



**«FRAMEWORK OF ACTIONS FOR THE LIFELONG
DEVELOPMENT OF COMPETENCIES AND
QUALIFICATIONS»**

Evaluation report

2006

Foreword

In March 2002, the European social partners adopted a framework of actions for the lifelong development of competences and qualifications, as a contribution to the implementation of the Lisbon strategy¹.

They identified four areas for priority actions. These priorities are:

- to identify and anticipate competences and qualifications needs;
- to recognise and validate competences and qualifications;
- to inform, support and provide guidance;
- to mobilise resources.

The member organisations of UNICE/UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC agreed to promote the framework of actions in Member States at all appropriate levels taking account of national practices and to transmit this document to all interested players at European and national levels.

They decided to draw up an annual report on the national actions carried out on the four priorities identified. Three annual reports were made public in 2003, 2004 and 2005².

In 2002, the social partners also decided to evaluate the impact of their actions on both companies and workers after three annual reports – this is the purpose of the present report.

The evaluation report comprises national evaluation reports jointly elaborated by social partners in the different Member States, which highlight the key features of social partners' work to promote the four priorities from 2003 to 2005. European social partners also report on actions taken at the European level separately.

In addition, a section entitled "main trends" summarises the information available on the initiatives taken from 2003 to 2005 and assesses the impact of the actions on labour markets across Europe.

The text of the framework of actions as adopted in 2002 as well as a list of contact persons from national and European organizations can be found at annex.

23 March 2006

¹ The framework of actions adopted in March 2002 can be found in annex

² These reports can be found on the websites of each organisation as well as on the European Trade Union resource Center (www.resourceetuc.com) and on the European Employers Resource Center (www.unice.org/erc)

Main trends

INTRODUCTION

The objectives of this section are to highlight key features of social partners' follow-up of the four priorities for actions of the European framework of actions (I) and to assess the impact of their actions on labour markets across Europe (II).

National reports demonstrate that social partners have intensively debated the issue of competence development. This is the case in all Member States. It is nevertheless more difficult to assess follow-up actions in the new Member States as they joined the process only in May 2004.

Following on from their commitment expressed in 2002, social partners have taken actions to promote all four priorities, focusing on the areas in which their needs are greater. In accordance with their national needs and practices, employers' and employees' organisations have used different tools to foster the lifelong development of competences and qualifications at national, sectoral and company levels.

They reported on actions taken in three jointly agreed annual reports published in 2003, 2004 and March 2005. For the present report, they were asked to assess the work they have done and to select examples of initiatives to illustrate progress made at national, sectoral and company levels.

I./ ANALYSIS OF THE ACTIONS TAKEN IN 2002-2005

The objective of the present chapter is to give an overview of the actions reported as being the most significant by national social partners. The intention is not to give an exhaustive list of actions but to highlight some examples of useful initiatives/tools developed by social partners.

PRIORITY 1: IDENTIFY AND ANTICIPATE THE COMPETENCES AND QUALIFICATIONS NEEDED

Identifying and anticipating competence and qualification needs is a complex matter. In order to help companies tailor their human resources policies to changing needs, employers' and employees' organisations have developed different tools to better identify individual needs such as:

- studies/surveys on companies' needs and consultancy services to help fulfil the needs identified in companies (Cyprus, Luxembourg, Norway, Sweden)
- collective agreements in private and/or public sector including provisions on tools to identify and anticipate competence needs at company level, such as individual interviews, (the Netherlands, UK, Belgium, Austria, Finland, Denmark, Poland)
- action plans at sectoral level to guide companies in the sector (Denmark, Ireland)
- company awards to disseminate good practice (Austria, Germany, UK)

- awareness-raising actions towards companies on the importance of identifying and anticipating competence needs to anticipate industrial change (Czech Republic, Poland)
- trade union guidelines for negotiations (Portugal, Belgium)
- pilot projects to develop strategies to identify and anticipate competence needs in companies (Finland, Germany, Lithuania, Ireland).
- developing sectoral training providers and employers led sector skills bodies (Czech Republic, UK)

Social partners were also involved in the collective analysis of competence needs and the development of qualifications at national or sectoral levels. These actions were conducted either on a bipartite or tripartite basis. Examples include:

- monitoring of labour market trends and awareness-raising actions to make them known to the public (Austria, Cyprus, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, UK, Belgium, Slovenia, Greece)
- evaluation of needs in view of reforming the existing education and training systems, with a focus on continuing vocational training system (Denmark, Spain), or on the apprenticeship system (Cyprus, Austria)
- recommendations to sectoral players following on studies developed by observatories, councils or committees (France, UK, Spain)
- national and sectoral collective agreements (France, Belgium)
- projects at national, regional and/or sectoral levels (Finland, Germany, Poland).

