

## EUROPEAN YEAR OF SKILLS 2023: PRIORITIES FOR TRAINING OF WORKERS IN TRADITIONAL & DEVELOPING AREAS OF EMPLOYMENT

## POSITION OF THE PRESIDIUM OF CESI

*The European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (CESI) is a confederation of more than 40 national and European trade union organisations from over 20 European countries, with a total of more than 5 million individual members. Founded in 1990 and a European sectoral social partner, CESI advocates improved employment conditions for workers in Europe and a strong social dimension in the EU. Most of CESI's affiliates are employed in the different fields of the European, national, regional & local public services, and in privatised services of general interest. CESI also represents private sector unions.*

### The European Year of Skills

In 2022, the EU decided to designate the time from May 2022 to May 2023 as 'European Year of Skills'. Following a proposal of the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council adopted their Decision (EU) 2023/936<sup>1</sup> to map the rationale, objectives and planned deliverables of the Year in further detail.

According to the Decision, the European Year of Youth, the Year, in the broader sense, aims to address skills gaps, mismatches and imbalances in and among the Member States, put this on the political agenda of policy makers and social partners, thus help reskill people to become more productive in their jobs and/or retrain to transfer from declining sectors of employment to developing and expanding ones, in particular in the area of industrial digitalisation and greening.

In doing so, the European Commission, Parliament and the Council hope that the Year will help people maintain or acquire the right skills for sustainable and quality jobs in those economic areas that can drive the EU's competitive and prosperous future.

To this end, the Decision (EU) 2023/936 outlines four specific focus areas for the Year:

1. promoting investment in training and upskilling, enabling people stay in their jobs or find new ones
2. ensuring skills match the needs of employers, by closely cooperating with social partners and companies
3. matching people's aspirations and skill sets with opportunities on the job market, especially for the green and digital transitions and the economic recovery
4. attracting people from outside the EU with the skills needed

The following resolution sets out a non-exhaustive list of take-aways and priority points to be further pursued and considered from the point of European independent trade unions.

<sup>1</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32023D0936>

## Take-aways half way through the European Year of Skills

### *Governance issues on future European Years*

- CESI agrees with the focus of this year's European Year on the area of skills as a suitable topic – due the actuality and acuteness of skills gaps, mismatches and imbalances in Europe – but reiterates previous criticism<sup>2</sup> that the European Commission should be more open and transparent in the setting of the topic of the European Years. **In the future, the European Commission should run a consultation procedure well in advance of a decision to designate a particular topic to an upcoming European Year.** Trade unions and social partners such as CESI have a particular insight into different action areas that justify the designation of a European Year.
- **CESI also highlights the need to communicate awareness-raising and participation opportunities for stakeholders in future European Years earlier and more systematically.** With the topic of this European Year announced as a surprise to non-institutional stakeholders, and with the EU Decision on the European Year adopted and published only on May 11 *after* its formal launch on May 9 2023, trade unions, social partners and NGO stakeholders across Europe lacked the necessary time and information to gear up and prepare their work and involvement in the European Year of Skills.

### *Policy issues to be further addressed in the context of the European Year of Skills*

- CESI welcomes the amendment of the European Parliament and the Council to insert a further focus of the Year in the Decision's Article 2(1) to promote more effective and inclusive investment in all forms reskilling and upskilling including in public services. This reflects a priority of CESI, which had criticised in a resolution<sup>3</sup> in advance of the adoption of the Decision an exclusive focus skilling in the private sector. CESI continues to stress that next to the private sector, the different fields of the public sector also face serious and increasing staff and skills shortages and often find themselves unable to compete for skills and talent with the private sector. In line with the Decision of the European Parliament and the Council, **awareness-raising and policy measures on reskilling and upskilling including in public services should be duly pursued in the context of the European Year of Skills.**

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.cesi.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/2022\\_CESI\\_Consultation-contribution\\_EYS2023\\_final-202212-1.pdf](https://www.cesi.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/2022_CESI_Consultation-contribution_EYS2023_final-202212-1.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.cesi.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/2022\\_CESI\\_Consultation-contribution\\_EYS2023\\_final-202212-1.pdf](https://www.cesi.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/2022_CESI_Consultation-contribution_EYS2023_final-202212-1.pdf)

