities and programmes that are already being offered. There needs to be a regular check-up in between the demands of the labour market and the curricula of education. To that end, education systems need to be able to react faster; they often suffer from continuous reforms or are too rigid to respond flexibly and swiftly to changes in the skills needs. Furthermore, trainings should be designed and tailored in way that avoid over/under qualifications, and trainings should be able to be adapted to the requirements of the labour market – which would in turn also require investment. Job search system and job mentoring schemes should also be reformed with the objective to become sensitive to the (changing) skills required on the labour markets.

#### **8. Which action could help to increase social partners' engagement in workforce skills development in general?**

CESI believes that the important role of social partners in workforce skills development should be highlighted more by integrating them more systematically in the delineation of strategies, proposals and measures. To this end, public policy can play an important role in fostering investment by employers to upgrade and reskill their workforce. The EU in particular can develop guidelines to pressure national partners and emphasise the important role of training and upskilling. The EU should also further strive to incentivise Member States to implement and monitor these guidelines, and also make EU funding available to this end.

**9. How could social partners collaborate among themselves and with national governments to ensure more and better investment in the up/reskilling of the workforce?**

All trade unions (among themselves) and social partners (with governments and employer organisations) should work together in a constructive manner to reform educational systems to make them future-proof and well-equipped, staffed and resourced, and to develop new labour policies corresponding to this. To this end, the need for a motivated employers' representation should be more emphasised, along with adequate public investment. It is important not only a network of social partners, but of vocational training institutions themselves. The dual system of vocational training (as it exists for instance in Germany) could be a best practice to inspire apprenticeship systems throughout Europe. The EU should develop a functioning reference framework as well a regular EU-wide vocational training summit. In terms of content, the role of value-oriented practices should be emphasised, together with the sustainability and access to digitalisation, as well as foreign language learning. In order to ensure fair and inclusive societies, vulnerable groups should be given an easier access to training schemes and the recognition process of their previous qualifications should be simplified. The importance of investing in the training of teachers themselves is also a key factor which is not to be overlooked. Furthermore as already mentioned under point 3 some trade unions have own training centres which are open not only to their members but to all workers. Member States should work with the trade unions to develop and improve these training centres to reach out to more vulnerable groups.

**10. What are the key priorities in the field of VET for attention in the coming years to address the challenges of achieving social fairness, a carbon-neutral economy and digital transition?**

Vocational training remains rather underestimated – in particular the vast potential of well-functioning VET systems to lay the foundation for large numbers of skilled, high-quality jobs as well as sustainable high employment rates. In this context there should be more investment and effort directed at awareness raising campaigns to help shape a more known and positive picture and appreciation of it. There is a need for a reform of educational systems as well as for the modernisation of professional training schemes – and social partners should be included in the discussion on this. To achieve social fairness the undertaker of VET programs need to be financially well equipped in order to live a self-determined life and fully benefit from the VET programs. In addition, educational systems should more take into consideration the inclusion of underrepresented groups such as women, youngsters, the disabled, migrant and refugees, and the rural population. Vocational schools should be more appreciated and perceived positively in the public and also in politics since they have a central role in shaping the social and global responsibility of youngsters. Furthermore, they can represent an opportunity for financially weak municipalities to modernise their workforce and material resources. For that matter, it should be put together a global network – ‘Vocational Education for Sustainable Development’ (VESD) – bringing together schools and employers. Regarding digital transition, the VET schools have to be well equipped with modern digital devices to ensure digital skills.