In some countries, the emphasis has been put on specific skills or on the needs of specific groups. This was the case for example in the UK where the focus was on low-skilled workers in Finland where the focus was on older workers, or in Luxembourg or Greece where the focus was on competence needs related to ICT.

Working in partnership with education and training institutions and public authorities at large is considered important by social partners. In most countries, social partners participate in tripartite agencies/councils entrusted with the development of human resources and qualification systems, where they give advice on national policies. In addition, they take a range of specific actions to better tailor education and training systems to labour market needs, among which:

- reform of existing qualifications and development of job profiles to make the outcomes of the education system fit labour market needs (Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Spain)
- reform of apprenticeship systems to foster competence development in real work situations at an early age and increase the employability of apprentices (Cyprus, Austria, Finland, Germany, UK)
- strategic planning of education and training provision to match labour market needs (Denmark, Norway, Slovenia, Greece, Poland)
- analysis of the practical impact of the training delivered to increase the efficiency of systems (Cyprus)

PRIORITY 2: RECOGNISE AND VALIDATE COMPETENCES AND QUALIFICATIONS

The recognition and validation of competences is essential for the employability of workers and for competence development policies in companies. Social partners

reported numerous activities aiming to promote the establishment of means of recognition and validation in their countries.

The following initiatives can be mentioned:

- further development of competence based qualifications systems (Finland, France, Lithuania, Spain, Norway)
- development of systems to accredit prior learning (non-formal, informal) in view of obtaining a (first) qualification (the Netherlands, Austria, Germany, Slovenia)
- collective agreements including provisions on concrete tools to foster validation in companies (France, Belgium)
- mapping exercise on existing means of validation (Germany)
- certification to respond to labour market needs (Cyprus, Germany, Poland)
- sectoral initiatives, for example to develop occupational standards, (Sweden, UK, Poland)
- influencing legislation (vast majority of countries).

Social partners make use of their participation in national qualifications authorities/councils, often of a tripartite nature, to influence national policies regarding the validation of competences. It is important that these policies take into account the realities of enterprises, as they are the place where competences are developed. A number of national social partners also reported initiatives to enable adults without basic qualifications, immigrants, older workers and unemployed people to step into the qualifications system (Norway, Portugal, Denmark, France).

When developing means of validation and recognition, social partners keep in mind the necessity to ensure that those systems must remain transparent in order to enable geographical and occupational mobility. Social partners therefore heavily engaged in discussions on National Qualification Frameworks and how to ensure transparency/permeability between education, vocational training and higher education systems (Austria, Cyprus, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, UK). They are also discussing European tools such as Europass, the European Qualification Framework and the European Credit Transfer System for Vocational Training (Germany, Austria, Czech Republic).

PRIORITY 3: INFORMING, SUPPORTING AND PROVIDING GUIDANCE

In order to ensure that employees and enterprises can pursue a strategy for competence development, it is necessary to enable workers and employers to access all the necessary information and advice and to tailor information and guidance to their needs. With this objective in mind, social partners undertook to review their existing information and guidance systems and to tailor them to labour markets needs.

They mentioned in particular the following activities:

- influencing national guidance strategy, for example developing guidance for people at work, (Austria, Germany, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland)

- awareness-raising actions on training opportunities and labour market needs to tackle skills mismatch (Cyprus, Finland, France, Czech Republic, Belgium, Greece, Poland)
- awareness raising actions on learning opportunities and individual development plans in order to attract high performing staff (Denmark)
- actions to raise workers' motivation for learning; the focus being either on specific target groups such as low-skilled workers, young, older and unemployed people or on a specific set of skills such as IT skills (Denmark, Finland, France, Luxembourg, Lithuania, Norway)
- providing consultancy services to companies, for example helping companies to take advantage of funding schemes for competence development, (Luxembourg, Portugal, Sweden)
- company awards to strive for excellence and disseminate good practice (UK)
- developing and/or financing information, guidance and support facilities, for example advisers to guide companies and workers, trade union learning representatives, one-stop-shop facilities, e-information etc. (Italy, France, the Netherlands, UK)
- collective agreements and/or good practice guidelines including provisions on practical tools to inform on learning opportunities and raise motivation of workers, for example individual development talks in companies, tutors or competence screenings for older workers, (Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, UK, Belgium)
- tailoring actions towards SMEs (Germany, UK)
- actions to bring closer the world of education to the world of work by providing business training to teachers (Austria).