- CESI emphasises the importance of policy makers and employers – enterprises and public service providers alike – further recognising the importance of further training for the workforce. Regular and tailored training on the job help employees stay and become more productive and allow them to develop professionally, and they allow companies to successfully manage inevitable transitions. It is an investment that pays off. As such, **the European Year of Skills should further strive to highlight the importance of training opportunities for staff being fostered and encouraged by employers and policy makers**, and to flag that the provision of training should take place in principle during paid working time. It should highlight the vital role that trade unions can play in the development of training opportunities by employers. Particular attention deserve initiatives like recently established Intergenerational Alliance for Learning, Skills and Employment of CESI's Italian member union Confsal, which strives to improve the knowledge transfer of skills in public services from older to younger workers, or CESI's capacity building project 'Active labour market policies in Europe: Successful designs and implementation through union participation' (Activer), which aims to flag the role that trade unions and social partners can and should play in the set-up and execution of active labour market policies, including measures for reskilling and upskilling.
- CESI supports the EU Single Market's principle of free movement of workers, goods, services and capital as an immigration instrument for Member States to meet skills shortages in the labour market of Member States with the most advantageous working conditions and social protection coverage. **The principle of free movement in the Single Market and the mutual recognition of qualifications in the EU should be further improved as part of the European Year of Skills.**
- At the same time, CESI is deeply concerned about the long term effects of emigration of workers on the availability of skills and labour in the countries of origin, including in third countries outside the EU. These often face depopulation of vast regions that are left un-served and deprived due to lack of professionals, to the detriment of the population and the economic perspective of the country at large. They lose out financially when they educate their workforces in the public education systems, only to see them move away afterwards to work elsewhere. This applies in particular also to large parts of the public service. Such developments, in time, widen the financial disparities, living standards, provision of public services and economic performance between more and less advantaged countries and regions. There is an important role for the EU to set the frame to bring together skills mismatch policies with ethical, sustainable and fair labour migration and help balance out push and pull factors of labour migration and address its complex and diverse socio-economic consequences. The European Year of Skills should raise awareness to stress that **EU cohesion policy and the EU's structural and investment funds as well as the EU's neighbourhood policy should be further tailored to mitigate causes and consequences of emigration brain drain (skills drain).**

- **In education, the European Year of Skills should further emphasise the necessary adaption in teaching and learning to labour-market relevant digital and skills relevant to the green transition** – especially in post-secondary VET programmes, higher education curricula, and lifelong learning and professional training. Systems need to be able to react faster; they are often too rigid to respond flexibly and swiftly to changes in skills needs. **However, the European Year of Skills should not miss to stress that general primary and secondary education curricula must not be emptied of subjects that help young people become responsible citizens of tomorrow**, such as history, politics and ethics. In a world where political apathy is in many places substantial and liberal democracies often increasingly threatened, the formation of socially engaged and responsible, cosmopolitan, open-minded citizenry is crucial. 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.
- **The European Year of Skills should stress that adaptations in education programmes require sufficient investments in necessary adjusted learning and teaching material, equipment and facilities, and training for educators and teachers.** Changes in curricula can only be successfully implemented if they are accompanied by adaptations in infrastructure and the teaching personnel. The latter must be constantly re-trained and upskilled to deliver their jobs in evolving digitalisation and green processes.
- CESI stresses that remedying labour shortages through skilling/upskilling/reskilling will in many cases not be successful by itself. Labour shortages in many specific areas, such as in healthcare, education and other parts of the public sector, persist not only as a result of skills mismatches but because of employment and working conditions that are insufficient to attract and retain workers. **The European Year of Skills should serve to highlight that addressing low pay, high strain and stress levels, deficient occupational health and safety, and a low recognition of the value of work in sectors with labour shortages is a precondition for workers to be willing to upskill in a sector or to re-skill into a sector at all.** This would also contribute to a fairer labour mobility in Europe (see above), as push-and-pull factors for emigration/immigration would be reduced.
- In particular, in many Member States there is a severe shortage of teachers and trainers, which hinders the delivery of necessary teaching and training programmes. **The European Year of Skills should emphasise that to counter teacher and trainer shortages, their employment and working conditions must improve in many Member States in order to attract, recruit and retain more talented young persons into this occupational field.** This is especially true for the areas of VET, lifelong learning, and the education of adults. Several Member States still see abusive uses of precarious consecutive fixed-term work contracts for teachers that expire every year during the summer holiday period so that no wages and social security coverage needs to be paid during this time. Moreover, teaching is too often still not a profession that enjoys a high social standing in the eyes of a majority of the population. Its low prestige frustrates the recruiting and retaining teachers in both rich and poor countries. Teaching is a highly valuable profession, and guaranteeing teachers decent salaries and improving their working conditions is of central importance. Their work and contribution to society must be adequately valued and recognised.