PRIORITY 4: MOBILISING RESOURCES

Mobilising resources for the lifelong development of competences is a key issue, which cannot be regarded as depending exclusively on social partners. In all countries, social partners discuss with public authorities on how to mobilise resources more efficiently and how to develop new and diversified sources of investment (funding, time, human resources). They took a range of specific actions which were introduced through collective agreements or other means, depending on the countries' practices.

In several countries, social partners developed win-win strategies implying a shared responsibility and co-investment in competence development from workers, companies and public authorities. Initiatives include:

- the development of individual learning accounts (Austria, the Netherlands, UK)
- tax incentives and deductions for companies and for individuals undergoing competence development (Austria, Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Spain, Greece)
- pooling resources to maximise efficiency in a single competence development centre at regional level working in close cooperation with sectors (Belgium)
- reduce apprenticeship grant in order to increase number of apprentices in companies (Germany)
- development of an apprenticeship system for university students to maximise exchange of knowledge and expertise (the Netherlands).

Financing lifelong competence development is a constant concern of social partners. Numerous and diverse initiatives were taken in this field, including:

- influencing the design/reform of the financing system for education and training (Czech republic, Finland, Spain)
- development of tools to ease access to learning, such as learning vouchers, learning leave, learning grants, e-learning, (Austria, Denmark, Germany, Finland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, UK)
- monitoring and promoting companies' investment in competence development, for example by agreeing on minimum levels of investment in collective agreements, (France, Cyprus, Sweden, Belgium, Ireland)
- awareness-raising activities on available sources of funding for companies and/or workers (UK, Luxembourg, Sweden)
- cooperation with education institutions at sector/regional level (Sweden)
- development of bipartite or tripartite training funds to finance companies training plans (Spain, Italy, Czech republic, Cyprus, the Netherlands, Belgium, Greece, Poland)
- use of EU structural funds (Cyprus, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Ireland, Poland)
- development of union learning fund (UK).

II./ IMPACT OF THE FRAMEWORK OF ACTIONS

The framework of actions for the lifelong development of competences and qualifications was the first ever adopted by the European social partners. European social partner negotiations resulted in the definition of four priorities for actions common to all national social partners and a work plan for future follow-up. The framework of actions has had the merit of delivering a clear message and a sense of focus to national social partners in most countries. It has created impetus for change, supported pre-existent social partners actions on competence development, and helped bring about concrete actions to promote lifelong competence development in all Member States.

European social partners support the cooperation process on vocational training initiated in Copenhagen and Maastricht. Through their work on the framework of actions, they were for example able to influence the content of the Maastricht Communiqué adopted in December 2004, which is the European roadmap for vocational education and training policies. They believe that the process of policy coordination undertaken at the European level would gain in clarity, effectiveness and attractiveness for stakeholders if it was more focussed on a few priorities – as it is the case in European social partners' framework of actions. European social partners call on the Commission and the Council to fully take into account their discussions, proposals and priorities for work.

Concerning the follow-up, the annual reports do not aim at being exhaustive but highlight the most significant actions taken by social partners at national, sectoral and company levels. Social partners agreed on a selection of examples to illustrate progress made, which give an indication of the priorities set in their work. A clear evolution can be observed in the actions reported from the first report (2003) to the latest one (2005). The first year, a significant number of actions were geared towards dissemination and awareness-raising on the European text and its priorities

at national, sectoral and company levels (conferences, debates, websites, booklets, media etc.). Over the years, more and more actions have been taken to promote the priorities themselves.

For the period 2002-2005, among the most relevant initiatives reported by social partners, more than 350 examples were given which were spread as follows:

Priority 1: identification and anticipation of competencies and qualifications needs	108
Priority 2: recognition and validation of competencies and qualifications	89
Priority 3: information, support and guidance	53
Priority 4: mobilising resources	100

Among the initiatives reported, over 70 concerned companies' good practice examples. Moreover, discussions on the national follow-up to the European framework of actions have led to important decisions on national social partners joint actions, such as:

- creating or reforming forums to discuss national labour market and education policies with public authorities (7 initiatives reported)
- launching or relaunching national social dialogue on lifelong learning (5 initiatives reported)
- organising European events to share good practices with social partners from other Member States (4 initiatives reported)
- making joint translation and dissemination of the European text (almost all countries).

Looking at the content of the reported initiatives, it appears that the first concern of social partners was to better tailor education and training to labour market needs, in order to improve both the employability of workers and the competitiveness of companies, and to make education and training systems sustainable. These actions correspond to priorities 1 and 4. Concerning the mobilisation of resources, unfortunately the number of innovative solutions to promote co-investment in terms of funding, time and human resources was relatively limited. Social partners' second concern was to open-up existing systems, make them adopt a lifelong learning perspective and fully integrate work-based learning outcomes. These actions correspond to priority 2. Fewer actions were taken under priority 3 and several countries acknowledge that more has to be done to spread tailored information and raise motivation for competence development from the part of both companies and workers.

Even if the follow-up was intended to be primarily done in Member States, European level social partners also reported a number of actions. They widely disseminated the text and made its core elements known to EU public authorities and European sectors. They also promoted the involvement of the social partners from the new Member States by organising a specific seminar in May 2004 and by raising awareness on the priorities and follow-up mechanism through their joint integrated programme of technical assistance to the new Member States started in 2002. Finally, they collected and raised awareness on good practices from European sectoral social partners (11 initiatives reported)³.

³ For more details, please refer to the European Fiche

To conclude, the considerable amount of work done by national and European social partners to follow up on their initial commitment has made it possible to raise awareness on actions taken at national, sectoral and company levels, exchange experiences and gain understanding on the practical solutions sought by social partners. The compilation of shared good practices which was done annually enables to learn from others' experiences.

The European process both gave impetus to social partners for new actions and a framework to national social partners for discussions be it bilaterally or with public authorities. In some countries, in particular the new Member States, it encouraged social partners to get involved in national discussions on lifelong learning and to make their voice heard in debates which were mostly led by public authorities.

Even if social partners' actions still remain influenced by national policies and overall political context, and therefore mirror the current difficult situation of Europe, the reported initiatives demonstrate that social partners understand the challenges of the ageing of the population, globalisation of markets and rapid technological change in an increasingly similar way and that comparable solutions are successfully developed in different countries in south, north, eastern or western Europe.

The follow-up work has also enhanced perception of competence development as a shared interest for employers and employees and helped finding concrete solutions to modernise education and training systems. In most countries, it has clearly led to increased understanding and better cooperation between social partners as well as to a sense of shared responsibility.

The influence of the framework of actions on social partners' activities will continue in the future. It also depends on the ability of social partners at all levels to disseminate and raise awareness on the results of this evaluation exercise.

FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

Three years after the adoption of the framework of actions, Europe's economic and employment situations have worsened. With almost 20 million people unemployed, weak growth and insufficient productivity rates, the overall impact of the framework of actions on the functioning of labour markets is difficult to assess.

Policies to develop lifelong development of competences and qualifications can contribute to solving labour market problems but it is also crucial that all aspects of the European growth and jobs strategy are implemented effectively. Developing lifelong learning therefore remains an essential priority if Europe is to become the most competitive knowledge-based economy and society in the world.

European social partners believe that the four priorities identified in 2002 remain valid and essential building blocks to improve the functioning of Europe's labour markets. They reaffirm the need to continue their dialogue and deepen their discussions on the lifelong development of competences and qualifications. Furthermore, they want to look at lifelong learning in the wider perspective of the functioning of labour markets in Europe.

European Trade Union Confederation *

**Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe –
UNICE/UEAPME****

**European Centre of Enterprises with Public Participation and of
Enterprises of General Economic Interest**

**FRAMEWORK OF ACTIONS FOR THE LIFELONG DEVELOPMENT OF
COMPETENCIES AND QUALIFICATIONS**

Evaluation report

23 March 2006

National evaluation reports available on European social partner organisations
websites:

- Austria
- Belgium
- Cyprus
- Czech Republic
- Denmark
- Finland
- France
- Germany
- Greece
- Ireland
- Italy
- Lithuania
- Luxemburg
- The Netherlands
- Norway
- Poland
- Portugal
- Slovenia
- Spain
- Sweden
- The United Kingdom
- The European level

www.etuc.org www.unice.org www.ueapme.com www.ceep.org

* The ETUC delegation includes representatives of the Eurocadres/CEC Liaison Committee

** UEAPME - European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises