# IMPROVING SKILLS MATCHING IN EUROPE

Final report, February 2026

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Project of the European Social Partners with the financial support of the European Union.

# European social partners' recommendations

The following recommendations have been developed by the European cross-industry social partners, taking into account the findings from their project on "improving skills matching in Europe". This project was supported by an independent representative study following surveying and interviewing of the national members of ETUC, BusinessEurope, SGI Europe and SMEunited as well as EU level sectoral trade union and employer organisations. European, and national social partners, namely employers' organisations and trade unions of workers, are responsible for and are essential actors in shaping and implementing skills policies at all appropriate levels.

According to C/2023/1389 COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 12 June 2023 on strengthening social dialogue in the European Union, "Social dialogue encompasses tripartite and bipartite consultation and negotiation, in the private and public sector, at all levels, including dialogue at cross-sectoral, sectoral, enterprise level, or at national, regional or local level. National tripartite social dialogue brings together government, workers and employers to discuss public policies, laws and regulations and other decisions that affect the social partners. Tripartite consultations can ensure greater cooperation between the tripartite partners and build consensus on relevant national policies."

European social partners have recently adopted Joint Procedures for European cross-sectoral social dialogue, which help to improve trust between the social partners by developing a better common understanding of what the EU social dialogue can deliver and how to conduct it.

TFEU Article 152 explicitly recognizes and promotes the role of the social partners at EU level and commits the EU to facilitating dialogue between them Articles 154 and 155 TFEU define the framework for EU social dialogue, its consultation and negotiation procedures involving social partners at EU level.

## The role of social partners in shaping the skills system

1. Policy design and implementation: Through an effective legal and/or policy framework and social dialogue Member States and their competent authorities should effectively, proactively and systematically engage with social partners at all appropriate levels (national, regional, sectoral) to improve skills policies and the functioning and orientation of skills systems. In doing so it is important to take into account reliable and measurable labour market and skills data, so as to support job and skills matching and reduce skills shortages.
2. VET qualifications and occupational profiles: National social partners should continue and further develop cooperation among themselves and with relevant public authorities (eg ministries) to improve training systems. i.e. initial and continuous VET.
3. Joint solutions by social partners: National social partners should aim to strengthen their cooperation and social dialogue, where needed, in order to define joint solutions, including the negotiation of collective agreements, to anticipate skills development, and to design, implement and evaluate skills policies training arrangements, the gathering and interpretation of skills intelligence and pilot initiatives.

## Skills matching and recruitment

4. Labour market integration strategies: Member States, together with social partners and public and private employment services should develop policy frameworks that encourage the adoption of inclusive and forward-looking labour market integration strategies. Such frameworks should support the design and provision of flexible, recognised training programmes that support the inactive and unemployed to enter the labour market and to obtain and maintain quality jobs.
5. Facilitating recruitment: According to national specificities public and private employment services and social partners should strengthen their cooperation in order to support labour market participation; facilitate recruitment; employability; matching, including through mobility and migration; and the provision of career guidance.

6. Cooperation with PES: Social partners should take part in PES governance structures and help to reinforce their role that effectively shape and implement labour market policy, according to national specificities, supporting apprenticeship matching, defining training needs and supporting training provisions, and improving recruitment practices.
7. Awareness raising and guidance: National social partners should support and contribute to the work of public employment services and take a role in awareness raising about available jobs and career opportunities in different sectors. This couldinclude guidance on sector-specific upskilling and reskilling, and apprenticeship opportunities for all ages.

## Transitions and retention: upskilling and reskilling

8. Training solutions: Member States should ensure the meaningful and timely involvement of social partners in skills governance at European, national, sectoral and local levels. This is essential for supporting the financing, delivery and provision of up-skilling and re-skilling, reflecting the first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights on the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning for everyone. Member States should also recognise the competence and support the capacity of social partners in designing and implementing effective training provision in the interests of employers and workers.
9. Transition and retention strategies: Social partners should examine how to use their bipartite social dialogue as well as their tripartite exchanges with public authorities at all appropriate level to develop transition and retention strategies for employees, including as concerns job-relevant recognised training provision and participation and the role of labour mobility in supporting fair job-to-job, industry-to-industry and intra-EU and cross-border transitions and matching.
10. Investing in training: National social partners should identify further ways to finance and broaden access to training within their national context. Sustainable solutions to the financing and provision of training also need to be identified with the support of European funding, national budgets, social partners' training funds and through social partners' bipartite initiatives and dialogue; and in close cooperation with appropriate public authorities.

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# Acknowledgements

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The research was carried out by a team of experts from Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini: Terence Hogarth (Team Leader), Liga Baltina (Deputy Team Leader), assisted by Giulia Martorana, and Marina Ferent-Pipas. The team is grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the ongoing European debate on skills matching and the role of social partnership.

The authors would also like to acknowledge the valuable contribution of the Steering Committee composed by the members of the secretariats and representatives of member organisations of BusinessEurope, SGI Europe, SMEunited and ETUC, which provided strategic direction, constructive feedback and substantive input at key stages of the study. Their engagement helped ensure the relevance, balance and policy significance of the analysis.

Sincere thanks are extended to all social partner organisations that participated in the survey, interviews and case studies, as well as to the speakers and participants at the international conference "Improving skills matching in Europe" and the final validation conference "Skills development: reducing skills mismatches and skills shortages", held in Brussels on 6 March 2025 and 13 February 2026. Their insights, examples and reflections were essential in grounding the study in practical experience across diverse national and sectoral contexts.

# Executive summary

## Study aims and methodology

In 2024, BusinessEurope, the European Trades Union Confederation (ETUC), SGI Europe, and SMEunited commissioned the "Improving skills matching in Europe 2024-2025" study. Its overall aim, as set out in the terms of reference, was to "look at the role of social partners in fostering skills matching, thereby contributing to reducing labour and skills shortages through consideration of this multi-faceted issue, with a perspective towards achieving good outcomes for workers and employers."

The study examined three issues in detail:

1. The **role of social partners in shaping national skill systems** designed to identify, anticipate, and respond to skill mismatches. This provides an indication of the extent of social partner influence over the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data to inform policy making, and the design of measures which might improve skills matching (such as involvement in qualification design and content).
2. The engagement of **social partners in activities designed to improve skills matching** in the workplace with a particular emphasis on facilitating recruitment.
3. **Social partner involvement in upskilling and reskilling** so that skills are up to date - especially in the light of changes in skill demand resulting from the digital and green transitions. How social partners are able to improve labour and skill retention in the workplace is also considered.

A multi-faceted research design was employed to address the three issues. This included a **literature review** which set the scene on the current state of skill mismatches across Europe and how the social partners have sought to improve the level of skills matching. The literature review provided preparatory information for participants in an **international conference** - organised by BusinessEurope, ETUC, SGI Europe and SME United – which provided social partner delegates an opportunity to give their views on the issues of interest. A **questionnaire survey** of social partner organisations which asked about their activities relevant to skills matching. The survey was conducted in May and July 2025 and obtained responses from 94 social partner organisations. Following the survey, EU social partners selected 12 countries for **in-depth case studies**, based on an agreed set of criteria. In each country, semi-structured interviews were conducted with social partner representatives to explore in more detail how skills matching challenges are addressed in different national contexts. A final validation conference was organised by BusinessEurope, ETUC, SGI Europe and SME United to give delegates the chance of complementing and validating this final report and the draft recommendations.

## The labour market and skills policy contexts

The demand for labour across Europe has over the recent past exceeded supply. Until relatively recently, employment rates had been in decline with vacancy rates reaching historic highs. As a consequence, employers reported skill shortages and skill gaps with the potential to inhibit organisational performance and, in aggregate, overall economic performance. Additionally, there are concerns that Europe equips too many people with skills for which there is insufficient labour market demand and too few with the skills the labour market and economy require. This is made explicit in the recent Draghi report on competitiveness and the EU's Union of Skills.[1] Embedded within the various policy responses is the importance of social partnership in addressing skill mismatches. The European Skills Agenda for Sustainable Competitiveness, Social Fairness and Resilience (2020), for example, stresses the need for labour market skills intelligence to be the basis of policy making. This requires collective action that

[1] Draghi, M., (2024). *The future of European competitiveness – A competitiveness strategy for Europe*. Brussels: European Commission.

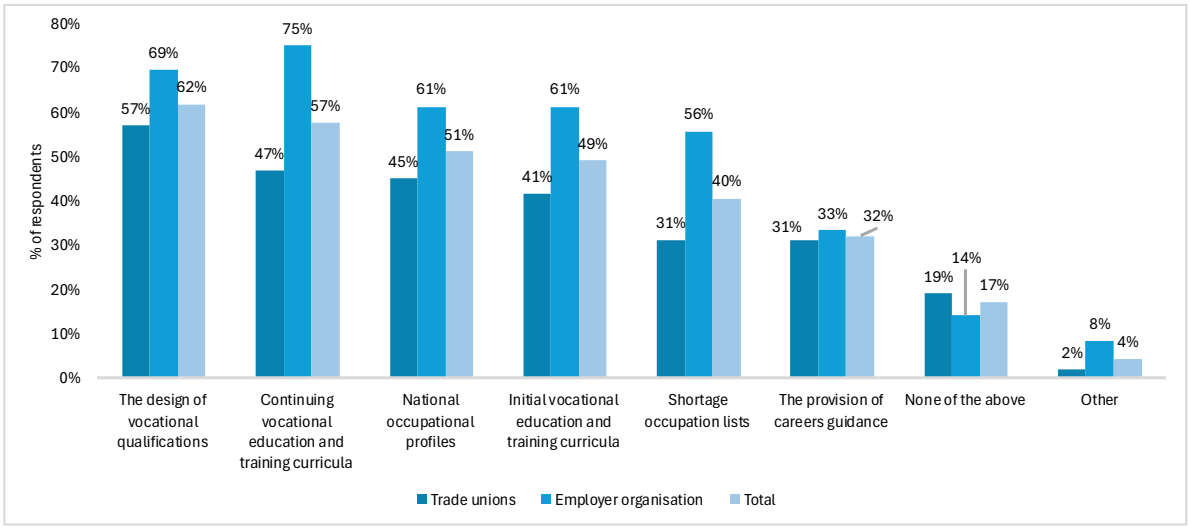
requires "*mobilising business, social partners and stakeholders, to commit to working together, in particular within the EU's industrial eco-systems*" (p.5).[2]

## Social partner involvement in shaping the skills system

The survey of social partner organisations revealed that they were engaged across a wide range of activities which involved a high degree of collaboration with one another. The survey was conducted between May and July 2025.

The evidence reveals that both employer organisations and trade unions are involved in skills development, especially the design of vocational qualifications and training curricula (see Figure 1). The majority of social partners on each side reported working in collaboration with one another on issues to do with skills.

**Figure 1: Areas of skill systems where respondents are involved**




Source: Social Partners' Skills Shortages and Gaps Survey

Where social partners are involved in various activities they report a degree of influence. The survey of social partners reveals that a majority of them have influence over the design of vocational qualifications, advising on the skills required to support the use of AI and the green transition, and in the development of national occupational profiles or standards. Influence is often exerted through being members of the national institutions which have responsibility for these skill developments.

When asked about the barriers to their organisations exerting influence over skills policy, social partners point to issues such as policymaking being scattered across too many government departments and agencies, or situations where social partners are granted only limited involvement in skills policy making. This could be remedied by more structured involvement of the social partners in policy making at national, regional, and sectoral levels.

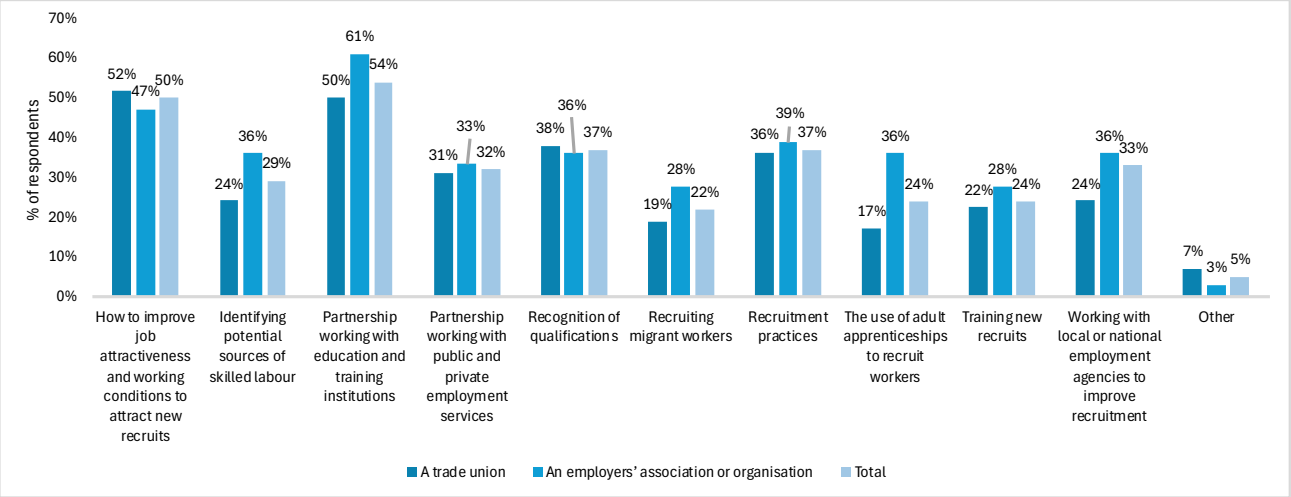
## The role of social partners in recruitment

Recruiting workers from the external labour market is one means by which employers can meet their skill needs. With their extensive links across workplaces and sectors, social partners are particularly well placed to provide guidance on effective approaches to recruitment to ensure that skills supply from the external labour market meets the demand within the workplace. Nearly all social partners are involved in activities related to improving skills matching and recruitment, i.e. ensuring that skills supply meets the needs of workplaces and making sure that workplaces have the right policies and practices in place to successfully recruit people with the skills required.

[2] European Commission (2020). *European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience*. COMM (2020) 274 final.

While social partners are engaged in a range of activities, the two they are most likely to be involved in are working in partnership with education and training institutions to improve the recruitment of students/trainees, and improving job attractiveness in certain jobs and sectors in an effort to increase the number of applicants for these jobs (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Social partner engagement in skills matching and recruitment**




Source: Social Partners' Skills Shortages and Gaps Survey

Working with public employment services (PES) provides one means of assisting people to find work, especially where individuals may be unemployed or economically inactive. The social partners are active in working with PES especially in developing connections with enterprises to improve skills matching, and the recruitment of migrant workers from inside and outside the EU. Social partners are keen to work with PES to ensure that skills supply was better matched to local employer needs.

Evidence from the survey points to the social partners being engaged in assisting with the education-to-work transition, by supporting apprenticeships, traineeships, and mentoring programmes. These are considered to be relatively effective mechanisms for facilitating the transition of young people from school to work. Social partners are active in ensuring that young people are recruited to these kinds of training programmes.

## The role of social partners in supporting upskilling and reskilling

EU policy has established access to training and lifelong learning as a fundamental right as reflected in the first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights, which states that: '*Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market*'.[3] The evidence collected over the course of the study reveals that the social partners are actively engaged in promoting the provision of upskilling and reskilling of existing workers. Their involvement includes advising or negotiating collective agreements which include training clauses, giving information on the benefits of providing training to existing workers and employers, and designing training programmes and courses. They are also involved in the advising on the skills and competences that workers and enterprises need to acquire, especially digital skills (e.g. IT literacy, cybersecurity, digital tools), green skills (e.g. sustainable practices, energy efficiency), and the technical or vocational skills related to a specific occupation or sector.

[3] European Commission (2021). *The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan*. COM (2021) 102 final.

A majority of social partners reported that they have some influence over policies related to upskilling and reskilling. Influence is strongest where social partners are involved in collective bargaining, participate in governmental working groups, or have direct involvement in financing or providing continuing training initiatives.

The retention of skilled workers is closely related to the issue of upskilling and reskilling. Employers are often concerned that their investments in skills will be lost if trained workers leave to work for other companies. Just under a half of social partners report being involved in supporting labour retention with trade unions being more likely than employer organisations to do so. Among those who say they provide support for the retention of skilled workers within the workplace, many of these activities relate to the terms and conditions of work. Factors, however, directly related to skills were important here too, with social partners advising on the provision of career plans and career progression routes. Social partner opinions on their level of influence over labour and skill retention practices in the workplace is positive overall with a majority reporting that they have some influence

## Conclusion

What is the alternative to social partnership in the skills domain? If it is left to the market to determine the demand for, and the supply of, skills, then there is every likelihood that skill mismatches will persist simply because labour market signals about the demand for skills are not always well articulated or clearly understood. Even if the signals are well understood, training supply is not so flexible that it can quickly respond to market demand. 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 in the labour market. The evidence points to social partners developing policies, practices, tools, and programmes designed to anticipate and mitigate skill mismatches. Evidence presented in the report demonstrates that the unique insights the social partners have into the causes of skill mismatches and how they might be effectively addressed results in solutions which are tailored to a particular situation. This relates to the expertise and experience they can bring to bear in shaping interventions which improve the overall operation of the skills system, facilitates recruitment , or increases the provision and take-up of upskilling and reskilling. It is apparent that social partners' resources can be stretched when trying to engage in a wide range of activities spread across fragmented skill systems.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Skill shortages and the role of social partnership

In 2024, BusinessEurope, the European Trades Union Confederation (ETUC), SGI Europe, and SMEunited commissioned the "Improving skills matching in Europe 2024-2025" study. Its overall aim, as set out in the terms of reference, was to "look at the role of social partners in fostering skills matching, thereby contributing to reducing labour and skills shortages through consideration of this multi-faceted issue, with a perspective towards achieving good outcomes for workers and employers."

Labour markets have been buoyant across Europe over the past few years. Unemployment rates have been at historically low levels and vacancy rates have recorded record highs. As a consequence, labour demand has, on average, outstripped supply with labour and skill shortages being widely reported as a constraint on economic performance. The importance attached by EU policy makers to redressing the problems posed by skill shortages and mismatches is readily apparent from the political guidelines for 2024-2029 which includes 'Tackling the Labour and Skill Gaps' amongst its six priorities.[4] In doing so, the EU "*…will establish a Union of Skills – focusing on investment, adult and lifelong learning, skill retention and the recognition of different types of training to enable people to work across our Union*" (p.12). In a similar vein, Mario Draghi's report – The Future of European Competitiveness – identifies skills supply, amongst other things, as a barrier to economic growth. In response, it states that "*the EU should overhaul its approach to skills, making it more strategic, future-oriented and focused on emerging skill shortages*" (p. 33).[5] The report also highlighted the need for a more co-ordinated approach to education and training policies at the EU level. More recently the Herning Declaration on the attractiveness of vocational education and training (VET) – adopted by the European Union in September 2025 - has drawn attention to the role of VET in tackling skill mismatches.[6] All of the above see social partnership fulfilling an important role in tackling skill mismatches.

Social partners are in a unique position to address skill mismatches. They are involved on a day-to-day basis in collective discussions about working conditions, job quality, and recruitment and retention which provides them with a holistic view of the characteristics, extent, causes and implications of skill mismatches. Social partners also provide different perspectives on skill mismatches including those of employers, workers, large and small companies, across a range of sectors. In-depth information representing a number of different perspectives provides social partners with a unique outlook on how to address existing mismatches and avert future ones. The remainder of this report demonstrates social partner involvement in redressing Europe's skill mismatches.

## 1.2 Aims and methodology

The study looks at the role of social partners in three different aspects of skills matching.

1. The **role of social partners in shaping national systems** designed to identify, anticipate, and respond to skill mismatches. This provides an indication of the extent of social partner influence over the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data to inform policy making, and the design of measures which might improve skills matching (such as involvement in qualification design and content).

[4] European Commission (2024) *Europe's Choice Political Guidelines for the Next European Commission 2024–2029*. Luxembourg: Publications Office.
[5] Draghi, M., (2024). *The future of European competitiveness – A competitiveness strategy for Europe*. Brussels: European Commission.
[6] EU Council (2025). *The Herning Declaration on attractive and inclusive Vocational Education and Training for increased competitiveness and quality jobs 2026-2030*.

2. The engagement of **social partners in activities designed to improve skills matching** in the workplace with a particular emphasis on facilitating recruitment.
3. **Social partner involvement in upskilling and reskilling** so that skills are up to date - especially in the light of changes in skill demand resulting from the digital and green transitions. How social partners are able to improve labour and skill retention in the workplace is also considered.

These three themes were explored through a multi-faceted research methodology. This included a **literature review** which set the scene vis-à-vis the current state of skill mismatches across Europe and how the social partners have sought to improve the level of matching. The literature review provided preparatory information for participants in an **international conference** - organised by BusinessEurope, ETUC, SGI Europe and SMEunited - entitled *Improving skills* matching *in Europe,* held in Brussels on 6 March 2025. It also suggested questions for delegates to consider. In series of plenary and break-out sessions, social partners provided examples of how their organisations had been involved in shaping skill systems, skills matching and recruitment, and upskilling, reskilling and skill retention. Annex 1 provides further information about the international conference. The literature review and international conference influenced the design of a **questionnaire survey** of social partner organisations which asked about their activities relevant to skills matching, their degree of influence, and activities they would particularly like to highlight. The survey, conducted in May and July 2025, obtained responses from 94 organisations – 58 (62%) were trade unions and 36 (38%) were employer organisations. Further details of the survey are provided in Annex 2. Following the survey, EU Social partners selected 12 countries for **in-depth case studies**, based on an agreed set of criteria. In each country, **semi-structured interviews** were conducted with social partner representatives to explore in more detail how skills matching challenges are addressed in different national contexts. The rationale for the selection of countries is provided in Annex 3. It includes a mix of countries according to the extent of collective bargaining and skills mismatch. Twelve case study interviews were conducted with representatives from the trade unions and employer organisations in Denmark, Italy, Netherlands, Estonia, Germany, Austria, Croatia, Luxembourg, Latvia, Czechia, Greece and Romania. Interviewees were selected following advice from ETUC, BusinessEurope, SMEunited and SGI Europe on the most representative organisations in each country. Inputs from all research phases were incorporated into a draft final report, which was validated and complemented by delegates participating in the **final validation conference**, "Skills development: reducing skills mismatches and skills shortages", held in Brussels on 13th February 2026.

## 1.3 Structure of the report

**Chapter 2** provides an assessment of the scale of skill mismatches across Europe. This is primarily based on the background report prepared for the international conference. The following chapters provide a synthesis of the information collected from the international conference, the survey of social partners, semi-structured interviews conducted in selected 12 case study countries, and the final validation conference. **Chapter 3** looks into how social partners have been able to shape skills systems. In **Chapter 4**, the role of social partners in skills matching and recruitment is addressed, and in **Chapter 5** the focus is upon the role of social partners in upskilling, reskilling and skill retention. Finally, **Chapter 6** provides a conclusion and some tentative recommendations.

# Skill mismatching: A review of the evidence

# 2. Skill mismatching: A review of the evidence

Europe continues to face substantial mismatches - with around a third of workers either over- or under-skilled - highlighting the need for stronger alignment between education, training, and labour-market demand, more granular skills-anticipation data, and fuller use of social partners' real-time insights. This chapter presents an assessment of the scale of skill mismatches across Europe, drawing primarily on the background report prepared for the international conference.

## 2.1 The Policy perspective

The EU's political guidelines for 2024-2029 include 'Tackling the Labour and Skill Gaps' amongst its six priorities.[7] In doing so, the EU "*…will establish a Union of Skills – focusing on investment, adult and lifelong learning, skill retention and the recognition of different types of training to enable people to work across our Union*" (p.12). The importance of this initiative is evident from the prominence of skills in the policy discourse on green and digital transitions and the need to stimulate economic growth. Mario Draghi's report – The Future of European Competitiveness – identifies skills supply, amongst other things, as a barrier to economic growth. The prescription is that "*the EU should overhaul its approach to skills, making it more strategic, future-oriented and focused on emerging skill shortages*" (p. 33).[8] The report also highlighted the need for a more co-ordinated approach to education and training policies at the EU level.

The call for Member States to reform their skills systems to make them more responsive to the changing demands of the labour market is not new. Successive EU skill agendas have drawn attention to the need to invest in skills anticipation and provision to ensure that the supply of skills is better matched to both current and future demand. This is clearly recognised in the latest EU Skills Agenda – European Skills Agenda for Sustainable Competitiveness, Social Fairness and Resilience (2020) – which sees skills anticipation as the bedrock on which skill policy should be based. Skills intelligence, it plainly states "*…needs to be embedded in national skills strategies and in training and education systems. Individual companies should also develop internal processes to identify skills gaps and measures to address upskilling of their own workforce.*" (p.8).[9] Turning labour market skills intelligence into policy and action is dependent upon collective action. This is one of the five building blocks of the EU Skills Agenda: "*mobilising business, social partners and stakeholders, to commit to working together, in particular within the EU's industrial eco-systems*" (p.5).[10]

Improving the attractiveness of VET is seen as one means of improving skills matching, not least because programmes such as apprenticeships have a substantial workplace-based component where students / apprentices learn how to apply their skills and knowledge in practice. The Herning Declaration on VET, adopted by the European Union in September 2025, places a strong emphasis on social partnership where the Ministers responsible for VET: *"stress that social dialogue and a strong partnership with social partners is crucial and welcome social partners' and all other relevant stakeholders' intention to support the implementation of the objectives and actions set out in this Declaration, and recall that companies as learning venues are crucial to modern, inclusive and excellent VET"*(p.1).[11]

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[7] European Commission (2024). *Europe's Choice Political Guidelines for the Next European Commission 2024−2029*, Luxembourg: Publications Office.
[8] Draghi, M., (2024). *The future of European competitiveness – A competitiveness strategy for Europe*. Brussels: European Commission.
[9] European Commission (2020). *European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience*. COMM (2020) 274 final.
[10] Ibid.
[11] EU Council (2025). *The Herning Declaration on attractive and inclusive Vocational Education and Training for increased competitiveness and quality jobs 2026-2030*.

As the foregoing demonstrates, the importance attached to the role of social partners in the process of skills anticipation and acting upon the information it provides is clearly recognised. Through collecting information on how the social partners effectively engage in these types of activity – or where they face barriers to effectively influencing skills policy – a better understanding will be obtained about how the social partners can collectively act to improve skills matching across the EU.

With the above in mind, the remainder of this chapter covers the following.

1. It looks at the role of social partners in addressing the overall level of mismatches.
2. It examines the extent to which skill mismatches occur as a result of external labour market conditions and the role of recruitment in addressing skill mismatches, including the contribution of social partners to improving skills matching.
3. It considers the role of upskilling and reskilling in addressing skill mismatches, and looks how social partners have sought to increase investment in training.

## 2.2 Skill mismatches and the social partners' role in shaping skills systems

### The skills challenge

As noted above, there is a need for collective action to ensure that the EU possesses the skills required to improve its competitiveness in the face of the challenges posed by the green, digital, demographic transitions and, in doing so, bring about a range of social and economic benefits for EU citizens. Strengthening skills matching systems across Europe is not solely a matter of competitiveness, especially in the public services sector, where improved access to, and participation in, training enhances the quality and safety of services, as well as preparedness for future crises. The Val Duchesse Tripartite Declaration for a Thriving European Social Dialogue amplifies the commitment to strengthen social dialogue in relation to, amongst other things, labour and skill shortages. The Joint Recommendations of the European Social Partners on Promoting Social Partnership in Employee Training (2018) are also pertinent here, especially Recommendation No. 6, which states:[12]

> "*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.*"

And Recommendation No.7 that stipulates:

> "*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.*"

The recommendations imply that the social partners will be engaged in the diagnosis of skill needs and the actions to redress any mismatches. To do so, they need access to data on emerging skill needs and mismatches that lend itself to promoting actions to bring about a better match between skills supply and demand. Promoting action assumes that the social partners will be able to use labour market skills intelligence to influence various parts of the skills system. In other words, the authorities responsible for curricula development and programme design, vocational schools and other training institutions, career counsellors and, importantly, employers and workers vis-à-vis their skill needs. This has to be undertaken promptly to ensure that the skills system can adjust and align its supply to meet emerging demands effectively.

[12] BusinessEurope, Ceep, Ueapme, Etuc (2018). *Joint Recommendations of the European Social Partners on Promoting Social Partnership in Employee Training*.

Below is a synopsis of the future skills challenges to address and how skills anticipation data potentially provides a means to reduce skills mismatches. This is then used to frame a set of questions about (i) the utility of labour market skills intelligence available to social partners and (ii) examples of relatively good practice.

The skills challenge is that of being able to identify the skills which will emerge as the triple digital, green and demographic transitions gather pace. Regarding the green transition, there are a variety of measures at both EU and national levels designed to attain net zero greenhouse emissions by 2050. The overall impact of the green transition, as set out in the European Green Deal and the European Climate Law (2021), suggests that it will, in aggregate, have relatively little impact on employment levels, though there may be adverse local effects (e.g. those regions with large carbon footprints).[13] From a skills perspective, the Green Deal would appear to have, at most, a modest impact insofar as it tends to result in an increased demand for existing skills rather than a demand for new ones (e.g. construction workers using their existing skills but applying them to retro-fitting existing buildings rather than building new ones). This indicates a shift towards greening existing competences where the core skills remain largely the same but are applied in environmentally focused contexts.

The digital transition has the potential to be more disruptive than the green one. Digital technologies have the potential to wholly substitute for existing skills and workers, augment the existing tasks undertaken by workers, and lead to the creation of new tasks and new jobs.[14] All of these may occur to some degree. For the time being, the impact of digitalisation seems to favour task augmentation with limited job loss, but this may change in the future if artificial intelligence leads to a demand for new kinds of skills.[15] Demographic change will reduce labour and skills supply and, at the same time, increase the demand for people to work in health and social care jobs. Depending upon the severity of the impact on labour supply it may well necessitate the automation of tasks and jobs.

The key point is the degree of uncertainty and the extent to which the green, digital, and demographic transitions interact with one another such that the diffusion of new technologies transforms the green transition and provides a solution to what might otherwise be severe labour shortages resulting from an ageing and shrinking population. The implication here is the potential for relatively radical technological change, which will propel the green transition and simultaneously lead to machines increasingly substituting for labour.

## Conceptualising skill mismatches

Measuring skill mismatches is far from straightforward.[16] In practice, mismatches prove difficult to define, not least because defining what is meant by skill proves to be challenging. Attewell, in his comprehensive review of the concept, comments: "… *like so many common sense concepts, skill proves on reflection to be a complex and ambiguous idea*".[17] Notwithstanding this problem, definitions of skill mismatch tend to be focused on: (a) the difficulties employers face in recruiting people from the external labour market with the skills they require; and (b) the extent to which workers within an organisation possess the skills employers need to meet their production goals (see Table 2.1).

[13] Cedefop (2021). *The green employment and skills transformation: insights from a European Green Deal skills forecast scenario*. Luxembourg: Publications Office.
[14] Autor, D. (2022). *The Labor Market Impacts of Technological Change: From unbridled enthusiasm to qualified optimism to vast uncertainty*. Washington: NBER Working Paper 30074.
[15] Cedefop (2022). *Setting Europe on course for a human digital transition: new evidence from Cedefop's second European skills and jobs survey*. Luxembourg: Publications Office.
[16] McGuinness, S., Pouliakas, K. & Redmond, P. (2018). 'Skills mismatch: concepts, measurement and policy approaches'. *Journal of Economic Surveys*, Vol. 32(4). 985-1015; Brunello, G. and Wruuk, P. (2021) 'Skill shortages and skill mismatch: A review of the literature' Journal of Economic Surveys, Vol. 35(4) 1145-1167.
[17] Attewell, P. (1990) 'What is Skill?'. *Work and Occupations*, Vol. 17, No.4, pp.422-448.

**Table 2.1: Classification of skill mismatches**

| | Skill shortages / Skill gaps | Skill surpluses |
|---|---|---|
| **Internal: Organisations' existing workforces** | The workforce of an organisation is not fully proficient in their existing jobs (skill gaps) | Workers' skills are excess to those required in their jobs |
| **External: Skills available in the labour market** | Employers experience difficulties in recruiting people with the skills they require (skill shortages) | Workers are in excess to the jobs available in the labour market – either because of recruitment decisions, or a result of skills obsolescence. |

Source: Adapted from LMI for All Blog What is a skill mismatch? How to define and measure shortages and surpluses

In relation to both internal and external skill mismatches, a distinction is made between vertical and horizontal mismatches. A vertical mismatch refers to situations where workers possess skills at a higher or lower level than required in their current job, whereas a horizontal mismatch occurs where the level of skill (however defined) is at the level typically required in the job, but those skills are inappropriate to the tasks undertaken.

Taking the above into consideration, one ends up with the following conceptualisations of skill mismatches:

- over-qualification – individuals have a higher qualification than required in their job;
- under-qualification – individuals possess lower qualifications than required to do their job;
- over-skilling – individuals are employed in jobs which do not fully utilise their skills;
- under-skilling – individuals lack the skills and abilities necessary to perform the tasks required in their current job;
- skill shortages – where demand for a particular type of skill exceeds the supply of that skill at the prevailing rate of pay;
- skills obsolescence – skills previously utilised in a job are no longer required or have diminished in importance.

As will be mentioned below, all of these refer to current rather than future employment.

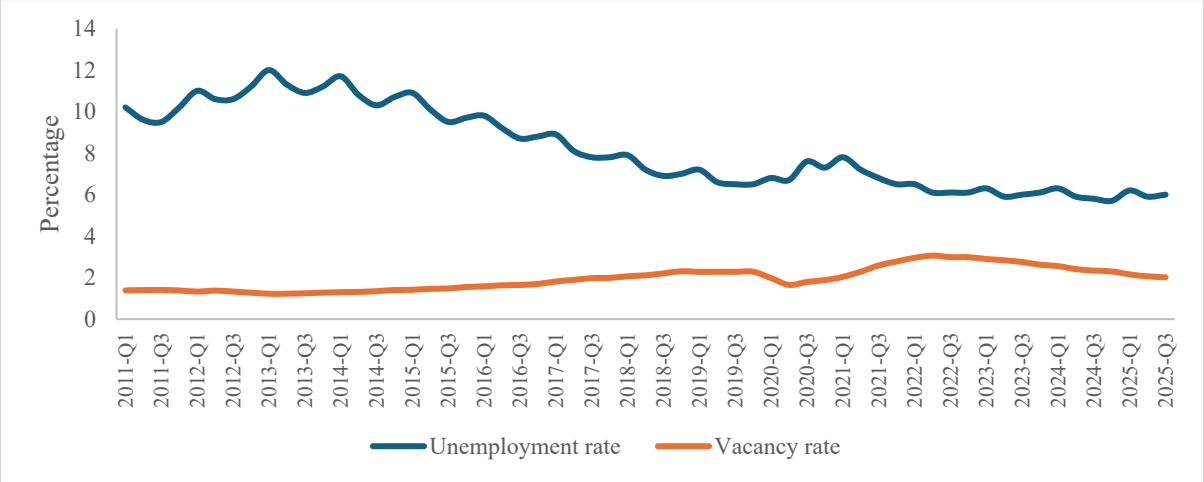
## Measuring mismatches

Measurement poses a further challenge. Ideally, a direct, multi-dimensional measure of a worker's competence is required, such as one that might be obtained through a skills test. These are seldom, if ever, available. In general, the concept of skills in the policy discourse is measured with reference to occupation, and /or qualification. These are imperfect, though readily available measures of skill. Increasingly, the use of data science techniques such as scraping online job advertisements (OJAs) provides more detailed information on changes in the demand for specific skills. This type of analysis, however, is still in its infancy and is subject to uncertainties about whether data refer to actual skill needs or some ideal set of skills those advertising job openings would like to acquire.

A distinction may be made between objective and subjective measures of skill mismatches. There have been various attempts to derive objective measures which rely on indicators capturing the dynamic interplay of demand and supply-side factors. At its simplest, this is captured by the Beveridge Curve, which compares unemployment and vacancy rates. Figure 2.1 indicates the change in the ratio between unemployment and vacancy rates over time in the EU to show how, over the early 2020s, labour market conditions have tightened across Europe. The Beveridge Curve is really a measure of labour shortages and surpluses rather than a measure of skills mismatch. Labour shortages and surpluses, however, are sometimes conflated with their skill equivalents. More recently, attempts have been made to develop composite indicators of skill mismatches, which reflect trends in both the demand for, and the supply of skills to the labour market to establish lists of occupations, and sometimes skills,

where demand outstrips supply.[18] But again, these are more about current demand rather than that which might emerge in the future.

**Figure 2.1: Vacancy and unemployment rates, 2010 to 2024**




Source: Eurostat EU-Labour Force Survey [lfsq_urgan]

Subjective approaches capture information from surveys regarding the extent to which workers (about their skill levels and the extent to which they are matched to their jobs) and from employers (about the difficulties they face in finding people with the skills they require when recruiting from the external labour market, and the extent to which they consider their existing workforce proficient to undertake the tasks required of them). Surveys such as the European Skills and Jobs Survey, the EU Company Survey, and the EURES Labour Shortages and Surpluses Survey, provide data relating to these issues by Member States.[19]

## The scale of the skill mismatch problem

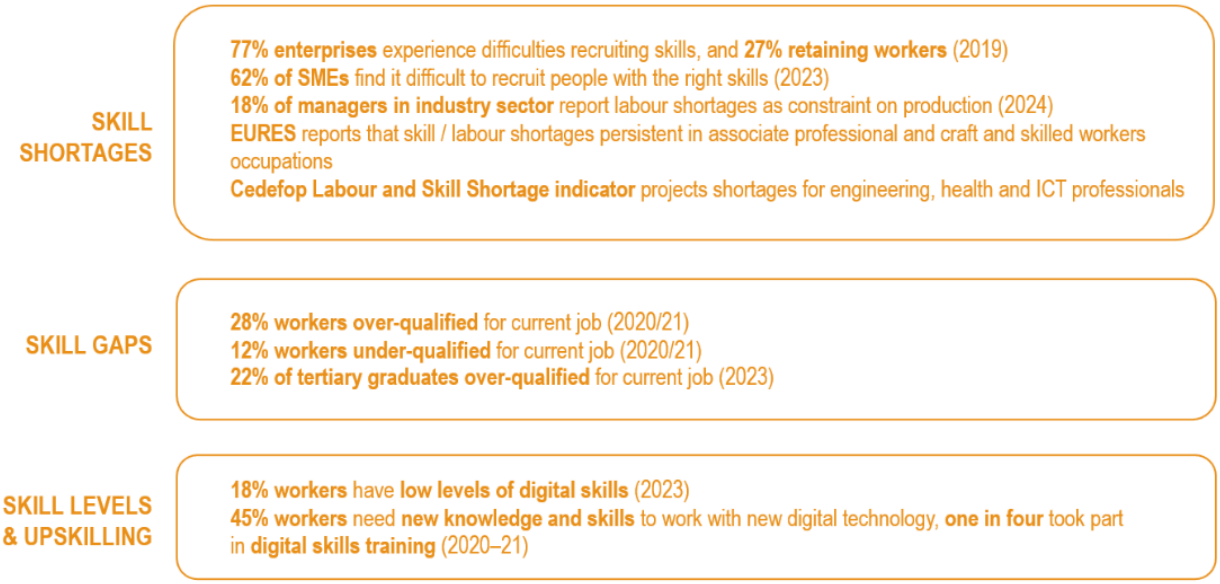
Skills mismatches refer to the extent to which there is an over- or under-supply of skills to the economy. Both kinds of mismatch are socially and economically damaging. Skill shortages constrain the capabilities of employers to grow their businesses, while skill surpluses reduce workers' employment opportunities and wage returns.

. Notwithstanding the difficulties attached to defining and measuring skill mismatches, the scale of the skill mismatch problem can be gleaned from a few key stylised facts. [20] The European Investment Bank's 2025 Investment Survey revealed that a shortage of skilled labour was the second most important barrier to investment in the EU (just behind uncertainty about the future). Overall, 79% of employers reported shortages of skilled labour as a barrier to investment (52% said it was a major obstacle).[21] In a similar vein, a 2023 Eurobarometer asked employers about the most serious problems facing their companies.[22] Difficulties finding people with the right skills was reported more than anything else. This was reported by 65% of small, 68% of medium-sized, and 72% of large

[18] See for example OECD (2017). *Getting Skills Right: Skills for Jobs Indicators*. OECD Publishing; OECD. (2022). *Skills for jobs 2022: Mapping skill requirements in occupations based on job postings data*. OECD Publishing; Flisi, S., Goglio, V., Meroni, E., Caetano Rodrigues Jorge Rodrigues Ferro M., Vera Toscano, M. (2014). *Occupational mismatch in Europe: Understanding overeducation and overskilling for policy making*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
[19] Cedefop (2022). *Setting Europe on course for a human digital transition: new evidence from Cedefop's second European skills and jobs survey*. Luxembourg: Publications Office; Cedefop / Eurofound (2020). *European Company Survey 2019: Workplace practices unlocking employee potential*. Luxembourg: Publications Office; *EURES (2024). Labour Shortages and Surpluses Report 2023* Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
[20] McGuinness, S., Pouliakas, K. and Redmond, P. (2019). 'Skills Mismatch: Concepts, Measurement and Policy Approaches'. *Journal of Economic Surveys*, Vol. 32(4), pp 985-1015
[21] European Investment Bank (2025). *EIB Investment Survey 2025: European Union overview*. Luxembourg: EIB.
[22] Eurobarometer (2023). *European Year of Skills: Skills shortages, recruitment and retention strategies in small and medium-sized enterprises*. Flash Eurobarometer 529.

companies. It is not just about skills shortages. Skills surpluses pose a challenge too. Cedefop's European Skills and Jobs Survey found that over a quarter of workers (28%) had attained higher levels of education than their job required compared with 12% who were under-qualified.[23] As a consequence, other things being equal, they are less likely to obtain the same level of reward from their skill investments as their well-matched counterparts. Given the potential scale of mismatches facing employers and workers, policy makers have increasingly sought to improve the skills matching process. Figure 2.2 below provides some stylised facts about the current state of skill mismatches across Europe derived from some of the main sources of representative data on skills mismatch in the EU.

**Figure 2.2: Stylised facts about skill mismatches in the EU**




Sources: European Skills and Jobs Survey (2020/21); EU Company Survey (2019); Eurostat Digital Skills series; EURES Labour and Skill Shortages in 2023; EU Business and Consumer Surveys (2024); Eurostat series on over-education of tertiary graduates

Much of the data mentioned above is backward looking, insofar as it measures things which have happened in the past, with data often provided at a highly aggregated level, especially where skill is measured with reference to occupation or qualification. Skills forecasts are available but rely upon occupation and qualification as measures of skill. They provide information on skill demand rather than mismatches, though Cedefop's recently developed future shortages indicator is an attempt to create a future oriented perspective on mismatches.[24] Data scraping of OJAs, such as Skills-OVATE, provides near real-time detailed information about the skills required in a job – notwithstanding reservations about the accuracy of the information OJAs provide – but little information about future skill needs.[25] Skill foresight exercises combine forecasting with other sources of information about skills demand to develop, typically scenarios of future skill demands and potential mismatches, but these are not systematically undertaken across the EU.

## From diagnosis to policy making and action

Cedefop's summaries of skills anticipation systems across the EU reveal that social partners in many Member States are involved in the oversight of skills anticipation exercises and, in some countries, are actively engaged in collecting and analysing skills anticipation data. The OECD's analysis of national skills strategies across the EU

[23] Cedefop (2022). *Setting Europe on course for a human digital transition: new evidence from Cedefop's second European skills and jobs survey*. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop reference series; No 123

[24] Livanos, I. (2024) 'Skill Shortages in Europe: theoretical consideration and empirical evidence' in Baltina, L. and Hogarth, T. (eds.) *Rethinking Europe's Skill Needs: Reflections following the European Year of Skills*. Rome: Quaderni Series.

[25] Further information is available at: https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/skills-online-vacancies.

Member States emphasises the significant role of social partners and other stakeholders in developing and implementing strategic frameworks, provision of information on sectoral and occupational shortages, actions to tackle skill mismatches, and supporting measures related to career counselling and delivering training programmes.[26] Practice, however, varies significantly across the Member States. It further highlights the critical importance of formalising cooperation mechanisms that can build engagement and ownership of measures.

**There are several understandable weaknesses related to skill anticipation, which social partners are well-placed to address.**

First, information on skill shortages, gaps, and obsolescence tends to look backwards to what happened one or two years ago rather than being forward looking. If skills forecasting addresses mismatches, it tends to do so indirectly by identifying high demand employment jobs.

Second, skill mismatches tend to be measured with reference to qualifications and occupation, and where information is provided on specific skills, the focus is usually limited to transversal ones.

Third, relatively little consideration is given to the strategic choices, often at the workplace or sectoral levels, which determine how work will be organised around, for example, a new technology, and the skill needs this will give rise to.

Because social partners are often working at the national, local, sectoral, and workplace levels, they are well placed to observe the changes which are taking place, in real time, and the skill needs which arise. There are multiple examples where social partners have been engaged in innovative initiatives which complement existing approaches to skills anticipation at local, regional, national, and pan-European levels (e.g. the sectoral blueprint alliances, Pact for Skills, promotion of apprenticeship training). These have been able to provide: insights into emerging skill needs in various sectors; learning platforms enhancing access to upskilling and reskilling opportunities, and suggestions for updating VET curricula.

What is less clear is how social partners are able to utilise the information they have on skill mismatches to influence the relevant parts of the skills system. For instance, it is not clear how social partners are able to influence the content of curricula or training programme content on an ongoing basis to ensure that the skills supply is meeting demand. And how much influence do the social partners have over the content of an apprenticeship in a given occupation and if they do, does that extend to the entire content of an apprenticeship (e.g. training regulations for the apprenticeship, the workplace-based element, and assessment)? And if so, what kind of influence is brought to bear? These are questions which are addressed in the next chapter.

## 2.3 Skills Matching and recruitment

### Balancing the demand for, and supply of, skills

This section addresses the inter-relationship between employers and the external labour market. It concentrates on understanding the role of the social partners in tackling skills mismatches, especially in relation to supporting recruitment, and addressing the training needs to enter jobs. It also touches upon the intermediary organisations that are involved in connecting job seekers to employment (careers counselling services / public employment services) and the engagement of social partners in these organisations. The recruitment of those transitioning from education to work via various training programmes is addressed in the next section on upskilling and reskilling.

Recruiting workers from the external labour market, including through mobility and migration, is one means by which employers will be able to fulfil their skill needs. Efforts at the EU level to establish an EU Talent Pool and to facilitate the recognition of skills and qualifications–both within the EU and for third country nationals looking for

[26] OECD (2024). *Insights from Skills Strategies in the European Union: Lessons Learnt for Developing and Implementing Effective Skills Policies*. Paris: OECD Skills Studies, OECD Publishing.

work in Europe–demonstrate that the external labour market should be considered in broader terms. On this matter, the role of social partners is critical in ensuring fairness and quality employment for all workers, with trade unions calling for strong guarantees on equality of working conditions with EU nationals, fair access to public services, and social protection. The involvement of social partners is essential in shaping and monitoring these recruitment practices.

There is a general view that effective recruitment reduces labour and skills shortages, lower turnover rates, and improves organisational performance. There are manifold changes affecting the recruitment process, including the use of technology to process or screen applications, as well as the emergence of gig-type employment where the relationship between the 'worker' and 'employer' is much more tenuous with implications for the recruitment process.[27] The extent to which employers need to recruit workers will also be governed in part by retention. If employers can retain their skilled workers, then this will reduce the need to recruit.

Recruitment also needs to be addressed in relation to the role of employment services. Career guidance services, for example, play an essential role in bridging the gap between workforce capabilities and businesses' requirements. This includes services available in educational settings that guide students on learning pathways as well as assisting jobseekers find work. Social partner engagement in employment services is seen as important in being able to improve job-matching.[28] Given the changes which may well result from the digital and green transitions there is a need to ensure that workers – and employers - have access to information, advice, and guidance on their likely future skill needs and how these might be met.

## The scale of the recruitment challenge

Before considering how recruitment and retention of skills can be improved through social partnership, it is useful to give an indication of the scale of the problem which faces the EU. The EU Company Survey (ECS) conducted in 2019 revealed that 77% of workplaces in the EU found it difficult to recruit people with the skills they require (26% said it was very difficult and 51% fairly difficult).[29] The ECS reported that Slovakia (92%), Romania (90%) and Malta (88%) had the highest incidence of recruitment difficulties, while Denmark (44%), Greece (43%) and Slovenia (36%) recorded the lowest levels. Construction stood out as the sector with the highest level of recruitment difficulties (86%). A more recent Manpower survey[30] from 2024 revealed that 74% of employers faced difficulties finding the skills or talent that they needed.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), because of their size, are sometimes not as well-resourced to engage in extensive recruitment campaigns compared with their larger counterparts.[31] A Eurobarometer survey of SMEs from 2023 found that 52% of SMEs found it very difficult to recruit staff and 26% moderately difficult (see Figure 2.3).[32] In other words, the vast majority of SMEs experienced difficulties recruiting the skills they needed. Employers in Slovakia recorded the most difficulty and in Denmark the least. [33]

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[27] Nikolaou, I. (2021). 'What is the role of technology in recruitment and selection?'. *The Spanish Journal of Psychology*, 24. e2; Urzì Brancati, C., Pesole, A., Fernández-Macías, E. (2020) *New evidence on platform workers in Europe. Results from the second COLLEEM survey*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

[28] Cedefop; ETF; European Commission (2021). *Investing in career guidance: revised edition 2021*. Inter-Agency Working Group on Career Guidance WGCG.

[29] Cedefop / Eurofound (2020). *European Company Survey 2019: workplace practices unlocking employee potential*. Luxembourg: Publications Office.

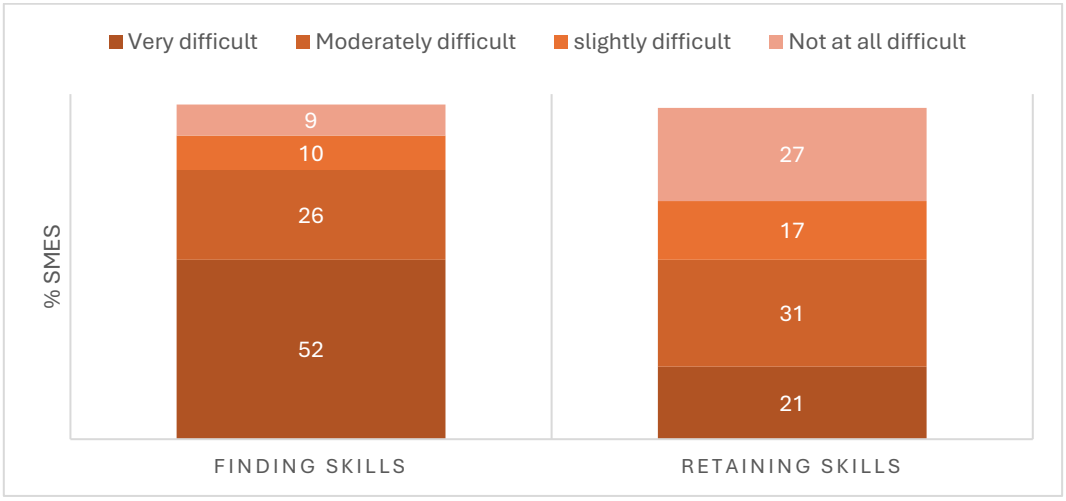
[30] Source and more details available at: https://go.manpowergroup.com/talent-shortage.

[31] Biea, E. A., Dinu, E., Bunica, A., & Jerdea, L. (2024). 'Recruitment in SMEs: the role of managerial practices, technology and innovation'. *European Business Review 36*(3), 361-391.

[32] Eurobarometer (2023). *European Year of Skills: Skills shortages, recruitment and retention strategies in small and medium-sized enterprises*. Flash Eurobarometer 529. Brussels: DG EMPL.

[33] Ibid.

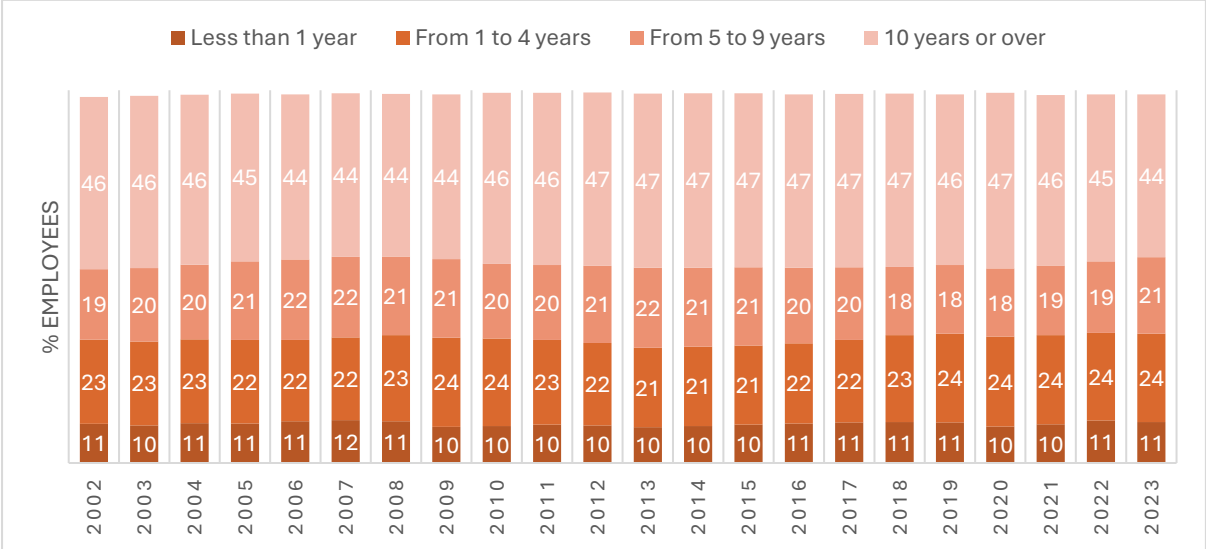
**Figure 2.3: Share of SMEs reporting difficulties recruiting or retaining skills (2023)**




Source: Flash Eurobarometer 529

Job tenure refers to the length of time an individual has been employed in a particular job or with a specific employer and provides an indication of labour retention. Job tenure has changed relatively little over time, despite the tightening of the EU labour market over the early part of the 2020s (see Figure 2.4). In 2003, 10% of employees had a tenure of one year or less, which had risen to 11% in 2023.[34] There are, of course, occupational differences, with those in elementary occupations being more likely to report a job tenure of less than a year (18% of all working in elementary occupations) compared with, for example, managers (7%), which has implications for meeting skill needs.

**Figure 2.4: Job Tenure in the EU, 2002 to 2023**




Source: Eurostat Labour Force Survey – Job Tenure [lfsa_qoe]

In the ECS, 27% of workplaces reported difficulties in retaining staff. This varied from 10% in Finland and 54% in Slovakia.[35] The transport and construction sectors were, respectively, the most likely to report retention problems

[34] Data from the European Labour Force Survey via Eurostat.
[35] Cedefop / Eurofound (2020). *European Company Survey 2019: workplace practices unlocking employee potential*. Luxembourg: Publications Office.

(30% in both cases) and financial services the least (19%). Evidence in relation to SMEs indicates a more severe retention problem, with 52% reporting that it was either very or moderately difficult to retain staff.

## Factors which influence recruitment

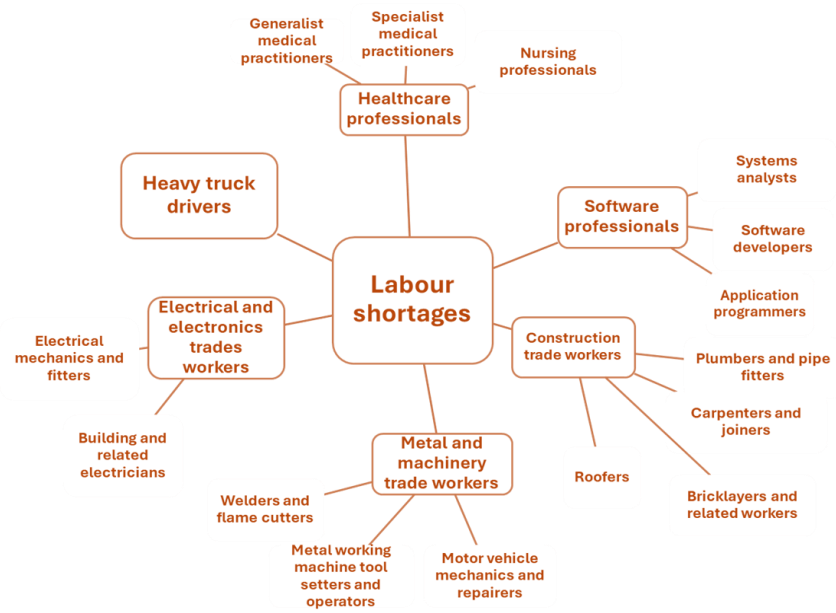
Not all recruitment problems are necessarily skill related ones, even if they are reported as such in surveys. In practice, employers are likely to experience recruitment problems as a result of:

- The terms and conditions of employment on offer;
- Recruitment strategies and preferences;
- A lack of internal skills supply;
- Location, especially if it is at some distance from centres of population;
- Relatively high levels of workforce exit resulting from retirements and quit rates;
- Demographic trends in the local labour market area; and
- The supply of skills from the education and training system or other employers.

It is not possible to analyse each of these in turn, except to say that analysis which has sought to separate the shortage of skills in the labour market from other factors such as the terms and conditions of employment suggests that somewhere between 60 and 80% of skill shortage vacancies are likely to be unrelated to the supply of skills.[36] If one looks at the occupational characteristics of labour shortages reported by EURES, many jobs require modest levels of skills (see Figure 2.5).

It was observed that shortages in Europe reflect not only skill mismatches but also challenges related to the quality of jobs. Analysis of post-pandemic evolutions indicated that sectors with poor working conditions have struggled most to recover. In this context, a balanced approach is needed—supporting businesses while ensuring fair wages and working conditions for employees.[37]

**Figure 2.5: Labour shortages by occupation reported to EURES (2023)**




Source: own elaboration based on ELA's – EURES Report, 2024

[36] Cedefop (2015). *Skill shortages and gaps in European enterprises: striking a balance between vocational education and training and the labour market*. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop reference series; No 102.
[37] Zwysen, W (2023). *Labour shortages – turning away from bad jobs. In ETUI, The European Trade Union Institute*. ETUI.

Other analysis suggests that employers' approaches to recruitment may, sometimes, be overly complex, especially when setting stringent recruitment criteria when looking for the perfect fit between organisation and recruit.[38] The results from the ECS suggest that workplaces which offer relatively good terms and conditions of employment, linked to recruitment criteria which focus solely on the qualifications and experience of the candidate are less likely to experience difficulties recruiting people with the skills needed. This chimes with the BusinessEurope survey of companies where respondents drew attention to a declining number of applications per vacancy, which may, to some degree, reflect applicants' difficulties in meeting various recruitment criteria.[39]

Looking at how recruitment difficulties might be eased, information is available from the Eurobarometer, which investigated the recruitment and retention problems faced by small and medium-sized companies. SMEs indicated that strengthening the collaboration with PES (57%); better tools for assessing the skills of applicants (48%); and better tools for assessing the company's skills needs (47%) are required to reduce recruitment difficulties. Additionally, SMEs indicated that measures related to hiring workers from abroad or living abroad were relevant. This relates to "easier procedures for recognition of foreign qualifications" (39%), "easier procedures for hiring workers from outside the EU" (38%), and "easier procedures for employing remote workers living abroad" (26%).[40]

A potentially under-researched area in relation to recruitment and retention is the degree of over-qualification or over-skilling in the workplace and the extent to which employers can draw upon the unused skills held by workers. This might be expected to increase retention levels and reduce recruitment needs.

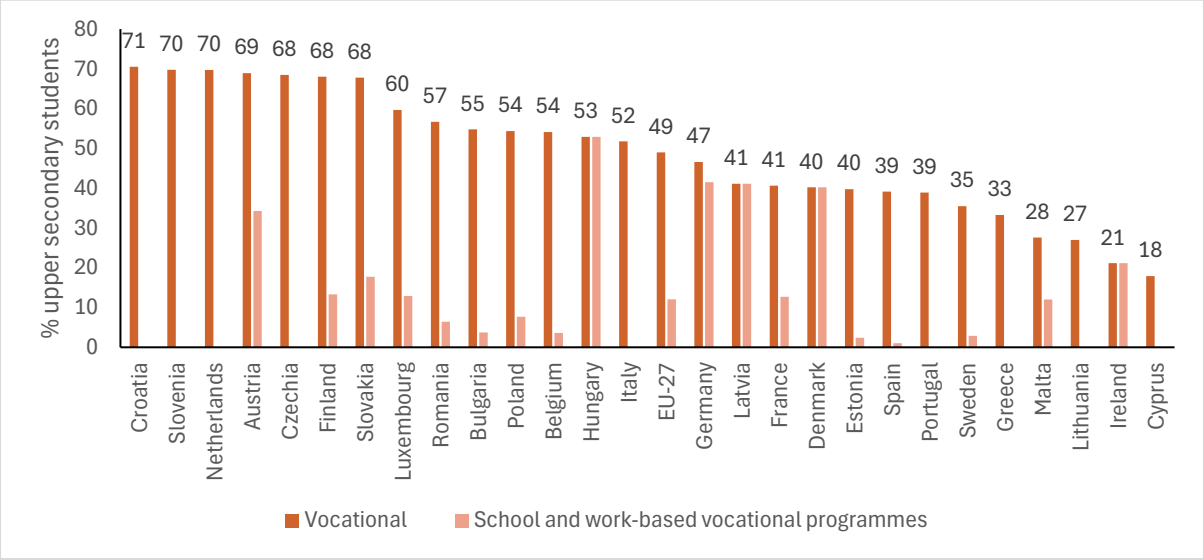
### The recruitment of young people: the education-to-work transition

Any analysis of recruitment needs to consider the education-to-work transition. EU policy increasingly recognises the important role initial vocational education and training plays assisting people make the transition from education to work, and in delivering to employers the skills they need. Apprenticeships are seen as particularly adept at delivering skills that have economic value in the labour market. At the EU level, the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) involves the social partners in strengthening the quality, supply, and overall image of apprenticeships across Europe, while also promoting the mobility of apprentices. Apprenticeships are also an important part of the Youth Guarantee.

Over the last ten years, the share of upper-secondary students entering the vocational pathway has remained more or less constant in the EU27 at just under 50%: in 2015 it stood at 48.9% and by 2024 it stood at 49.7%. There is, however, substantial variation by Member State as shown in Figure 2.6.. In Austria, for example, 69% of upper secondary education students were enrolled in vocational education in 2022 compared with 18% in Cyprus. Although it is difficult to find statistics on the share of upper-secondary education accounted for by apprenticeships type training, the share of upper-secondary students participating in programmes combining school and work at EQF levels 3 and 4 provides an indicative approximation. The share of upper-secondary education students accounted for by this type of training has been fairly constant over time in the EU27: in 2015, 10.8% of students in upper secondary education were enrolled on school and work-based programmes and this had risen to 12.4% in 2024. There are, however, substantial differences between Member States with respect to the share of upper secondary students enrolled on school and workplace based programmes (see Figure 2.6).

[38] Cedefop /Eurofound (2020). *European Company Survey 2019: workplace practices unlocking employee potential*. Luxembourg: Publications Office.
[39] BusinessEurope (2023). *Analysis of Labour and Skill Shortages: Overcoming Bottlenecks to Productivity and Growth*. Brussels: BusinessEurope.
[40] Eurobarometer (2023). *European Year of Skills: Skills shortages, recruitment and retention strategies in small and medium-sized enterprises*. Flash Eurobarometer 529. Brussels: DG EMPL.

**Figure 2.6: Participation in vocational education in upper-secondary education (2022)**




Source: Eurostat Labour Force Survey - Pupils enrolled in upper secondary education by programme orientation [educ_uoe_enrs04][41]

SMEs provide the majority of apprenticeship places in countries with strong apprenticeship-based VET systems. In France, around 80% of apprenticeship places are offered by SMEs, while in Germany, the figure is 70%, and 60% in Austria.[42]

## Role of social partnership in tackling recruitment problems and improving career guidance

Significant improvements have been registered through social partners' cooperation and involvement in various areas of working and employment conditions, sometimes indirectly. European cross-sector framework agreements and joint actions have supported enhancements in areas of employment related to parental leave, part-time work, fixed-term work, gender equality, lifelong learning, and workplace safety. These developments potentially increase the attractiveness of employment to would-be recruits and contribute to labour and skill retention.

Looking more directly at actions designed to reduce skill shortages and gaps, sectoral initiatives at the EU level have made in-roads into tackling recruitment and retention problems, In the healthcare sector, which faces acute recruitment and retention problems, the European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU) and the European Hospital and Healthcare Employers' Association (HOSPEEM) have agreed an updated Framework of Actions on Recruitment and Retention (2022). Actions endorsed under this agreement focus on improving areas such as working conditions, health and safety, lifelong learning and continuous professional development to increase attractiveness and maintain the workforce already in the sector. Another example identified was the initiatives of social partners in the audiovisual and live performance sectors. The European Framework of Actions on Skills in the Audiovisual and Live Performance covers multiple initiatives implemented to tackle labour shortages recorded for several occupations in these sectors. Efforts to increase awareness and attractiveness of graduates and the workforce towards these sectors include the Creative Pathways to Creative Careers campaign and the organisation of Creative Skills Week.

At the national level, examples of social partner initiatives related to increasing the attractiveness of specific sectors, enhancing career guidance services and strengthening matching to reduce shortages, were identified in **Denmark** and the **Netherlands**. The Danish Construction Industry Association developed various knowledge and tools (e.g., practical recommendations and guides for different target groups such as managers, HR, mentors or

[41] Some figures might be different when looking at national data sources. However, the LFS has been used to guarantee consistency of measurement across all countries.
[42] European Alliance for Apprenticeships, (2024). *Support to SMEs in offering apprenticeships*.

colleagues, and new young employees) for the stakeholders in the sector with the aim of supporting the integration of recent graduates, students and those new in the construction industry.

The Regional Work Centers (RWC) in the Netherlands represent an initiative supported by stakeholders such as municipalities, the Employee Insurance Agency (UWV), employer organisations, education providers and trade unions. These centres offer access to career services for both employees and job seekers, aim to improve the availability of support for career-related questions, and assist people in finding employment or new career opportunities through public-private partnership cooperation. Companies in the energy sector cooperate to develop and ensure the functioning of the *Arbeidsmatchplatform*, which is a labour-matching platform. This initiative supports the recruitment processes of skilled manual workers and tackles labour shortages in the sector. It promotes a skill-first approach in the recruitment of employees that considers primarily the skills of job seekers and less their prior education. In addition, work-based learning opportunities and activities are emphasised to help people upskill or reskill in line with the needs of the available workplaces.

It is also recognised that at the firm level, there are many positive examples of social partnership in action to address recruitment and retention issues related to skills.

## 2.4 Transitions and retention: Upskilling and reskilling

### The importance of vocational education and training

From a skills policy perspective, two kinds of transition are of particular interest: (i) the transition from education to work; and (ii) the transitions individuals make once they are in the labour market as they move or progress between jobs and employers. The former draws attention to the role of initial vocational education and training (IVET) and the latter continuing vocational education and training (CVET). EU policy making recognises the importance of both. The role of VET in meeting the EU's skill needs has increased in prominence over recent years.[43] This is true in relation to both IVET – where there has been a policy push on the take-up of apprenticeships – and CVET, where the need to improve the skills of adults, including those in work as well as those unemployed, has been recognised in a number of policy initiatives, such as the Recommendation on the Upskilling Pathways (New Opportunities for Adults). [44]

VET is seen as particularly suited to addressing Europe's skill needs given that it is focused in many instances on equipping individuals with the competences required to be proficient in a specific occupation or profession. This should, other things being equal, reduce the level of horizontal mismatch in the economy so long as people are directed towards occupations and professions for which demand is expected to remain buoyant. Hence, skills anticipation is essential in directing individuals towards training programmes.

Transitions, in many respects, require workers and job seekers to have access to training at workplaces and, more generally, lifelong learning so that they are able to progress in their chosen field. The importance of this is writ large in EU policy making. The first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights states that: '*Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market.*'[45]

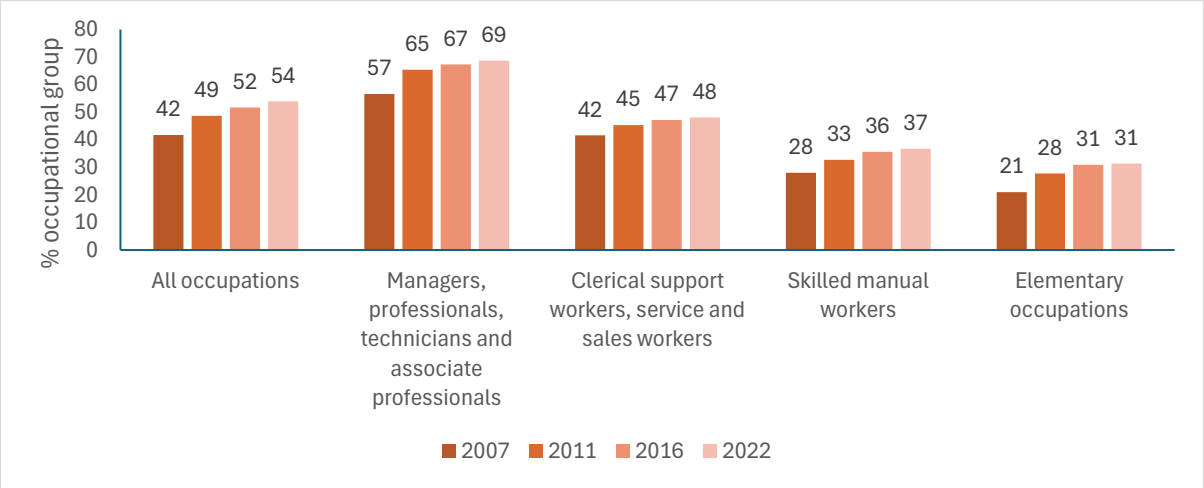
### Continuing vocational education and training

Mention has already been made of the triple demographic, digital, and green transitions that will affect both the demand for, and the supply of, skills. It is known that in the case of the digital transition, there will be changes to

[43] Cedefop (2018). *The changing nature and role of vocational education and training in Europe: volume 3: The responsiveness of European VET systems to external change (1995-2015)*. Luxembourg: Publications Office
[44] *Council Recommendation of 19 December 2016 on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults*. (2016/C 484/01).
[45] European Commission (2021). *The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan*. COM (2021) 102 final.

the skills both individuals and employers need to acquire. The second European Skills and Jobs Survey (ESJS2) revealed that 28% of workers felt they were under-skilled to undertake their current job. At the same time, 12% said they were over-qualified. Both potentially create a demand for training – in the former case, to support the upskilling required to adapt to changes in the workplace, and in the latter, to convert their existing skills or capabilities so that they are better matched to demand. ESJS2 also hinted at the under-provision of training insofar as those working with new digital technologies felt they needed training, but this was not delivered.[46] Other evidence demonstrates that where technological change adversely affects employment, those who work in relatively less skilled jobs without access to training are most affected.[47] Over time, the percentage of people engaged in training has increased across all occupations, but it tends to be the highly skilled and qualified who are most likely to receive it. Figure 2.7 shows that the percentage of people in employment in receipt of training over the past twelve months has increased across all occupational groups, but those employed in managerial, professional, and associate professional jobs are more than twice as likely to take part in training compared with those in elementary occupations.

**Figure 2.7: Participation in training over the past 12 months in the EU27**




Source: Eurostat Adult Education Survey [trng_aes_104]

In the previous section mention was made of apprenticeships in relation to the education-to-work transition and the importance attached to this form of training in delivering skills for which there is a demand in the labour market. It also needs to be borne in mind that apprenticeships are increasingly being delivered to adults and, in doing so, fulfil a reskilling function.[48]

## Barriers to training

There is extensive literature on the reasons why either individuals or employers are unable to engage in training.[49] Employers are an important source of training for individuals. The Adult Education Survey 2022 reveals that 47%

[46] Cedefop (2022). *Setting Europe on course for a human digital transition: new evidence from Cedefop's second European skills and jobs survey*. Luxembourg: Publications Office.
[47] Pouliakas, K. (2024). 'Automation Technology and its Impact on Jobs: Evidence from the second European Skills and Jobs Survey' in Baltina, L. and Hogarth, T. (eds.) *Rethinking Europe's Skill Needs: Reflections Following the European Year of Skills*. Rome: Quaderni Series; Pouliakas, K. (2018). 'Risks posed by automation to the European labour market'. In: Hogarth, T. (ed). *Economy, employment and skills: European, regional and global perspectives in an age of uncertainty. Rome: Quaderni Series.* pp. 45-75.
[48] Cedefop (2020). *Apprenticeships for adults*. Cedefop briefing note, June 2020.
[49] Acemoglu, D. and Pischke, J-S. (1998) 'Why Do Firms Train? Theory and Evidence' *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol. 113, No. 1, pp. 79-119; Wolter, S.C., Mühlemann, S. and Schweri, J. (2006). 'Why Some Firms Train Apprentices and Many Others Do Not'. *German Economic Review,* 7: pp. 249-264

of employees engaged in work related training over the past 12 months. It also reveals that 43% of employees said their work related training was employer sponsored. In other words, where employees reported being in receipt of work related training, 92% of them said it was employer sponsored..[50] The Continuing Vocational Training Survey reveals that 56% of enterprises in the EU provided continuing vocational training in 2005 and this had increased to 67% in 2020. The number of training hours each employee spends training has remained static: 9.3 hours in 2005 and 9.5 hours in 2020. Provision of training potentially provides a means of reducing the extent of skill shortages or skill gaps, but employers face barriers in providing training or more training related to[51]

- a lack of information about the benefits of training or the need to undertake training;
- concerns about the costs of training and appropriating the returns of any training provided (because employees might leave to work elsewhere);
- a lack of capital to invest in training;
- concerns about employees being away from productive work during training;
- training providers and programmes not being available to meet the needs of the employer, or poor quality of training programmes.

From employees' perspectives, participation in training is hindered by several key barriers. Time constraints, such as balancing work and personal commitments, often leave individuals with limited availability for training activities. Financial costs, as some relevant training courses, can be expensive for individuals who lack sufficient financial support. Family responsibilities, including caring for children or other dependents, further limit workers' ability to engage in training. A lack of interest or perceived need for training is also observed, particularly among those with lower educational attainment, who may not see the relevance or necessity of further education. Health issues, especially among older adults or those with existing health concerns, can make participation challenging. Negative past learning experiences may deter individuals from re-engaging in educational activities. Additionally, access issues, such as limited availability of training opportunities or inadequate digital resources, pose significant obstacles.[52]

## Role of social partnership in improving labour market transitions

To improve the availability of training provided by employers (to meet their business needs) and support employees in developing their skills (whether to progress within their current roles or transition to new jobs), the social partners have been involved in the implementation of activities designed to overcome the barriers to training taking place and, in doing so, address skill shortages and gaps. [53] Examples of innovative interventions are provided below.

**Raising awareness about the benefits of upskilling and reskilling to adapt to a changing product and service market environment.** In the Netherlands, the Foundation for Cooperation on VET and the Labour Market promotes lifelong learning opportunities and facilitates interactions between different stakeholders that can improve VET system outcomes (e.g., aligning VET qualifications with technological changes, advising on skill needs, and facilitating work-based learning opportunities). In the UK, Union Learn is an initiative of the Trades Union Congress

[50] Data from Eurostat - Adult Education Survey [trng_aes_123__custom_20174500]
[51] Cedefop (2018). *Insights into skill shortages and skill mismatch: learning from Cedefop's European skills and jobs survey.* Luxembourg: Publications Office. Ewart, E. (2006). *Market failure in skills*, Wath-upon Dearne: Sector Skills Development Agency; Wolter, S.C., Mühlemann, S. and Schweri, J. (2006). 'Why Some Firms Train Apprentices and Many Others Do Not'. *German Economic Review,* 7: pp. 249-264; Acemoglu, D. and Pischke, J.-S. (1999). 'Beyond Becker: Training in Imperfect Labour Markets'. *The Economic Journal*, 109: 112-142.

[52] Güner, D., and Nurski, L., (2023). *Understanding barriers and resistance to training in the European Union*. Bruegel; Liodaki, N., & Karalis, T. (2024). 'Barriers to Employees' Participation in Continuing Professional Education Programs in Greece'. *European Journal of Education and Pedagogy*, 5(3), 36–43.
[53] BusinessEurope, Ceep, Ueapme and Etuc (2018). *Promoting social partnership in employee training*.

(TUC) that works closely with employers to ensure the conclusions of workplace learning agreements, which represent an important tool for establishing equitable training policies and practices. [54]

**Identifying skill needs within workplaces, promoting training and using skills intelligence (data/tools) to design and implement effective upskilling and reskilling initiatives that mitigate skill mismatches.** In **Czechia**, social partners are involved in anticipation of change and competencies and skills development by partnering with educational institutions to guarantee the relevance of training offers (Moravian-Silesian Employment Pact). **Germany**'s employer representatives and trade unions cooperate in updating and creating new training regulations and occupational profiles that consider changes in the labour market and the need for new skills, especially in the dual VET system. **Nevertheless**, short-term economic pressures and uncertainty about future skill needs sometimes discourage long-term training investments.

**Developing platforms to improve access to training.** In **Italy**, the *MetApprendo* is a digital training platform to assist workers in the country's engineering and metals sector to secure the individual training they need, under provisions in the sector's collective agreement. Three trade unions – Fiom-Cgil, Fim-Cisl and Uilm – together with the employer organisations Federmeccanica and Assistal, joined forces to launch MetApprendo. It provides tools to enable companies in the sector to measure training needs, develop customised plans and offer online training. Under the national agreement, companies must pay a fee of EUR 1.50 per person to enrol their workers on the platform. In the **United Kingdom**, Union Learn has developed various resources for lifelong learning, such as online courses, tools to identify transferable skills and help services in redundancy situations.

**Support for financing initiatives.** In their joint project on "Skills, Innovation and Training," European social partners advocated for establishing and enhancing training funds, co-managed by social partners, to support continuous learning and workforce adaptability.[55] The example of training funds in the Netherlands provides an example of how the social partners are involved in funding of upskilling and reskilling. Sectoral training funds have voluntarily established by social partners and regulated through collective agreements. Their funding comes from a levy on enterprises in a given sector.[56] In **France**, the *Compte Personnel de Formation* (CPF) enables individuals to accumulate training rights throughout their working lives. In the **Netherlands**, the *Stimulering Arbeidsmarkt Positie budget* (STAP budget) was launched in 2022. **Luxembourg** enables both large employers and SMEs to access funding for vocational training through the *Co-financement de la formation* (Joint funding of training). Companies can receive either a 20% premium on the taxable annual investment in training or a 14% tax reduction on the total vocational training costs for the financial year. In addition, under the **French** *Crédit d'impōt pour dépenses de formation des dirigeants d'entreprise* (Tax credit for training expenses of entrepreneurs), all companies are allowed to deduct the training expenses for managers from the taxable profits.

**Supporting training centres within and outside companies across EU Member States.** In **Portugal**, social partners are directly involved in enhancing the delivery and administration of the training system as providers of knowledge and skills through training centres co-managed by social partners and national PES.

**Promoting upskilling /reskilling directly linked to the twin transition to protect employability.** In their joint project on "Skills, Innovation and Training," European social partners have emphasised the importance of aligning training provisions with the demands of the digital and green transitions.

[54] More details about Union Learn are available at: https://www.unionlearn.org.uk/
[55] Etui, Business Europe, SGI Europe, SMEunited (2021). 'Skills, innovation and the provision of, and access to, Training', Fondazione ADAPT, Bergamo, Italy.
[56] Ibid.

There are also various collective agreements to consider, such as the Agreement on Work life Security, Transition, and Employment Protection in Sweden.[57] The prevalence of CVET provisions tied to collective agreements is often estimated to be below 10% in Europe.[58]

### The importance attached to labour and skill retention

As alluded to above, skill mismatches can be reduced if skilled labour can be retained. Employers are often concerned that their investments in skills will be lost if trained workers leave to work for other companies. Because non-training firms do not bear the expense of training, they are potentially able, other things being equal, to pay higher wages. Employers are, however, often able to deliver training in a way that delivers a combination of skills unique to the organisation providing the training.[59] In this way, the problem non-training companies taking the trained workers of training companies is reduced. The provision of training can also be part of a wider set of human resource measures within organisations that cements the relationship between employers and employees which reduces labour turnover and thereby the need to recruit workers to replace those who have exited.[60]

## 2.5 Conclusions

Taken together, the evidence points to around a third of the EU workforce being mismatched in some way to their current job. Redressing skill mismatches requires actions on many fronts. It requires the education and training systems to be better attuned to provision of skills needed in the labour market. It also necessitates improved governance mechanisms with social partners to identify skill needs in the labour market and to support supply of skills.

Until relatively recently, skills anticipation data relied heavily on occupation and qualification as proxy measures of skill. This has often produced data at a high level of aggregation, which limits its utility when thinking about, for instance, the content of a training course. Such data are of great value in providing information about the likely scale of future skill demands but tend to lack the granularity that education providers need. Surveys such as the European Skills and Jobs Survey and the analysis of OJAs, such as that provided by Skills-OVATE, have immeasurably improved the provision of detailed, granular information on skills demand and skill mismatches, but there is scope to add to this. Social partners are particularly well placed to complement pan-European and national approaches to skills anticipation by providing near real-time insights into emerging skill demands of workers and employers, respectively. Social partners are represented in Member State's skills anticipation systems, albeit to varying degrees (this is addressed in the next chapter). An issue that may warrant further exploration is the extent to which the information social partners have ready access to is integrated into national systems of skills anticipation.

If skill mismatches are to be tackled, there is a need to understand how this information can be effectively used to influence the various actors who comprise the skills system within a particular country, such as the authorities responsible for VET curricula, education and training providers, employment services, etc. Skills mismatches are also dependent upon employers' recruitment and retention practices. Attracting and retaining skilled labour is dependent upon offering competitive terms and conditions of employment. Social partners play an important role here. There is, however, a limit to which this can solve skill mismatches if the supply of skills fails to increase.

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[57] Ulander-Wänman, C. (2022). 'The social partners as actors in new labour law legislation in Sweden'. *European Labour Law Journal*,13(2), 292-304.

[58] Etui, Business Europe, SGI Europe, SMEunited (2021). 'Skills, innovation and the provision of, and access to, Training', Fondazione ADAPT, Bergamo, Italy.

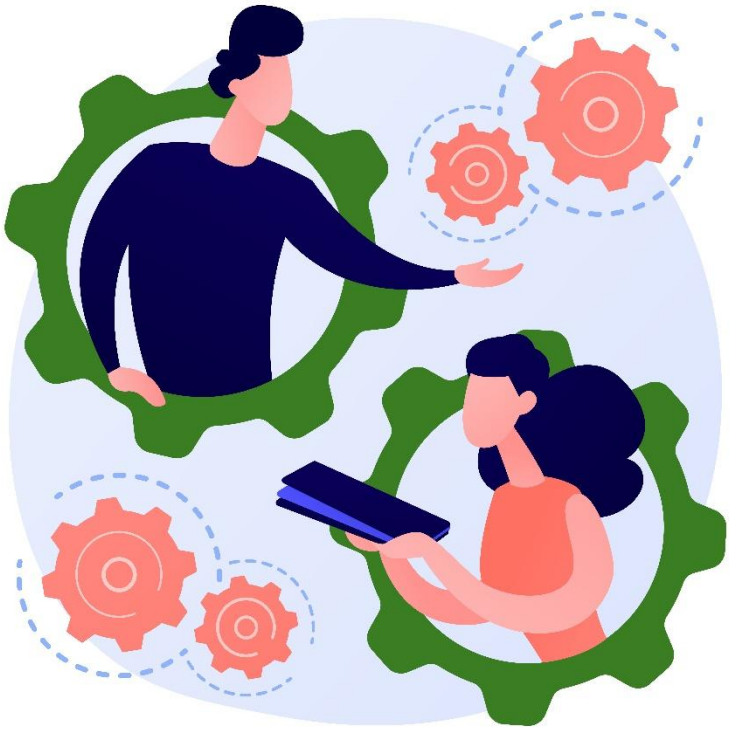
[59] Lazerar, E.P. (2009). 'Firm-Specific Human Capital: A Skill-Weights Approach'. *Journal of Political Economy* Volume 117, Number 5.

[60] Cedefop / Eurofound (2020). *European Company Survey 2019: Workplace practices unlocking employee potential*. Luxembourg: Publications Office.

Otherwise, there is a danger that labour costs will rise to a level that impedes competitiveness. It is also important to consider the complementary role that the targeted recruitment of skilled third country nationals can have in improving labour supply and matching and ensuring quality jobs. In addition to the growing skills supply from IVET, there is also a need to improve that from CVET. The workplace remains the most important source of CVET for those in work. Improving provision within the workplace is seen to be dependent upon a collective effort because employers often deliver it in conjunction with external training providers, especially so where it is externally accredited.

The evidence provided here indicates where social partners have successfully contributed to skills anticipation and improved the matching of skills supply to demand. An important task is to better understand what works well in differing national contexts to identify potentially transferable measures to address skill mismatches across the EU. A conundrum remains. There is an assumption that a competitive EU labour market, where people and skills are well matched, will require people to increasingly move between jobs, sectors, and employers. Given that much CVET is employer-provided, a question remains about how the skill needs of workers will be met when employers may be reluctant to fund training from which they will not necessarily benefit. And what role can social partners play here?

# The role of social partners in shaping the skills system



# 3. The role of social partners in shaping the skills system

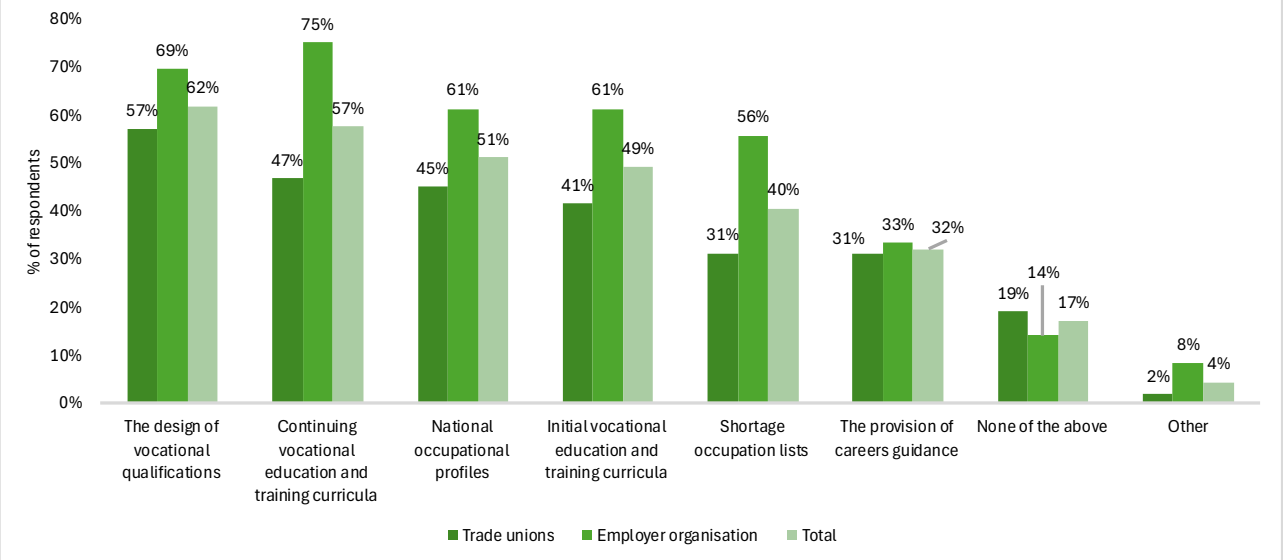
## 3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter was based on a literature review of the scale of skills mismatches across Europe with examples of where social partners had been involved in improving skills matching. In this chapter, and the two that follow, the discussion is brought up to date given that it is based on a review of the evidence provided by participants in the international and validation conferences, respondents to the questionnaire survey, and in-depth discussions with social partners in selected countries, all conducted during 2025 and 2026. Here the particular focus is on the role of social partners in shaping the overall skills system so that it is better able to match the supply of skills to labour market demand. It looks at the involvement of the social partners in system level activities such as having influence over the curricula of vocational programmes, the design of vocational qualifications, the provision of careers guidance, and so on. Information is also provided on the degree of influence social partners are able to exert alongside that which demonstrates the barriers they face in bringing their expertise to bear.

## 3.2 Social partners' involvement in the skills system

The areas where social partners report the highest level of involvement in the skill system are design of vocational qualification, reported by two third of respondents (62% of respondents), the design, development or updating of continuing vocational education and training (CVET) curricula, reported by 57%, and of initial vocational education and training curricula (IVET), indicated by 49% (see Figure 3.1). Slightly over a half (51%) report being involved in the design, development or updating of national occupational profiles, followed by 40% involved in the construction of shortage occupation lists. Finally, one third of respondents (32%) engage in the provision of careers guidance, and 4% are involved in other activities such as direct participation in policymaking and research activities on skill needs. Overall, 17% of respondents said they are not involved at all in shaping skills systems.

**Figure 3.1: Areas of skill systems where social partners reported engagement**




Source: Social Partners' Skills Shortages and Gaps Survey

Figure 3.1 also compares the responses of trade unions and employer organisations regarding their involvement in shaping the skills system. Employer organisations report higher overall levels of engagement. The majority of employer organisations are active in developing CVET and VET curricula, and the design of vocational qualifications. Trade unions, in comparison, appear to be more focused on the design of vocational qualifications, CVET curricula, and national occupational profiles.

Case study interview evidence illustrates how social partner involvement translates into concrete influence in highly institutionalised systems (see Box 3.1).

**Box 3.1: Germany: social partners as co-architects of the vocational training system**

The German case illustrates a highly institutionalised model in which social partners have direct and formal influence over the skills system. Employer organisations and trade unions are legally embedded in the governance of vocational education and training, notably through their joint role in developing and revising training regulations and occupational profiles within the framework coordinated by the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB). Interviewees described this as a consensus-based process in which social partners shape the content, duration and assessment requirements of apprenticeships in response to technological and organisational change at company level. This institutionalised co-decision gives social partners strong leverage over the relevance and labour-market value of qualifications.

Recruitment challenges are addressed upstream through structured cooperation between schools and enterprises. Initiatives such as the *Schulewirtschaft* network, managed by the **Confederation of German Employers' Associations (BDA)** and Institut der deutschen Wirtschaft Köln JUNIOR gGmbH , aim to improve career orientation, expose young people to workplaces at an early stage and strengthen transitions into apprenticeships.

The German interviews suggest that social partner influence is strongest where it combines formal decision-making rights with operational engagement along the education-to-work pipeline.

Source: Germany case study interviews

Croatia provides a contrasting example of a governance where influence is rooted in delegated public authority, not collective bargaining (see Box 3.2).

**Box 3.2: Croatia: employer-led governance through delegated authority**

Croatia represents a model in which employers, for instance, through the Croatian Chamber of Trades and Crafts, play a central role in shaping vocational training via delegated public authority. The Chamber is legally responsible for organising and overseeing apprenticeship training in craft occupations, including participation in enrolment planning based on labour-market needs. This gives employers a decisive role in aligning training provision with demand, even in a context where collective bargaining coverage is more limited than in some other Member States.

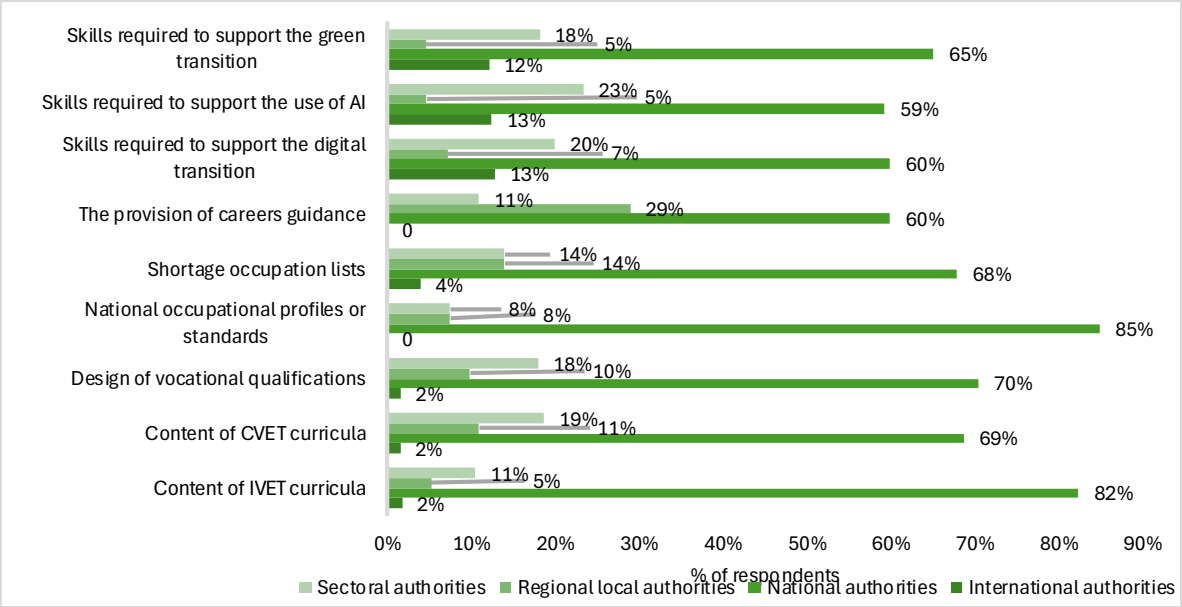
Beyond initial training, the Chamber administers master craftsperson and competence examinations, which function as recognised adult qualification routes. These exams support progression from skilled worker to independent craftsperson and provide an incentive for continuing skills development within small enterprises.

Source: Croatia case study interviews

## 3.3 Social partners' engagement with international, national, regional/local and sectoral authorities

In shaping various aspects of the skills system social partners engage with various institutions, primarily national authorities, across all policy areas. They engage with sectoral authorities, regional/local authorities, and international ones to a lesser degree (see Figure 3.2). Those involved in the shaping skills to support the digital transition and the use of AI, report relatively high levels of engagement with sectoral authorities as well as with international ones. A relatively high level of engagement with regional local authorities is observed among those respondents working on the provision of career guidance. There is not much difference in the extent to which employer organisations and trade unions engage with each type of authority.

**Figure 3.2: Respondents' engagement with different institutions by policy area**

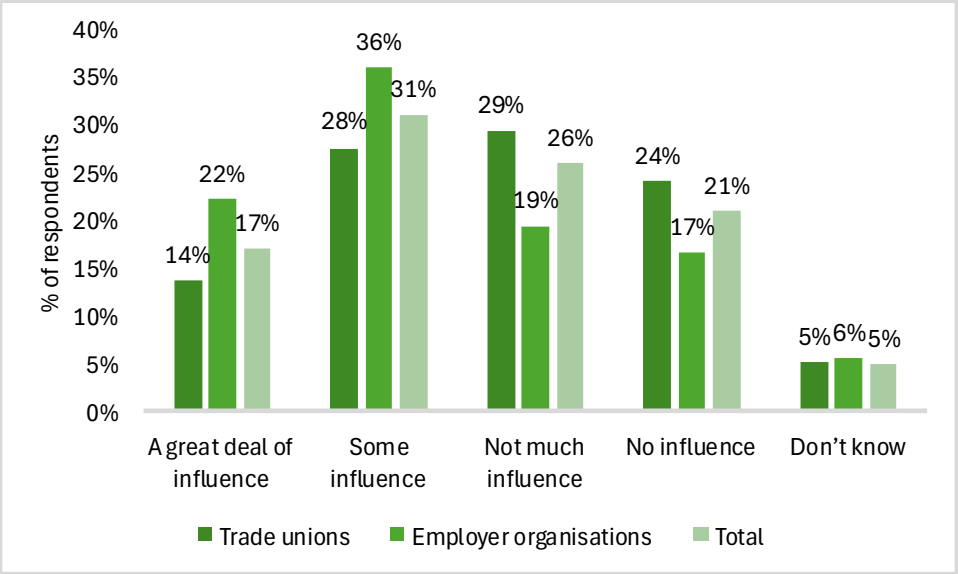



Source: Social Partners' Skills Shortages and Gaps Survey

## 3.4 Social partner influence over the skills system

Respondents were asked how they perceive their organisation's influence over different areas of the system. Views about social partners' influence over the **content of IVET curricula** revealed that 48% have either a great deal or some influence, and 47% s not much or no influence (see Figure 3.3). Employer organisations reported a higher level of influence than trade unions. Overall, 58% of employer organisations reported either a great deal or some influence over IVET curricula compared with 48% of trade unions. Slightly more employer organisations (22%) said they have a great deal of influence than trade unions (17%).

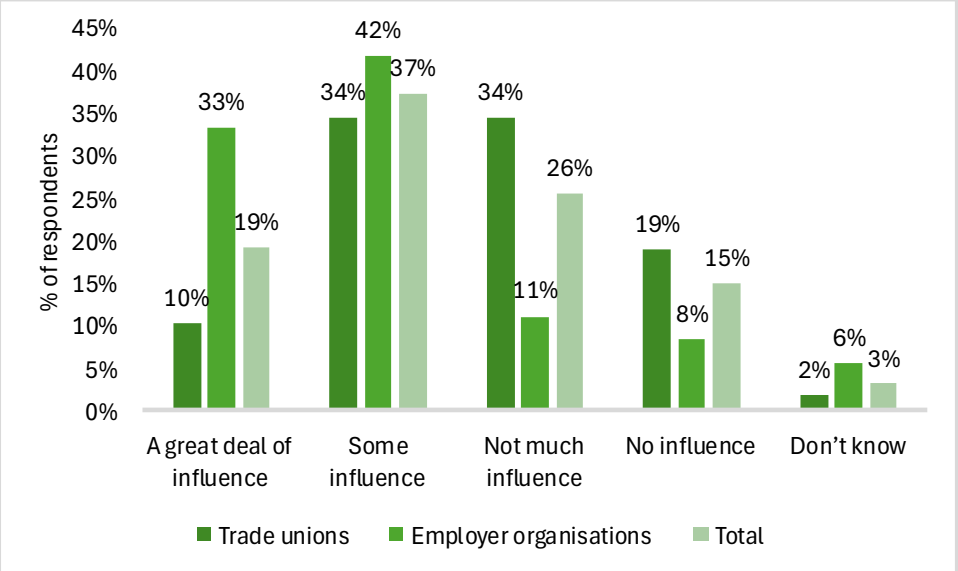
**Figure 3.3: Level of social partner influence over IVET curricula by type of organisation**




Source: Social Partners' Skills Shortages and Gaps Survey

Overall, a majority of respondents (56%) report **influence over the content of CVET curricula**: 19% a great deal of influence and 37% some influence (see Figure 3.4). Overall, three quarters of employer organisations report having at least some influence (33% a great deal of influence and 42% some influence). This compares with 44% of trade unions reporting influence (10% a great deal of influence and 34% some influence). Overall, 53% of trade unions report either not much or no influence over the content of CVET curricula compared with 19% of employer organisations.

**Figure 3.4: Level of social partner influence over CVET curricula by type of organisation**

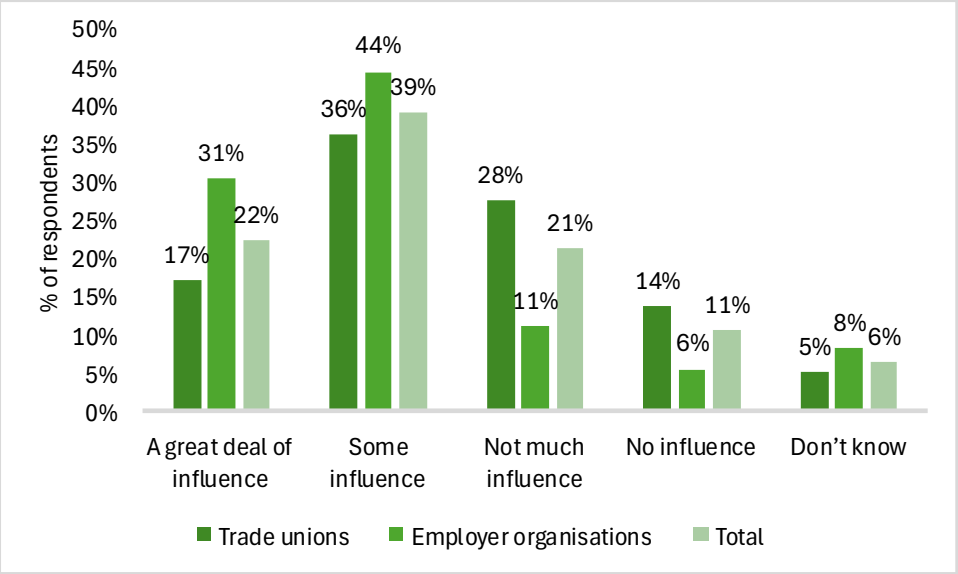



Source: Social Partner's Skills Shortages and Gaps Survey

Respondents were asked about their influence over the **design of vocational qualifications** (see Figure 3.5)**.** The results are similar to those reported in relation to influence over IVET and CVET curricula. Overall, 61% of respondents said they have a great deal or some influence. Employer organisations report having more influence than trade unions with three quarters (75%) reporting a great deal or some influence (31% a great deal of influence and 44% some influence). In contrast, 53% of trade unions report at least some influence (17% a great deal of

influence and 36% some influence). As reported in relation to IVET and CVET, the results highlight the relatively higher level of influence reported by employer organisations.

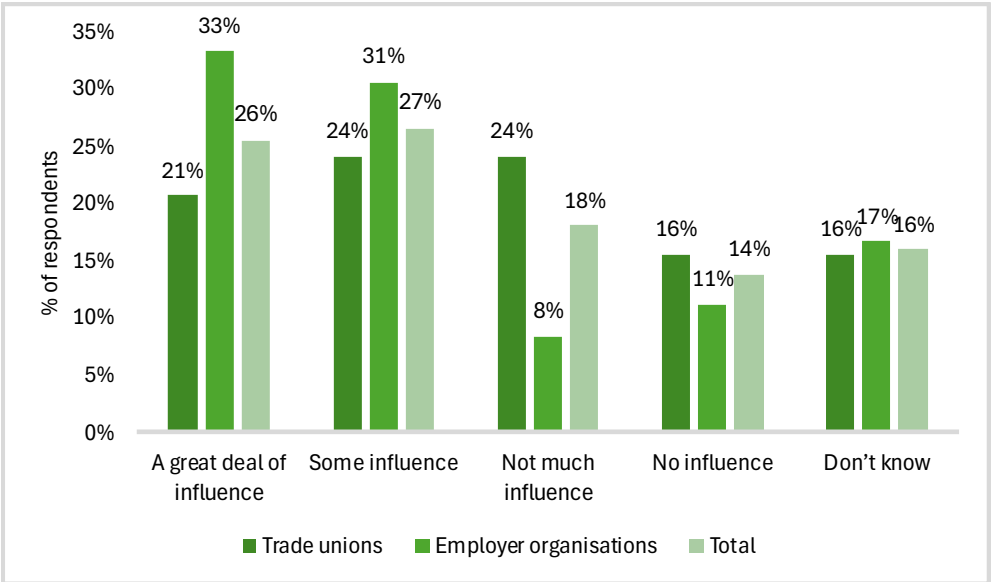
**Figure 3.5: Level of social partner influence over the design of vocational qualifications by type of organisation**




Source: Social Partner's Skills Shortages and Gaps Survey

National occupational profiles or standards, in general, define the skills required to be competent in a particular job or occupation. They can be used, amongst other things, to develop job descriptions, vocational training programmes and their assessment. In total, 53% of respondents report having at least some influence over **national occupational profiles and standards** (26% a great deal of influence and 27% some influence) (see Figure 3.6). This compares with 32% who report either not much or no influence (14% not much and 16% no influence). In general, employer organisations report more influence with nearly two thirds (64%) saying that they have influence (33% a great deal and 31% some influence). In contrast, 45% of trade unions report at least some influence (21% a great deal of influence and 24% some influence).

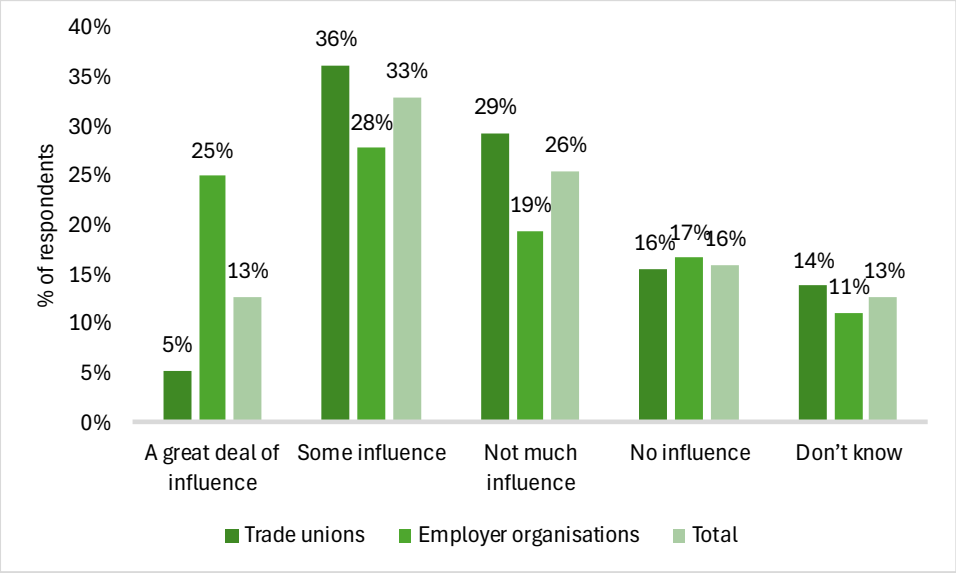
**Figure: 3.6: Level of social partner influence over national occupational profiles or standards by type of organisation**



Source: Social Partner's Skills Shortages and Gaps Survey

Shortage occupation lists identify those occupations or jobs where the supply of labour or skills outstrips supply. They can be used to fulfil a range of needs such as identifying where labour supply needs to be stimulated through, for example, the provision of training. Compared with their influence over VET curricula and occupational standards, social partners report lower levels of influence over **shortage occupation lists** with 38% reporting a degree of influence (9% a great deal and 29% some influence) (see Figure 3.7). Employer organisations and trade unions report similar levels of influence with 38% of employer organisations reporting influence compared with 37% of trade unions, except that employer organisations are slightly more likely to report a great deal of influence (11%) than trade unions (7%). Overall, 42% of respondents say they have not much or no influence (29% not much influence and 13% no influence) with little difference between employer organisations and trade unions.

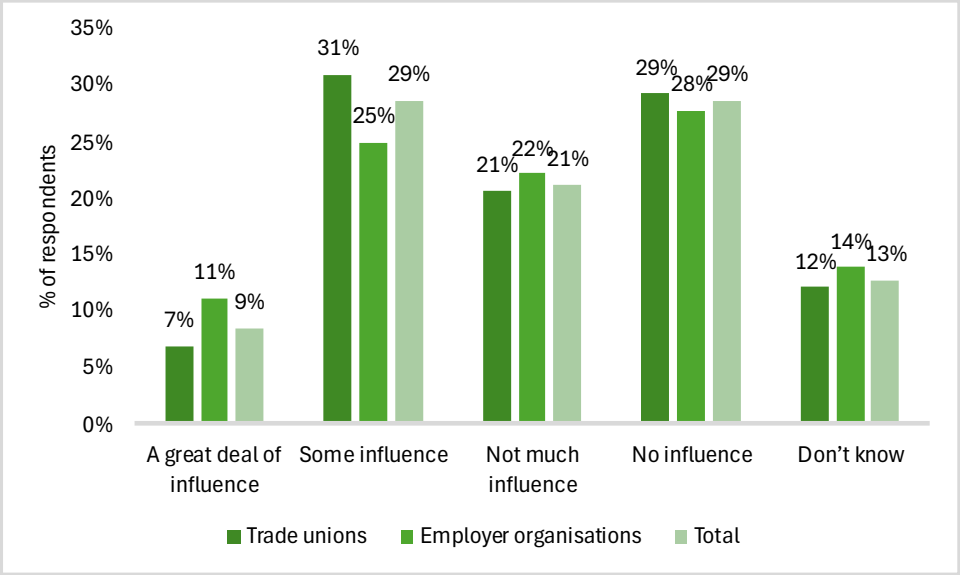
**Figure 3.7: Level of social partner influence over shortage occupation lists by type of organisation**




Source: Social Partners' Skills Shortages and Gaps Survey

Career guidance can be defined with reference to the provision of services or supports which assist individuals make informed decisions about their career options, paths, and development and the associated education and training that will provide the skills required to enter and progress in their chosen career. Overall, 46% of social partners reported influence over the **provision of careers guidance** (13% a good deal of influence and 33% some influence) (see Figure 3.8). Employer organisations reported a slightly higher degree of influence compared with trade unions. Just over half of employer organisations reported having influence over the provision of career guidance (25% a good deal of influence and 28% some influence). In contrast, 41% of trade unions reported influence (5% a good deal of influence and 36% some influence).

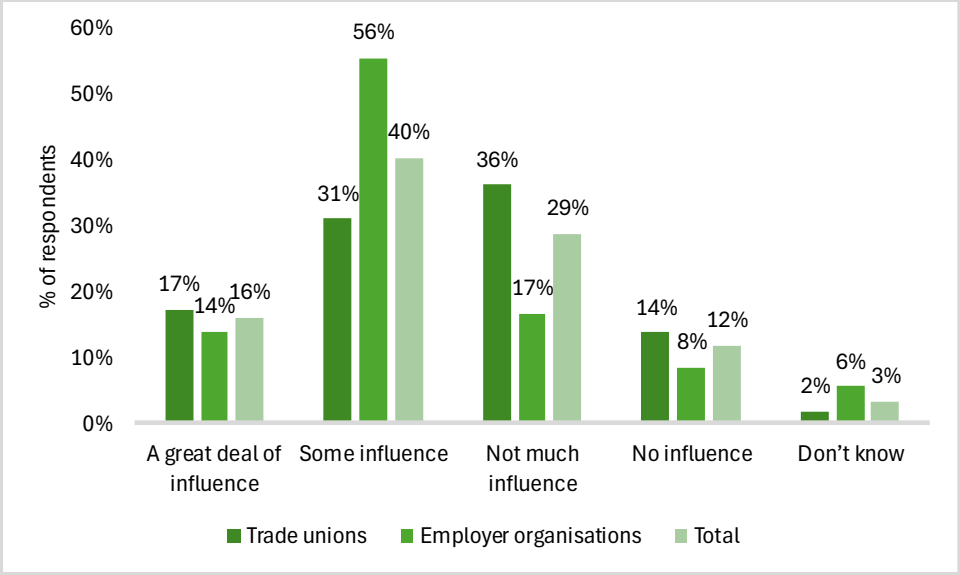
**Figure 3.8: Level of social partner influence over provision of career guidance by type of organisation**




Source: Social Partners' Skills Shortages and Gaps Survey

The digital transition, alongside the green one, has the potential to transform the demand for skills over the medium-term. The digital transition comprises the increasing integration of digital technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), in the production of goods and services. Just over a half of social partners (56%) reported influence in relation to **skills development related to the digital transition** (16% a good deal of influence and 40% some influence) (see Figure 3.9). Employer organisations are slightly more likely to report influence: 47% said they had influence (11% a good deal and 36% some influence) compared with 44% of trade unions (16% a good deal and 28% some influence).

**Figure 3.9: Level of perceived influence on skills required to support the digital transition by type of organisation**

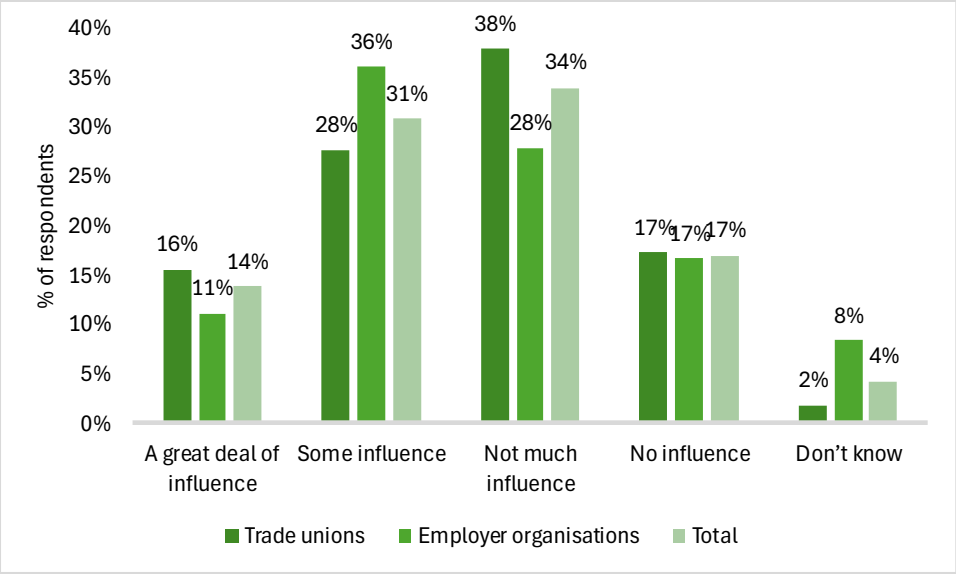



Source: Social Partners' Skills Shortages and Gaps Survey

AI is a particular form of technological change whereby computer systems perform tasks previously considered the preserve of humans, such as learning and reasoning. To date the impact of AI on jobs points towards workers

losing some skills but gaining others as revealed in Cedefop's AI Skills Survey (2025). But there remains uncertainty about the future impact of AI on jobs and skills given the pace at which AI is developing. Overall, 45% of social partners say that they have influence over the provision of **skills development to support the use of AI.** They tended to report some influence (31% of respondents) rather than a great deal of influence (14%) (see Figure 3.10). Employer organisations are slightly more likely to report that they have influence compared with trade unions, but the difference is modest (47% versus 44%).

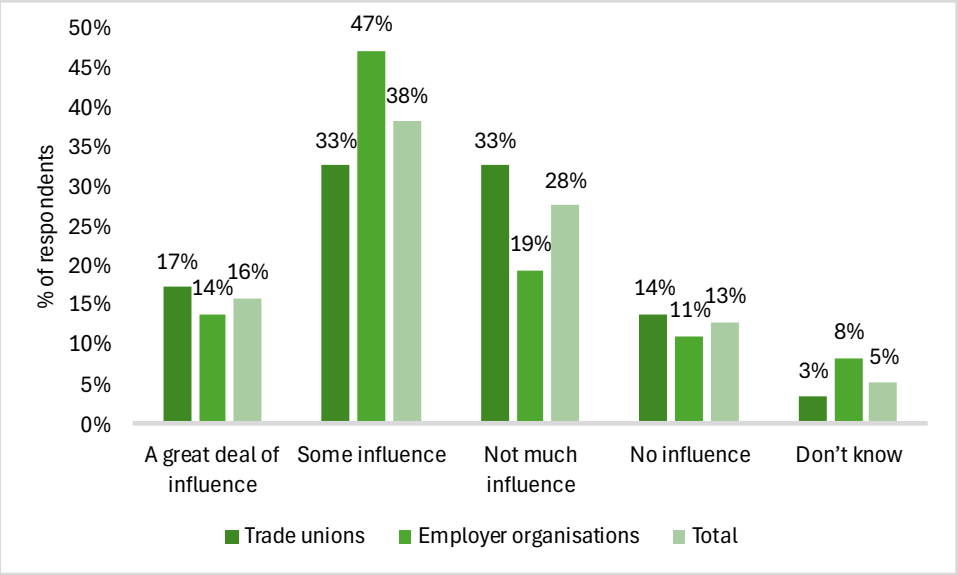
**Figure 3.10: Level of social partner influence over skills required to support the use of AI by type of organisation**




Source: Social Partner's Skills Shortages and Gaps Survey

The green transition refers to the process of change which will see the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services placed on a more sustainable footing with reference to, amongst other things, energy and resource efficiency and reducing carbon emissions. The green transition is seen to have an impact on the tasks undertaken across almost all jobs. Over half of respondents (54%) say that they have influence over the provision of **skills to support the green transition** (16% a good deal of influence and 38% some influence). Employer organisations were more likely to report having a degree of influence: 61% reporting some or a great deal of influence compared with 50% of trade unions (see Figure 3.11).

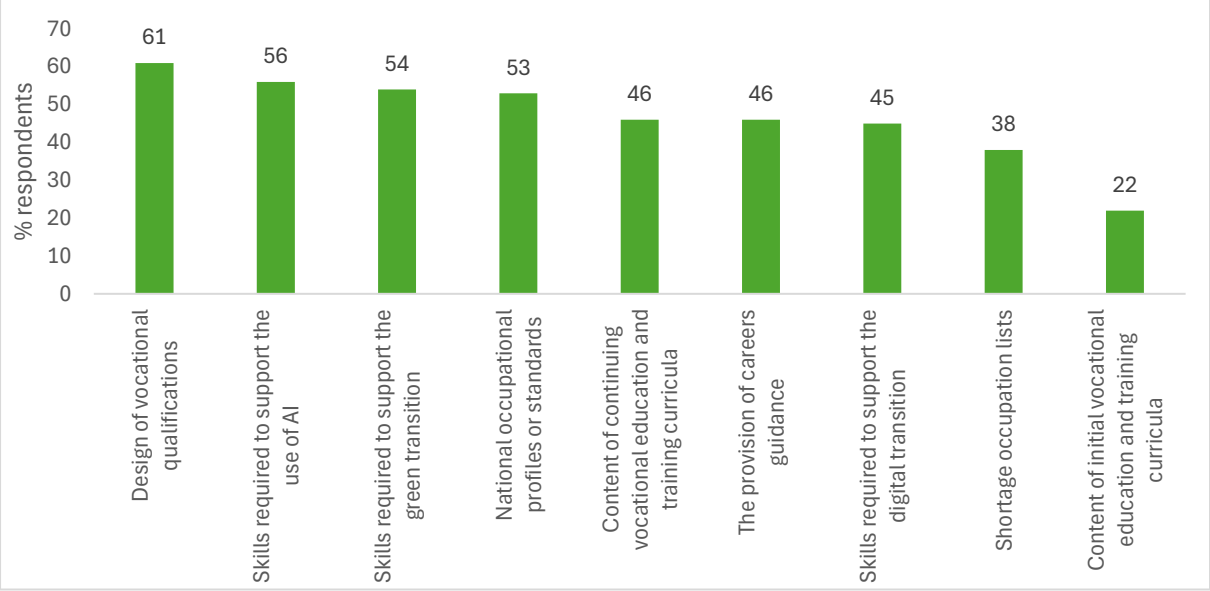
**Figure 3.11: Level of social partner influence over skills to support the green transition by type of organisation**




Source: Social Partners' Skills Shortages and Gaps Survey

By way of summary, Figure 3.12 shows the extent of social partners' influence over various parts of the skills system across Europe. It shows that, for the most part, around half of social partners report influence over the skills system. This drops to around a fifth in relation to influence over the content of IVET curricula, but rises to just under two-thirds when considering the design of vocational qualifications, by which is meant the extent to which they cover various parts of the economy, the level at which they are offered, and how they are delivered, as opposed to their content.

**Figure 3.12: Social partners' influence of various parts of the skills system**




Source: Social Partners' Skills Shortages and Gaps Survey

In systems with strong formal influence, interviews show that social partners can also mobilise flexible, targeted responses to emerging skills needs (see Boxes 3.3 and 3.4).

**Box 3.3: Austria: institutionalised co-governance and labour market relevance**

Austria illustrates a highly structured system in which social partner influence over skills development is both institutionalised and adaptable. Employer chambers administer apprenticeship training on the basis of delegated public authority, while trade unions and the Chamber of Labour are formally involved in negotiating occupational profiles and training regulations. Interviewees emphasised that this shared governance ensures stable standards and high labour-market relevance of qualifications across sectors.

Source: Austria case study interviews

**Box 3.4: Estonia: consultative involvement with uneven labour-market impact**

The Estonian case highlights a more consultative form of social partner involvement in skills governance. Trade unions and employer organisations are formally represented in bodies such as the Qualifications Authority and participate in the development and revision of occupational standards. However, interviewees stressed that employer use and recognition of qualifications remain uneven, which limits the practical impact of these standards on recruitment and career progression. Where social partner engagement was perceived as more tangible was within the governance of the Unemployment Insurance Fund, whose supervisory board includes social partner representatives. Here, unions reported having a clearer voice in shaping access to training and upskilling opportunities for unemployed and vulnerable workers. The Estonian interviews suggest that social partner influence depends not only on institutional presence, but also on the extent to which employers actively value and use the outcomes of jointly developed qualifications.

Source: Estonia case study interviews

In systems where social partners do not have direct regulatory or co-decisional authority, influence over the skills system is often exercised through consultation, bilateral institutions and project-based reform initiatives, as illustrated by the Italian case (see Box 3.5).

**Box 3.5: Italy: Shaping skills policy through consultation, bilateral bodies and recovery-driven reform**

The Italian case illustrates a model in which social partners influence the skills system primarily through structured consultation, bilateral institutions and nationally coordinated initiatives. Social partners do not have legislative powers, but they are formally involved in labour-market and skills policymaking through consultations with government and Parliament, participation in concertation forums, and membership of advisory bodies such as the National Council for Economy and Labour. These channels allow them to provide opinions, technical input and proposed amendments on reforms related to employment, training and social protection.

Social partner engagement is strongest in CVET and adult skills policies. This reflects both their close links with workers and employers and the fact that education is constitutionally assigned to regional governments, which limits their role in initial education and IVET at national level. A central lever of influence is the governance of Interprofessional Funds, through which social partners help identify skills needs, define training priorities and oversee large-scale training provision for employed workers.

In recent years, social partners have become more actively involved in skills matching and transitions in response to the digital and green transitions. A key driver has been the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, which includes a dedicated mission on skills and explicitly calls for stronger social partner involvement. Within this framework, social partners signed a national Pact for Skills and contributed to the design of training pathways and competence recognition processes, supported by capacity-building activities and exchanges with other EU countries.

Source: Italy case study interviews

The next section addresses barriers which stand in the way of social partners having more influence – if that is sought – over various parts of the skills system.

## 3.5 Barriers to influencing skill policies

When asked their opinion about the barriers to their organisations exerting influence over skills policy, most respondents refer to problems related to the policy making process. More than a half of all respondents (54%) indicate that *policymaking is scattered across too many government departments and agencies,* and almost half

(47%) say it is due to the *limited involvement of social partners in skills policy making*. Respondents also mention a *lack of consensus among key stakeholders about the problems to be addressed* (38%), a *lack of importance attached to skills policy and skills matching* (32% of respondents), and that *social partners' expertise is not recognised or valued and they are not in the 'right crowd' which policy makers listen to* (28%). A similar percentage (27%) indicate a *lack of data on skills mismatches*. Only a limited share of respondents (11%) report that *there are no barriers* and 10% indicate others, mainly related to the limited availability of financial and human resources, which forces organisations to focus on what are considered to be more pressing issues (such as wage levels).

Box 3.6 reveals how social partners in Luxembourg have been integrated into the policy making process.

**Box 3.6: Luxembourg: building influence through structured tripartite processes**

The Luxembourg case illustrates how social partner influence can be built incrementally through structured tripartite processes, even where negotiations are time-consuming. Repeated discussions between social partners, chambers and government have led to the establishment of dedicated working groups on skills issues within Luxembourg's tripartite coordination framework (Comité de coordination tripartite). Over time, jointly agreed positions have been reflected in government programmes, followed by the launch of pilot initiatives and the preparation of pre-draft legislation subject to formal consultation.

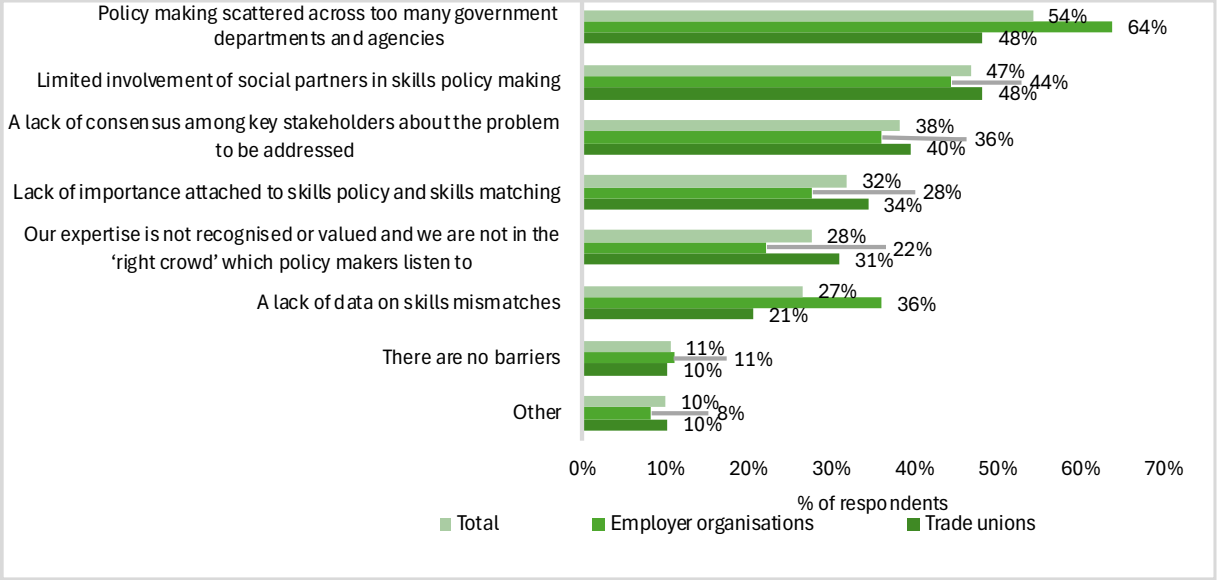
Interview evidence highlights that many of these initiatives are operationalised through established public and chamber-based structures, including the public employment service (ADEM) and chamber-led training bodies such as the House of Training. These platforms support the translation of tripartite agreements into concrete measures related to skills development, training provision and labour market integration.

Source: Luxembourg case study interviews

When analysing the results by type of organisation, employer organisations and trade unions reveal broadly similar results (see Figure 3.13). Some differences, however, stand out. Employer organisations in particular mention a lack of data on skills mismatches and fragmented policy making processes. In contrast, trade unions are more likely to respond that their expertise was not recognised and that they are not in the 'right crowd' to which policy makers listen.

Inputs from the final validation conference confirmed that the most limiting barriers to social partner influence over skill policies is the fragmentation of policy making across different government departments and agencies. For most countries, the level of centralisation of the skill systems governance significantly shapes their involvement. In decentralised countries such as Italy, where education policies fall under the remit of regional governments, influencing policy at national level can be challenging, while engagement tends to be stronger at regional level. In more centralised systems, national-level influence is generally easier to achieve. Additionally, participants at the conference confirmed that an effective role for social partners in such policies depends on institutionalised and meaningful forms of involvement in the policymaking processes from the design phase, rather than engagement at a later stage in a merely consultative capacity.

**Figure 3.13: Barriers limiting social partner influence over skill policy by type of organisation**




Source: Social Partners' Skills Shortages and Gaps Survey

The Romanian case provides an example of a context in which social partners are widely consulted on skills policy, but where institutional fragmentation limits their ability to translate participation into effective influence (see Box 3.7).

**Box 3.7: Romania: formal consultation with limited leverage in skills governance**

The Romanian case illustrates a skills governance system in which social partners are formally embedded across multiple consultation structures, but where their capacity to shape outcomes remains limited. Employer and trade union organisations participate in statutory social dialogue committees within the Ministries of Labour and Education, as well as in the tripartite governance of the Public Employment Service. They are also involved in a range of ad hoc and strategy-related bodies, including those linked to green skills.

Interview evidence suggests that influence varies significantly across institutions. While the Ministry of Labour is perceived as more receptive to labour market input, the Ministry of Education is described as more formalistic, constraining alignment between adult training, occupational standards and labour market needs. A key point of contention concerns sectoral committees, with social partners advocating for their relocation towards labour market governance to strengthen the relevance of upskilling and reskilling policies.

Source: Romania case study interviews

## 3.6 Measures to increase social partner influence on the skills system

Respondents were asked about how the barriers to their further engagement in the skills system might be overcome. This is seen to be dependent upon:

- stronger dialogue and coordination between social partners;
- increased engagement in shaping curricula and skills policies; and
- enhanced research on skills mismatch, forecasting of needed skills and data-based skills decisions.

Respondents emphasise that communication between social partners could be improved through more structured and transparent dialogue, clearer coordination across EU, national, regional, and sectoral levels, and stronger participation of employer organisations that monitor market trends.

A substantial share of respondents report the need for formal consultation mechanisms that systematically include trade unions and employer organisations in all stages of the skills policy cycle, from needs assessment and forecasting to curriculum development. Close cooperation with education and training institutions (including VET

and CVET centres and universities) is viewed as essential. Many respondents, particularly from employer organisations, emphasise the need to improve skills intelligence and forecasting capabilities. They call for more systemic research on skills mismatches and shortages and for policy decisions to be guided by reliable and measurable data. Respondents also emphasise that stronger data systems would increase transparency and objectivity of decision-making process.

The survey results reveal that improving social dialogue and collaboration between social partners is regarded as important in improving skills matching. There is an appetite from the social partners for engagement in every stage of the skills policymaking process from design to implementation, where they can work collaboratively with stakeholders, including ministries, universities and research institutions, education and training providers, enterprises, and PES to improve the supply of skills for which there is a demand.

Around one in ten respondents cite the existence of financial or legal frameworks for supporting CVET that had been negotiated, supervised or implemented by social partners. Common examples include training provision in collective agreements, transition support programmes, and sectoral or interprofessional funds, particularly in Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands and Sweden. Respondents from Italy also note the active use of funds to support training initiatives. Several respondents describe skills anticipation and forecasting frameworks in which social partners play a key role. Examples include the development of regional shortage occupation lists in Belgium, the operation of online platforms mapping employers' soft skills needs in Spain, and participation in forecasting exercises in Belgium, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, and Finland.

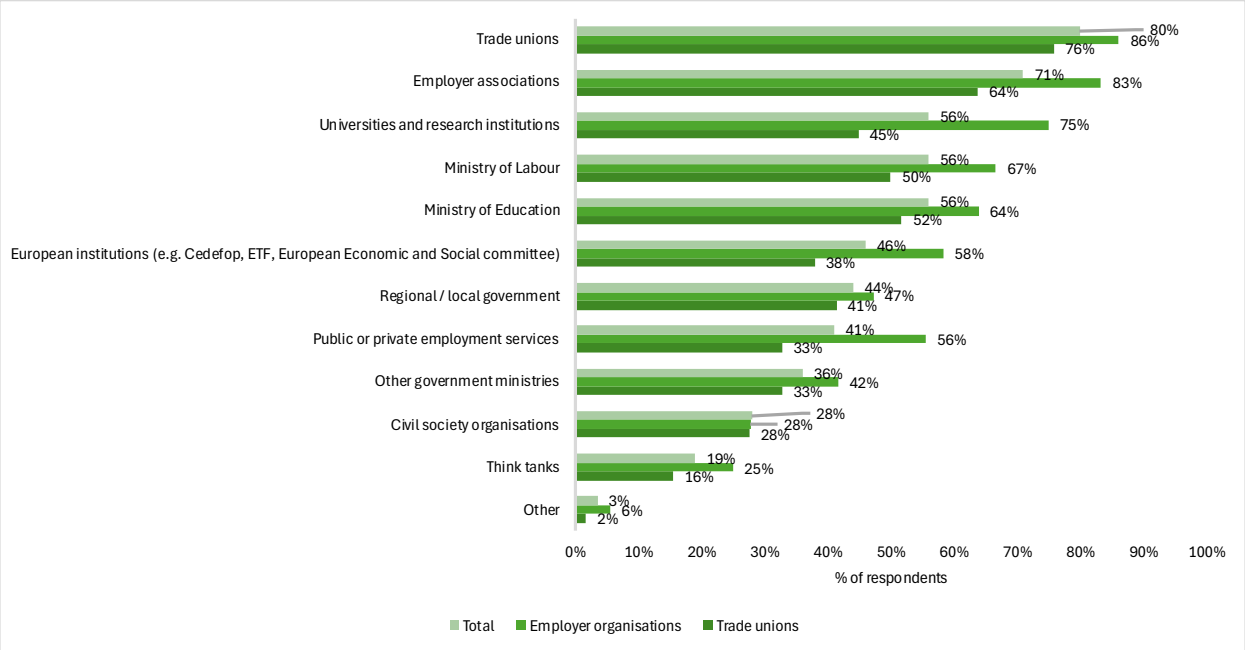
## 3.7 Social partners' collaboration in shaping the skills system

Social partners were asked about their collaboration with other organisations in shaping the skills system. The results show that 91% of social partners collaborate with other organisations on issues to do with skills (see Figure 3.14). Social partner organisations are not working in isolation on skill related issues. With reference to inter-social partner collaboration, the key statistics are summarised below:

- 45% of trade unions collaborate with other trade unions;
- 76% of trade unions collaborate with employer organisations;
- 86% of employer organisations collaborate with other employer organisations;
- 75% of employer organisations collaborate with trade unions.

Respondents indicate collaborating primarily with other trade unions (80%) and other employer organisations (71%), followed by Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour, and universities and research institutions (each mentioned by 56% of respondents). Slightly less than half of all respondents answer that they collaborate with European institutions such as Cedefop, ETF, the European Economic and Social Committee, and a similar percentage (44%) with regional/local governments, followed by public or private employment services (41%), and other government ministries (36%). A smaller share of respondents say that they collaborate with civil society organisations (28%) and think-thanks (21%). Further analysis based on interviews indicates that collaboration with European institutions primarily assigns social partners at national level a consultative role. In this capacity, they provide opinions on reforms and initiatives developed at EU level (such as the Skills Portability Initiative and the Quality Jobs Act). In many cases, they are also involved in the preparation of reports and knowledge-production activities, contributing country-specific information and insights. In addition, social partners report engagement with EU-level trade unions and employer organisations, including ETUC, SMEUnited and CGIE, through which they channel their input to be represented within EU institutions. The distribution of responses by type of social partner does not vary substantially. Employer organisations tend to indicate the highest percentage of collaborations across all types of institutions.

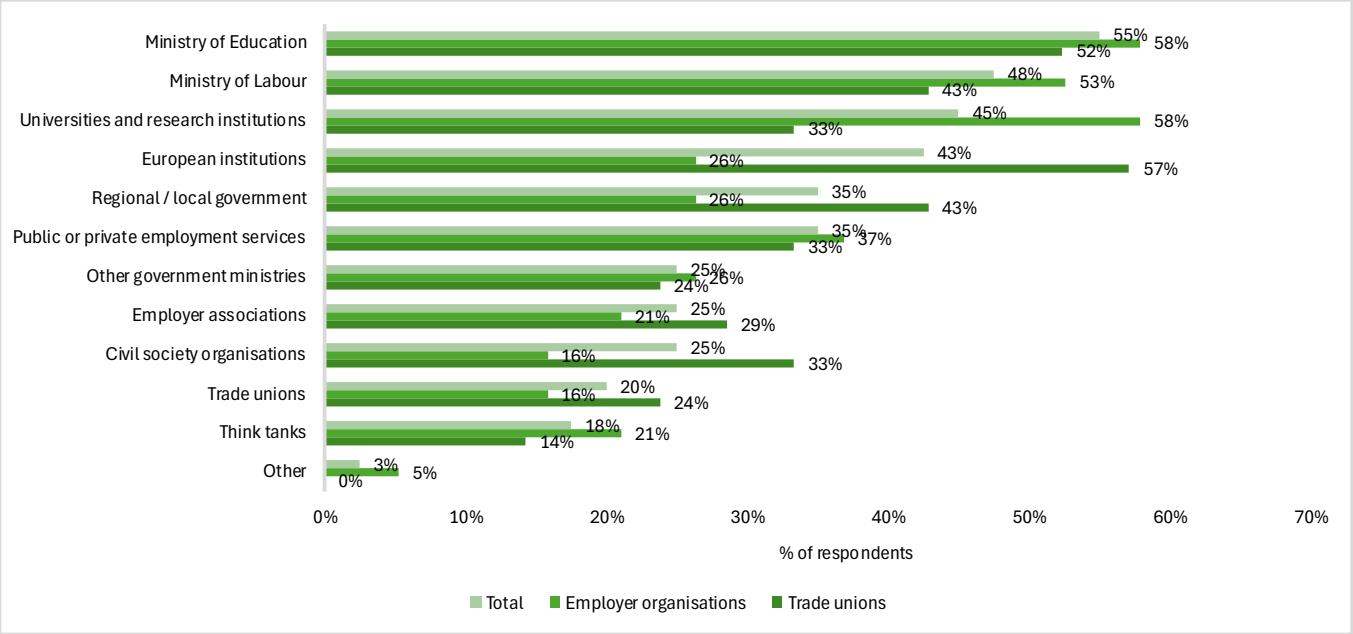
**Figure 3.14: Social partner collaboration with different institutions by type of organisation**




Source: Social Partners' Skills Shortages and Gaps Survey

Despite a relatively high level of engagement with relevant institutions, 43% of all respondents reported that there were organisations with which they would like to collaborate or collaborate more to promote effective skills policy development (see Figure 3.15). Among the organisation with which they would like to collaborate most respondents indicated Ministries of Education (55%), the Ministries of Labour (48%), and universities and research institutions (45%). Furthermore, 43% reported that they wanted to collaborate more with European institutions, public or private employment services, and regional or local government (35% each). Looking at the distribution by type of organisation, employer organisations, compared with trade unions, revealed a higher willingness to engage with institutions such as universities and research institutions, Ministries of Education, and Ministries of Labour.

**Figure 3.15: Organisations with which respondents would want to collaborate by type of organisation**




Source: Social Partners' Skills Shortages and Gaps Survey

In response to the open question 'What prevents you from collaborating or having more collaboration on skill issues?' respondents report most frequently the lack of or scarce and ineffective social dialogue, and the lack of resources (human, time, financial, sound statistical data).

On this matter, participants to the final validation conference stressed the importance of social partner capacity to effectively influence and deliver skill development policies and initiatives. Often, limited human and finance resources hinder the opportunities to further engage in collaboration with other entities. Moreover, they noted how sometimes a lack of consensus on the priorities to be addressed limits their effectiveness in these areas. Strengthening consensus-building and capacity building among social partners was identified as a priority.

## 3.8 The future of social partners' role in shaping skills policies

In response to the question 'Looking to the future, how could your organisation, and the social partners more generally, influence national, regional or local skills policies to improve the matching of skills supply to demand?', respondents mention three key priorities:

- strengthening dialogue and cooperation between social partners;
- expanding the collection, analysis and use of data on skill needs and labour market trends; and
- integration of training and skills matching measures into collective bargaining and legal frameworks.

Over half of the respondents highlight the need to reinforce cooperation between social partners, emphasising that effective dialogue is key for the coherent design and implementation of skills policies. They emphasise the importance of systemic consultation with members and stakeholders in deciding education reforms, designing curricula and occupational standards. Respondents view the role of social partners as central in providing labour market insights and research that can inform policy decisions and ensure training offers are aligned with emerging skill needs.

Beyond national level engagement, trade union representatives mention the need for closer cooperation with companies in shaping workplace training and lifelong learning strategies. One example provided by social partners was IG Metall's 'Training Mentors' initiative, where trained union or works council representatives support

colleagues in identifying skill gaps, accessing training opportunities, and building confidence in their professional development. This workplace-based model was described as particularly effective for workers with limited formal education. Respondents suggested that similar initiatives could be scaled up across Europe through dedicated funding, integrated into national and regional skills strategies, with formal recognition of union-led mentoring as a key component of inclusive workforce development. To a lesser extent, trade unions also highlighted the importance of measurable and reliable data to guide policymakers towards the most relevant skills and to demonstrate the social and economic benefits of well-targeted skills policies.

Among employer organisations, around half stress the need to strengthen cooperation between governments, education providers, PES, companies, and workers to develop concrete and viable training strategies. One example provided by employer organisations was APB's banking training institute (*Instituto de Formação Bancaria* 'IFB') that provides training programmes to its member organisations and other financial service companies. This type of arrangement has the potential to work in other sectors and countries and work in collaboration with other organisations such as, for example, universities. They have the potential to run pilot projects to improve skills supply. A second major theme concerns the expansion of statistical data collection, research on skill needs, and the improvement of skills anticipation systems. Employer organisations were also keen to improve data gathering and share high-quality labour market intelligence and analytical evidence with policymakers, training providers, and education institutions. Improving information about the returns to investments in training and how these benefit employers is also mentioned as an area for further development.

## 3.9 Conclusions

The survey and the insights gathered at the conferences provides insights into the role of the social partners in addressing skills mismatches in Europe. It reveals that both employer organisations and trade unions are involved in a wide range of activities designed to both improve the supply of skills and ensure that they are matched to demand. In general, the social partners report that they have an influential role in these areas. It is also apparent that the social partners would like to do more but face a number of constraints in doing so, not least because of limited resources and the need to prioritise where they should devote their available time and effort. Many social partners, however, are seen to be involved in the design and/or delivery of innovative skills supply / skills matching programmes: form data collection and analysis to the delivery of training. There is strong support from employer organisations and trade unions to work collaboratively together in tackling skill mismatches across Europe.. Where social partners report a relatively low level of engagement and influence, they say it is a result of under-developed systems of social dialogue where there are few mechanisms to allow them to engage in skills policy making. It was also said there is sometimes a failure to recognise their expertise in relation to skills policy. A relatively low level of engagement in the skill system also resulted from policy making being scattered across many government departments and agencies thereby stretching resources.

# The role of the social partners in skills matching and recruitment

# 4. The role of the social partners in skills matching and recruitment

## 4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented findings about social partner engagement with, and influence on, the overall skills system of a country. Here, the focus is on understanding the role of social partners in skills matching and recruitment. In other words, how social partners are involved in the recruitment process, their engagement with public employment services, and the recruitment of young people making the transition from education to work.

Participants in the international conference noted that enterprises across Europe faced a variety of barriers in adopting more effective recruitment practices. These were not always rooted in the supply of skills. Structural issues such as demographic decline, ageing populations, and labour market segmentation contributed to the challenge. In some sectors, including construction, healthcare, and agriculture, the problem was said to be the relative attractiveness of employment. Housing affordability was often mentioned as an indirect, but significant cause of recruitment problems. Other obstacles to effective recruitment were said to include complex administrative procedures for hiring third-country nationals, and over-reliance on automated recruitment processes (e.g. AI-driven systems sometimes overlook non-standard qualifications). Participants in the conference underlined the importance of fair and transparent recruitment processes, especially where AI tools are used. The availability of skills is, nevertheless, a source of recruitment difficulties. As will be revealed below, the social partners are involved in activities designed to reduce recruitment difficulties.

## 4.2 Social partners' role in skills matching and recruitment

Out of 94 respondents, 87% report providing advice and guidance to their members on several practices related to skills matching and recruitment (see Table 4.1). These are mostly related to *working in partnership in the field of education and training institutions* (54%) and *providing advice and guidance on how to improve job attractiveness and working conditions to attract new recruits* (50%) and *recognition of qualifications and on recruitment practices* (37%), as well as *working in partnership with public and private employment services* (32%). Around one-third indicate, respectively, *working with local or national employment agencies to improve recruitment* (33%) and providing advice and guidance on *identifying potential sources of skilled labour* (29%), followed by 24% of respondents indicating, respectively, *providing guidance on the use of apprenticeships to recruit workers* and on *training new recruits*. Moreover, slightly under one-quarter (22%) indicate providing advice and guidance on *recruiting migrant workers* with activities such as assisting with recognition of qualifications or signposting to language training services. Finally, 5% indicate other practices, such as offering support to the unemployed and to employees in the fields of labour relations, social insurance legislation, employment policies, education and training with a view to their integration/reintegration and promotion into the labour market, facilitating the exchange of information and relatively good practices among members and across Member States.

The distribution by type of social partner reveals that employer organisations appear more active in providing guidance on the use of adult apprenticeships to recruit workers, in providing support to identify potential sources of skilled labour and in working with local or national employment agencies to improve recruitment. That said, overall, there is not much difference between the responses of trade unions and employer organisations.

**Table 4.1: Recruitment and skills matching policies by type of organisation**

| | Total | Trade Unions | Employer Organisations |
|---|---|---|---|
| Partnership working with education and training institutions | 54% | 50% | 61% |
| How to improve job attractiveness and working conditions to attract new recruits | 50% | 52% | 47% |
| Recognition of qualifications | 37% | 38% | 36% |
| Recruitment practices | 37% | 36% | 39% |
| Partnership working with public and private employment services | 32% | 31% | 33% |
| Identifying potential sources of skilled labour | 29% | 24% | 36% |
| Working with local or national employment agencies to improve recruitment | 33% | 24% | 36% |
| The use of adult apprenticeships to recruit workers | 24% | 17% | 36% |
| Training new recruits | 24% | 22% | 28% |
| Recruiting migrant workers (such as assisting with recognition of qualifications or signposting to language training services) | 22% | 19% | 28% |
| Other | 5% | 7% | 3% |
| **Total (N)** | 94 | 58 | 36 |

Source: Social Partners' Skills Shortages and Gaps Survey

While survey results highlight the wide range of advisory and partnership-based activities through which social partners contribute to skills matching and recruitment, case studies illustrate how these roles are exercised in practice within different institutional contexts. In systems where social partner influence over education and training remains largely consultative, targeted initiatives can emerge that link formal qualification frameworks with concrete recruitment solutions. Box 4.1 provides an example from Greece, showing how social partner involvement in occupational standards has been complemented by employer-led recruitment pilots designed to address acute shortages in technical occupations.

**Box 4.1: Greece: linking occupational standards to employer-led recruitment pilots**

In Greece, social partners have a recognised and relatively consolidated role in shaping occupational profiles and qualification standards at national level. Through their participation in national bodies responsible for qualifications and vocational standards, notably the development of occupational profiles under the framework coordinated by the National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (EOPPEP), social partners contribute to the definition of learning outcomes, skill requirements and certification frameworks that inform VET curricula. This area stands out as one of the more institutionalised channels of social partner involvement within an otherwise predominantly state-centred skills system.

Recruitment challenges in technical occupations are increasingly addressed through small-scale, employer-led training and recruitment pilots. These initiatives typically follow an end-to-end approach, in which employers define skill needs, co-finance short training programmes and recruit directly from the resulting cohorts. Although these practices remain limited in scale and are not yet embedded systemically, they illustrate how employers and social partners can complement formal qualification structures with targeted, practice-oriented responses to acute labour shortages.

Source: Greece case study interviews

Respondents shared a wide range of best practices in the area of skills matching and recruitment. Most respondents mention activities that establish clear recruitment processes and guidelines on improving the quality

of work, sharing best practices and supporting SMEs in implementing them. In terms of facilitating recruitment , social partners work on:

- benchmarking HR practices (reported by employer organisations from France, Finland);
- analysing the results of different practices related to recruitment (reported by employer organisations from Finland and Latvia);
- creating ethical recruitment guidelines (reported by employer organisations and/or trade unions from Belgium (cf. Intersectoral brochure from social partners in the National Labour Council over diversity and equality in recruitment, and Inclusivity in the workplace), and in Finland);
- supporting SMEs in the recruitment process (reported by employer organisations and /or trade unions from Belgium, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Italy).

Social partners report a variety of activities aimed at supporting SMEs in the recruitment process, such as:

- raising awareness among employers about diversity and the use of free public tools for recruitment;
- providing courses on facilitating recruitment and skills matching;
- assisting with recruitment procedures;
- drafting a brochure on facilitating recruitment from the initial vacancy / job description to pre-interview assessment, to interviewing and appointing an applicant;
- providing digital tools and platforms that support SMEs in identifying skills, designing job profiles, and recruiting appropriate candidates.

Furthermore, to improve the quality of work and the attractiveness of employment, social partners report several activities, including:

- supporting SMEs to develop medium and long-term skills improvement plans for their employees;
- direct provision of compulsory and continuous training for professional development;
- enabling the collection and sharing of best employer practices;
- promoting fair recruitment processes and improving well-being in workplace through collective agreements (e.g. by establishing 'right to disconnect' rules in the workplace).

Respondents mention that they provide skills improvement programmes in order to increase the supply of skills. This was mentioned by, for instance, trade unions from **Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Romania, and Slovakia**. Employer organisations from **Germany, Luxembourg, Portugal, and Sweden** also mentioned that they have training centres or programmes. Many organisations described having their own training and career counselling centres where they provided CVET to those within their sectors, assessed the skills of employees, identified skill gaps and explored training opportunities and career paths. Sometimes, the programmes offered are a joint effort of multiple trade unions/employer organisations, and/or with other partners (e.g. public employment services or local training institutions).

Besides training, social partners provide financing opportunities for training and retraining of the workforce. One such programme is the Student finance for transition and retraining, in **Sweden**, which provides finance to assist adults in the labour market to broaden their skills and improve their employability by, for instance, being able to enter a different career path to their current one. It consists of a grant of 80% of their salary, up to a maximum amount, and the availability of a loan to top up their income.

Apprenticeships and similar programmes are promoted by both trade unions and employer organisations. In these programmes, VET schools, employers and students are directly connected and work together to develop the skills of the future worker. The practice is seen as a good way for students to obtain their first jobs. Adult apprenticeship schemes and work-based learning models are also mentioned. The example was provided of the **Austrian** initiative You can do something! run by the Chamber of Labour which offers a tailored and relatively rapid path to completing an apprenticeship for people with several years of professional experience.

Respondents also gave examples of: employers committed to hiring individuals who complete specific training programmes; collective agreements that included provisions for guaranteed post-training employment; minimum training standards; and structured upskilling pathways; and organising meetings between former trainees and trainees.

## 4.3 Future of social partners' influence over recruitment and skills matching practices

In response to the question 'Looking to the future, how could your organisation, and the social partners more generally, increase its influence over workplace recruitment and skills matching?' respondents said the following were important:

- strengthening dialogue and cooperation between social partners;
- increasing awareness campaigns (including those that aimed to promote work in a particular sector, and the importance of good work practices);
- providing more career guidance in relation to both jobs and apprenticeships.

Almost half of respondents say there is still room for strengthening dialogue and cooperation between social partners. Future activities in which social partners will engage include:

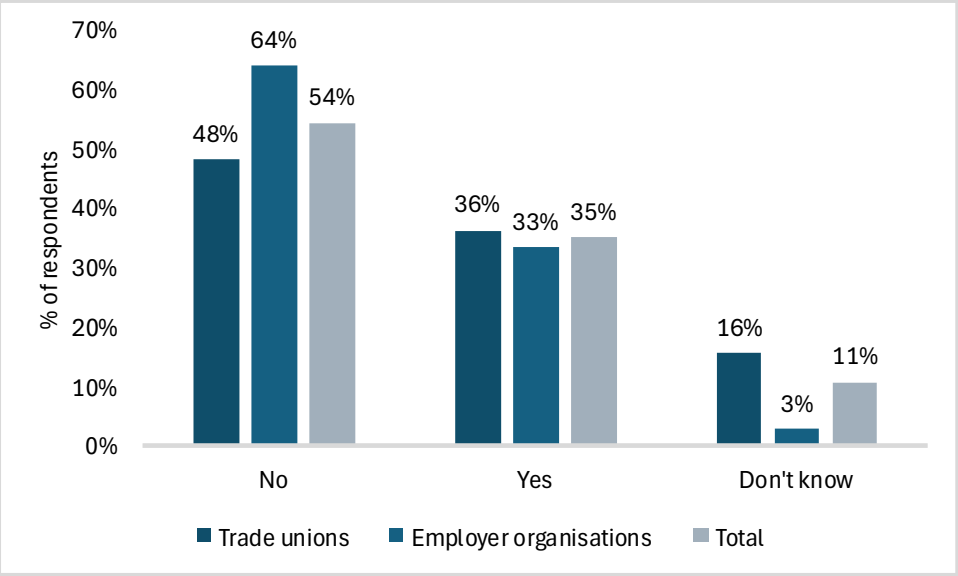
- advocating for clear, merit-based recruitment procedures that recognise both qualifications and experience fairly and reduce mismatches between job requirements and applicant profiles;
- awareness-raising activities for employers, workers and policymakers about how good recruitment and skills matching improve productivity, service quality, and worker satisfaction;
- supporting the design and promotion of flexible training programmes tailored to the developing needs of SMEs and workers; and
- advocating for policy frameworks that encourage the adoption of inclusive and forward-looking approaches to recruitment, including the integration of migrant workers.

With a similar coverage among trade unions and employer organisations, a tenth of respondents said their organisation should, in the future, increase their efforts towards career guidance, job and apprenticeships provision and promotion. Trade unions and employer organisations were looking towards strengthening their collaboration with companies, supporting them in promoting their apprenticeships or jobs to VET students or other job seekers. Moreover, to increase the talent pool, trade union respondents suggested the provision of stipends to potentially increase the interest of young adults in vocational training.

## 4.4 Social partners' collaboration with Public Employment Services (PES)

The findings from the survey show that respondents' collaboration with Public Employment Services (PES) to improve recruitment practices is limited, with more than half of them (54%) reporting not having any collaboration in place, and 35% reporting collaboration (see Figure 4.1). The responses from employer organisations and trade unions are more or less the same.

**Figure 4.1: Social partner collaboration with PES by type of organisation**




Source: Social Partners' Skills Shortages and Gaps Survey

Box 4.2 illustrates the Danish approach, where tripartite collaboration between social partners, PES and training providers is embedded in operational delivery mechanisms that link training provision directly to recruitment needs.

**Box 4.2: Denmark: operational tripartism connecting PES, training and employers**

Denmark offers a concrete illustration of how collaboration between social partners and public employment services can be operationalised. Through the Job-VEU initiative, established following a national tripartite agreement, social partners work with job centres and education providers to design job-oriented continuing training pathways aligned with local labour-market needs.

This collaboration is evidenced by collectively agreed competence development funds, jointly governed by employers and trade unions, which finance participation in training and support transitions from unskilled to skilled employment. Interviewees emphasised that the combination of funding instruments and coordinated delivery structures enables rapid and targeted responses to skills shortages.

Source: Denmark case study interviews

In response to the question 'How have you worked or are currently working with PES to support the recruitment of unemployed or economically inactive individuals?', social partners report being part of the PES governing board where they are engaged in the development of labour market policy, education/training programmes, and shaping approaches to recruitment to ensure that labour market programmes support disadvantaged groups such as long-term unemployed persons. Social partners also report being engaged in the recruitment of migrant workers in collaboration with PES. Respondents said that they: (1) were directly involved in integrating migrants in the labour force; (2) conducted seminars or disseminated materials on best practices for the recruitment of migrant workers; and/or (3) share challenges and opportunities in hiring migrant workers. For example, social partners report being engaged in programmes aimed at providing young refugees with apprenticeships or recruiting migrant professional workers in an effort to reduce skill/labour shortages. Some social partners described the challenges faced in implementing various initiatives and the positive outcomes. An example was provided of an initiative which sought to recruit migrant workers into healthcare jobs by providing language training in the workplace and providing support in gaining professional recognition. Other information was also provided by the social partners to assist with the recruitment of migrant workers, such as an example from Germany.

In response to the question on how social partners could strengthen their collaboration with PES to improve recruitment and skills matching, respondents emphasise two priorities:

- strengthening dialogue and cooperation with the PES; and
- enhancing collaboration between enterprises and PES, including through the creation of digital platforms to improve labour market matching.

The majority of respondents identify a need for more structured and consistent cooperation between social partners and PES. Suggested measures include the development of formal protocols of collaboration between PES, trade unions, and employer organisations to ensure continuous and efficient engagement in joint activities. Some respondents note challenges arising from frequent changes of PES representatives which leads to delays and repeated discussions.

Several employer organisations propose organising joint awareness campaigns with PES to inform employers, particularly SMEs, about the availability of human resource management support, including that related to apprenticeship schemes, CVET opportunities, and recruitment practices. Mention is also made of joint campaigns which can target workers, raising awareness about available PES services, training options, and active labour market policies.

Employer organisations from **Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, and Spain** expressed particular interest in collaborating with PES on the design and delivery of training, as well as on data exchange and information sharing. Respondents want stable mechanisms to connect companies, PES, and training centres to facilitate the anticipation of qualification needs and enable real-time adjustments to training provision.

Respondents also propose joint analyses between social partners and PES to identify both emerging skills in demand and those becoming obsolete in the labour market. Such cooperation could support:

- limiting student admissions to fields of study with low labour market demand;
- vocational schools; and
- developing lists of professions essential for local business development.

Respondents further highlight the importance of facilitating cooperation between enterprises and PES through digital platforms that match labour supply and demand. They propose that such platforms be jointly managed by PES and social partners – both trade unions and employer organisations – to ensure transparency, accessibility, and responsiveness to the needs of all users.

## 4.5 Social partners' involvement in recruitment of young people

Regarding their involvement in promoting the recruitment of young people directly from the education system, slightly under half of respondents (46%) report not being involved (see Table 4.2). Those involved in promoting the recruitment of young people from the education system reported focusing mainly on *promoting apprenticeships or similar kinds of workplace-based training* (33%) and *through collective bargaining and agreements* (24%) and *through measures to improve the attractiveness of certain jobs and sectors for young people* (23%). Further, 22% of respondents say they are *providing information direct to workplaces*, 20% indicate promoting the recruitment of young people *through education and training institutions such as vocational schools,* and 13% *through initiatives with PES*. The remaining 7% indicate other activities such as events like career fairs and through collaboration with Second Chance Schools, VET providers, and some Higher Education Institutions.

The analysis by type of organisation reveals significant differences (see Table 4.2). Employer organisations appear to be more involved in providing information direct to enterprises and in promoting the recruitment of young people through education and training institutions. In contrast, trade union respondents focus more on collective bargaining and agreements.

**Table 4.2: Social partners involvement in recruitment of young people directly from the education system by type of organisation**

| Practices | Total | Trade unions | Employer organisations |
|---|---|---|---|
| No, it is not involved in promoting the recruitment of young people directly from the education system | 46% | 53% | 33% |
| Yes, through promoting apprenticeships or similar kinds of workplace-based training | 33% | 22% | 50% |
| Yes, through collective bargaining and agreements | 24% | 29% | 17% |
| Yes, through measures to attract young people to work in certain sectors or jobs | 23% | 16% | 36% |
| Yes, by providing information direct to workplaces | 22% | 14% | 36% |
| Yes, through education and training institutions (such as vocational schools) | 20% | 10% | 36% |
| Yes, through sectoral bodies | 20% | 16% | 28% |
| Yes, through initiatives with public employment services | 13% | 9% | 19% |
| Other | 7% | 10% | 3% |
| ***Total (N)*** | 94 | ***58*** | ***36*** |

Source: Social Partners' Skills Shortages and Gaps Survey

In response to the question 'What kinds of activity has your organisation been involved in to support the transition of young people from school to work?' respondents provided a wide range of good practice examples. The most frequently mentioned are (a) apprenticeship / dual training and (b) mentorship programmes. Many respondents highlight apprenticeship, mentorship, and work-based learning initiatives as effective tools for facilitating the transition of young people from school to work and supporting upskilling of the existing workforce. Some social partners are directly involved in providing and supervising apprenticeships, internships, and work-study programmes. Others support enterprises in creating additional apprenticeship places, assist both apprentices and employers during training, and assist with the organisation of final examinations. Several social partners contribute to matching students with enterprises and promoting dual vocational training.

Respondents also mention a range of complementary transition measures such as career guidance, coaching, job shadowing, and financial support for young people. Trade unions and employer organisations co-organise school visits, interactive workshops, and develop educational materials on career options, workers' rights, and workplace participation. In the financial and manufacturing sectors, several organisations report hosting networking events to develop young people's skills and connect them with industry professionals. Many of the same respondents also describe extensive engagement in upskilling and reskilling activities, ranging from short digital-skills courses to adult apprenticeships and modular training delivered via internal training centres, digital learning platforms, and certified continuous learning programmes jointly managed by employers and trade unions.

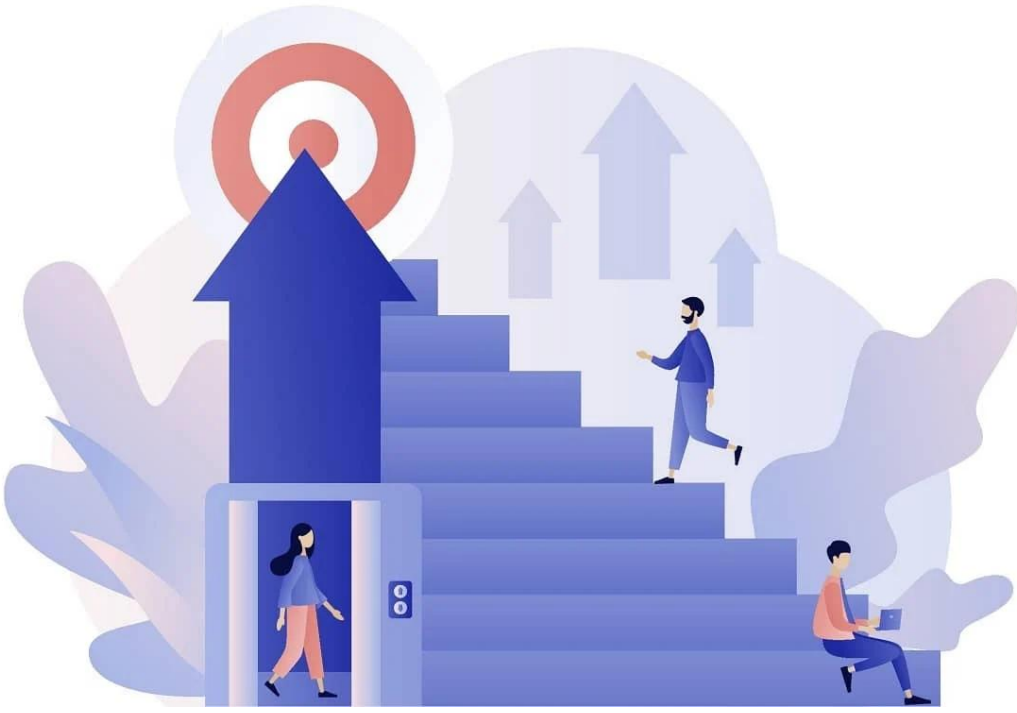
In response to the question 'Looking to the future, how should the role of your organisation, and the social partners more generally, be developed to assist with improving the school to work transition of young people?' respondents consider it important to increase collaboration between employer organisations, trade unions, and the education system to jointly develop curricula and organise and promote internships and apprenticeships. Both trade unions and employer organisations are keen to be involved in informing education and training providers about emerging skill needs given that the staff in these organisations are not always fully up to date on this subject. Respondents explained that these actions will enable young people to choose a career path that provides good employment

opportunities and ease their transition into work. To further reduce the gap between the world of work and the world of education, respondents consider it strategically important to promote work-based learning (work-study programmes and apprenticeships), provide workshop activities, and open schools to the business world by organising meetings with entrepreneurs. Practice-oriented career guidance in all schools in cooperation with employers is also suggested. Several partners suggest introducing courses led by trade unions and/or employer organisations in schools and universities.

## 4.6 Conclusions

Social partners are active in supporting good practice in skills matching and recruitment. They play a role in supporting and establishing clear and transparent recruitment practices, improving practices in relation to skills matching, and improving job attractiveness and working conditions (e.g., with long term skills development plans, work-life balance measures, etc.), all of which are regarded as central to reducing recruitment difficulties. The social partners report lower levels of collaboration and influence in relation to PES and the recruitment of young people directly from the education system. That said, social partners recognise the value of collaborating with PES and seek closer links. Social partners also emphasise the importance of vocational education in assisting with the transition from school to work, especially apprenticeship training, and are particularly keen on developing closer links with education and training institutions to ensure that skill supply is better matched to demand. Social partners feel they are especially well placed to share information with education institutions about emerging skill needs.

# The role of the social partners in transitions and retention: upskilling and reskilling



# 5. The role of the social partners in transitions and retention: upskilling and reskilling

## 5.1 Introduction

The digital and green transitions, and the heightened interest in artificial intelligence following the release of several large language models, have drawn attention to their impact on work processes and the resulting demand for skills. It seems increasingly likely that over a typical individual's lifetime in the labour market, she or he will need to acquire new skills to avoid the risk of their skills becoming obsolescent and the attendant risk of job loss this implies. Both European and national policies emphasise the importance of individuals engaging in ongoing training to avoid these risks occurring. It was apparent from the discussions in the conferences that social partners recognise the importance of upskilling and reskilling and are actively engaged to promote its take-up through a variety of means. It is not simply a question of learner volumes. Social partners are interested in ensuring that provision is of high quality and oriented towards satisfying current and emerging skill demand. Social partners are also concerned with developing the means to encourage small and medium-sized enterprises to engage in upskilling and reskilling their workforces, bearing in mind that they sometimes encounter barriers to funding and releasing employees for training as a consequence of their size. As will be revealed in this chapter, social partners engage in a range of activities related to upskilling and reskilling. If employers are to invest in the skills of their workforce, they will want to be assured that they will be able to retain the skilled personnel in which they have invested. Accordingly, there is also an interest in policies and practices related to skills and labour retention.

## 5.2 Engagement in upskilling and reskilling activities

Table 5.1 shows the types of activities in which social partners are engaged in relation to upskilling and reskilling of those already in employment. The results show that social partners engage in a wide range of activities. Their involvement includes *advising or negotiating collective agreements which include training clauses* (55% of respondents), *giving information on the benefits of providing training to existing workers* (51%) and *designing training programmes and courses* (44%).

The distribution by type of social partner reveals some differences. A relatively higher share of employer organisations, compared with trade unions, are engaged in delivering training to workers, designing training programmes and courses, and advising on the provision of adult apprenticeships. In contrast, trade unions report relatively high levels of engagement in advising or negotiating collective agreements which include training clauses, providing career guidance to workers, and advising on training supply.

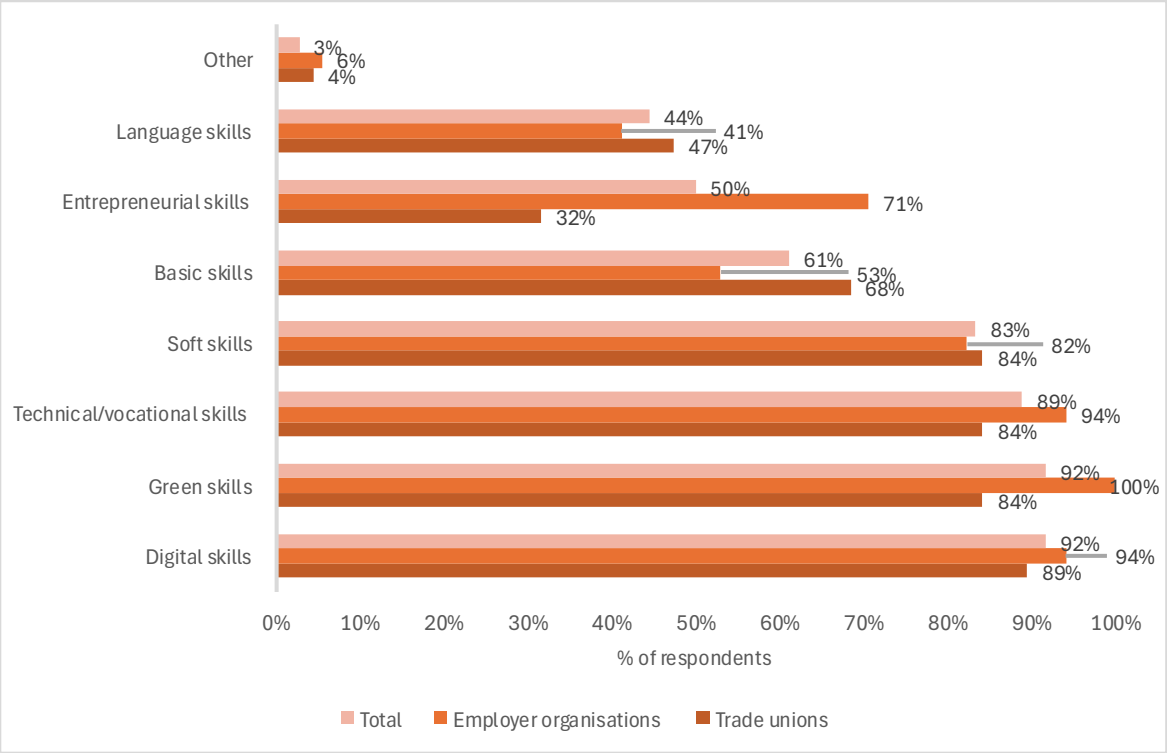
**Table 5.1: Respondents' involvement in upskilling and reskilling of those already in employment**

| Activities | Total | Trade Unions | Employer Organisations |
|---|---|---|---|
| Advising or negotiating collective agreements which include training clauses | 55% | 66% | 39% |
| Providing information on the benefits of providing training to existing workers | 51% | 52% | 50% |
| Designing training programmes and courses | 44% | 33% | 61% |
| Supporting the recognition of prior learning | 40% | 38% | 44% |
| Advising on training supply (i.e. organisations which can provide training) | 40% | 41% | 39% |
| Advising on what skills and competences workers and enterprises will need to acquire | 38% | 33% | 47% |
| Advising enterprises or collaborating with enterprises on how to update the skills of their workers | 37% | 31% | 47% |
| Advising on sources of funding for training | 36% | 33% | 42% |
| Delivering training to workers | 35% | 29% | 44% |
| Advising enterprises or collaborating with enterprises on undertaking skill or training needs analyses | 32% | 28% | 39% |
| Providing career guidance to workers | 28% | 34% | 17% |
| Advising on the provision of adult apprenticeships | 28% | 21% | 39% |
| No, it is not involved in any activity related to upskilling and reskilling of those already in employment | 14% | 16% | 11% |
| Other | 9% | 10% | 6% |
| ***Total (N)*** | 94 | ***58*** | ***36*** |

Source: Social Partners' Skills Shortages and Gaps Survey

Those who report being involved in advising on the skills and competences workers and enterprises need to acquire, were then asked about the particular skills on which they had provided advice (see Figure 5.1). Most say that they have advised on acquiring digital skills (e.g. IT literacy, cybersecurity, digital tools), and green skills (e.g. sustainable practices, energy efficiency). Overall, 92% of social partners advise on digital and green skills respectively. They are also involved in advising on technical or vocational skills related to a specific occupation or sector (89%), and soft skills (e.g. teamwork, problem-solving, adaptability) (83%). Relatively lower shares of respondents, but still substantial, report advising on acquiring basic skills such as literacy, numeracy and communication (61%), entrepreneurial skills (e.g., business planning, innovation) (50%), and language skills (44%). Employer organisations are relatively more likely to report advising on green skills and entrepreneurial skills, while trade unions appear be more engaged in providing advice on basic skills and soft skills.

**Figure 5.1: Skills on which social partners had provided advice**




Source: Social Partners' Skills Shortages and Gaps Survey

The example below illustrates the way in which social partners in the Netherlands have been able to support reskilling through their training funds (see Box 5.1).

**Box 5.1: Netherlands: collective funds and internal academies supporting lifelong employability**

The Netherlands case highlights how social partners contribute to upskilling and reskilling through jointly governed training funds and internal learning infrastructures, particularly in public administration. *The A+O fonds Rijk*, managed bipartitely by trade unions and the state as employer, finances training linked to sustainable employability, digitalisation and career development for civil servants.

Delivery is supported by institutions such as the *Rijksacademie* and *RADIO*, which provide structured training in areas including finance, procurement and digital skills. In parallel, recruitment pressures in ICT-related occupations are addressed through traineeships and alternative entry routes that combine training with employment.

Source: Netherlands case study interviews

## 5.3 Social partners collaboration to improve upskilling and reskilling practices

Social partners were asked about their collaboration with other organisations in improving the provision of upskilling and reskilling to those already in employment. The results show that 91% do so. With specific reference to inter-social partner collaboration, the key statistics are summarised below:

- 74% of trade unions collaborate with other trade unions;
- 47% of trade unions collaborate with employer organisations;
- 75% of employer organisations collaborate with trade unions; and
- 6% of employer organisations collaborate with other employer organisations.

The survey also reveals that social partners collaborate with education and training institutions (57%), national authorities responsible for training (56%), sectoral organisations (44%), as well as regional and local authorities responsible for training (38%) and career guidance organisations (24%). Overall, with the exception of collaborating

with national authorities responsible for training, employer organisations were more likely to report working in collaboration with other organisations on upskilling and reskilling practices (see Figure 5.2).

**Figure 5.2: Social partners' collaboration with other institutions**


Source: Social Partners' Skills Shortages and Gaps Survey

While survey results point to a high level of collaboration between social partners in supporting upskilling and reskilling for those in employment, case studies showe that the form and sustainability of this collaboration vary across institutional contexts. Box 5.2 illustrates this through the experiences of Czechia and Latvia, where engagement in upskilling and reskilling relies largely on project-based initiatives in the absence of strong collective bargaining or stable institutional frameworks.

**Box 5.2: Czechia and Latvia: project-based engagement where collective bargaining is limited**

The Czech and Latvian cases illustrate contexts in which social partner engagement in upskilling and reskilling is more fragmented and often dependent on time-limited projects. In Czechia, social partners participate in tripartite bodies and the National Register of Qualifications, but interviewees noted that sector skills councils lost momentum once EU project funding ended, weakening sustained sectoral input into skills policy.

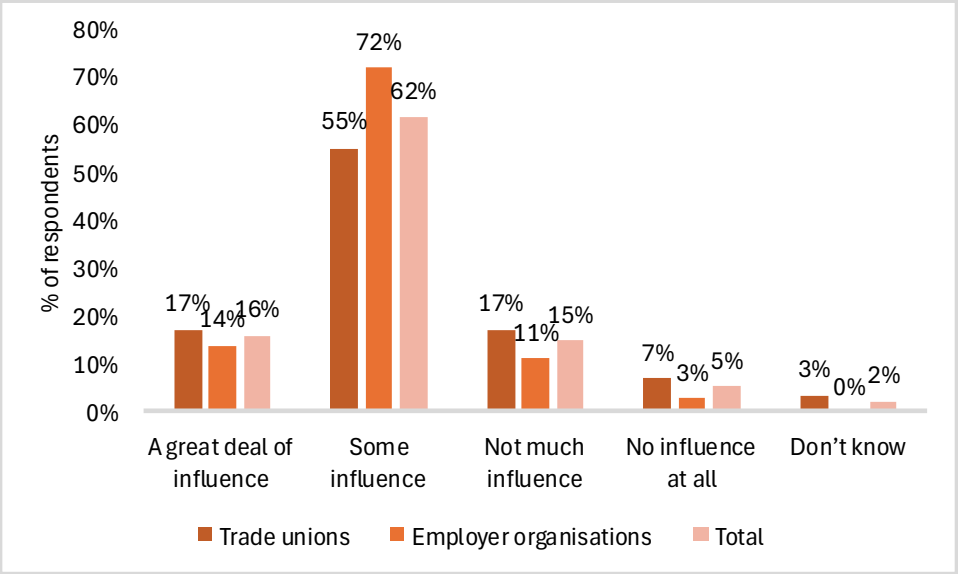
Similarly, in Latvia, social partner involvement is most visible in ESF-funded initiatives and ad hoc programmes, while collective bargaining plays a relatively modest role in structuring training rights and obligations. These cases show the potential vulnerability of skills initiatives that rely heavily on external funding and highlight the challenges of maintaining long-term social partner capacity in systems with weaker institutional anchors.

Source: Czechia and Latvia case study interviews

## 5.4 Social partners' influence over upskilling and reskilling policies

Respondents report that they have a fair degree of influence over policies related to upskilling and reskilling of those already in employment, with 62% reporting some influence and 16% a great deal of influence. The shares reporting little or no influence are relatively small. Employer organisations are more likely to report influence, with a higher share indicating some influence (72% compared to 55% of trade unions) (see Figure 5.3).

**Figure 5.3: Respondents' perceived influence over upskilling and reskilling policies**




Source: Social Partners' Skills Shortages and Gaps Survey

Where social partners have influence, it results from participation in governmental working groups, collaboration with training institutions, and being involved in financing, delivering, or regulating CVET through collective agreements. These three forms of engagement (policy participation, programme delivery, and social dialogue) are consistently identified as effective levers of influence. Respondents with more limited influence often point to the same areas as being those requiring further development.

Participation in governmental working groups, skills councils, or collaboration with training providers increases influence, but even here influence is seen as constrained by fragmented policy environments and overlapping institutional responsibilities. One respondent described this situation as follows: "*Our organisation plays an active advisory role by conducting sectoral and occupational studies and providing evidence-based recommendations. However, our influence remains limited due to the complex policy environment, the involvement of multiple ministries, and a lack of timely recognition of our proposals by public authorities.*"

Respondents who financed or managed continuing training initiatives or had integrated training provisions into collective agreements are among those most likely to report policy influence. A smaller number of respondents say that greater influence requires stronger regulation and collective agreements to guarantee workers' rights to continuing education and ensure public accountability in training provision. One trade union respondent explained: *"To ensure that upskilling and reskilling efforts are socially just and demand-driven, we advocate for formal co-determination rights for trade unions in training governance. This includes representation in supervisory boards and curriculum committees, and a legally enforceable right to continuing education backed by public funding."*

Where respondents report limited influence, this results from limited or ineffective social dialogue and consultation mechanisms. Trade union respondents, in particular, point to asymmetries in influence, noting that employers and governments typically hold stronger decision-making positions, while they have more of a consultative role with more limited ability to shape policy outcomes. Employer organisations, on the other hand, suggest that cooperation among all stakeholders involved in education, training, and lifelong learning (employers, unions, and national authorities) is often fragmented, and that skills policies are not always prioritised by national governments. Several respondents called for collective agreement provisions on compulsory CVET to ensure fair access to lifelong learning opportunities.

Respondents provided a wide range of good practice examples supporting the upskilling and reskilling of those already in employment. To begin with, trade unions across several countries pointed to the integration of upskilling and reskilling provisions into collective agreements.

- In Germany and Italy, collective agreements provide rights to training and defined frameworks for employee participation in upskilling activities.
- In Albania, Italy, and Spain, social partners negotiate free time for education, minimum training hours per employee, and public funding for training and reskilling plans.
- In Czechia, Lithuania, and Spain, agreements introduce improved wages, flexible working hours, teleworking options, and enhanced social benefits to support workforce retention.

Both trade unions and employer organisations refer to national strategies supporting lifelong learning:

- Malta's National Strategy for Lifelong Learning (2023–2030), which promotes work-based learning;
- Sweden's Main Agreement on Skills Development, Transition, and Employment Protection, which includes financial study aid for workers pursuing training.

Several respondents mentioned financial instruments enabling reskilling and upskilling including the following.

- In France, the TransCo (Collective Transitions) system allows employees to retrain for new careers while maintaining their salary.
- In Sweden, a transition study support scheme enables individuals to study for up to one year with at least 80% of their salary.
- In Czechia, individual learning accounts provide up to €2,000 over three years for participation in training.
- In Germany, the Upgrading Training Assistance Act (AFBG**)** provides grants and allowances for workers pursuing advanced vocational qualifications.

Across all responses, the findings suggest that social partners' influence over upskilling and reskilling policies is strongest where social dialogue is institutionalised, training initiatives are co-financed and co-managed, and collective agreements regulate lifelong learning rights. Where such mechanisms are weak or fragmented, influence remains more limited. The extensive range of national and sectoral examples demonstrates that structured collaboration, evidence-based policymaking, and robust social dialogue are the key conditions for ensuring that upskilling and reskilling systems effectively support both workforce development and fair labour market transitions.

To support training institutions, social partners engage in skills forecasting and training evaluation activities. This includes working closely with employers to identify skill gaps and recommend appropriate training programmes. As noted in Chapter 3, social partners are also involved in the development of occupational profiles, designing of training programmes and materials, in an effort to promote upskilling and reskilling.

## 5.5 The future of social partners' role in improving the provision of upskilling and reskilling practices

In response to the question 'Looking to the future, how could your organisation, and the social partners more generally, influence the provision of upskilling and reskilling to those already in employment to further improve skills matching?' respondents said the following were important:

- strengthened dialogue and cooperation between social partners;
- identifying training needs and financing/providing continuing training; and
- collective bargaining / collective agreements.

Most of the respondents see room for strengthening dialogue and cooperation between social partners in the future. Partnerships for formative innovation are recommended such as partnerships with universities and research centres to develop new training content aligned with the needs of the sector and testing new pedagogical

methodologies (e-learning, blended learning, microlearning) and technological solutions to make training more accessible, attractive and effective.

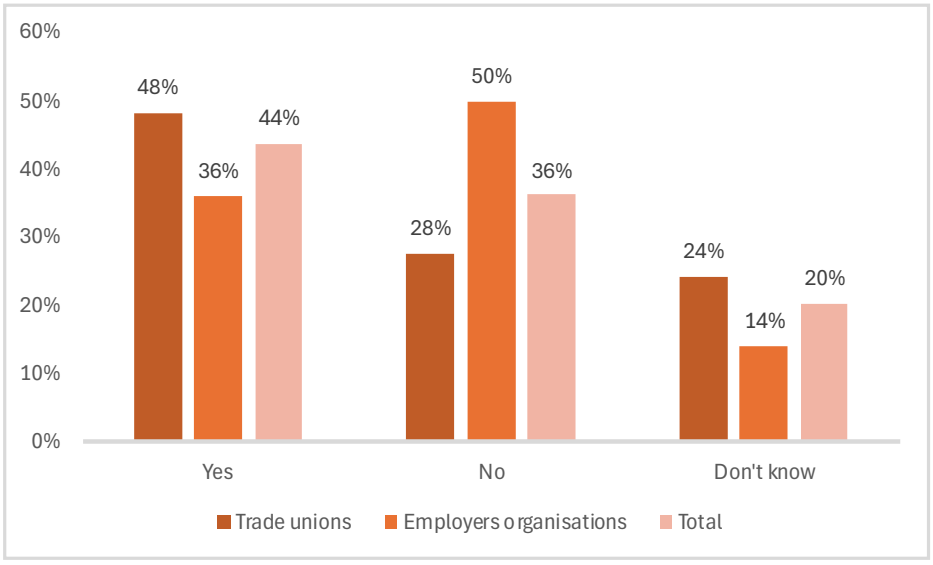
Besides universities and research centres, other public-private partnerships are encouraged. Some respondents suggested the establishment of regional and sectoral training alliances to coordinate the upskilling efforts across companies and industries. These networks could help pool resources, share best practices, and respond to local economic needs.

Almost a quarter of respondents (mostly employer organisations) reported they aim to focus on identifying training needs and financing/providing continuing training. They are looking towards creating or improving skills anticipation systems and supporting the collection and use of labour market data. Social partners in general point to the importance of national skills forecasting system to align training provision with future labour market needs. Employer organisations say they are interested in developing modular and personalised training offers, adapted to the profile of the worker and the specific needs of employers, allowing the acquisition of specific skills without the need for long absences from the job. Trade union respondents are of a view that workers need a right to continuing education, including access to paid training leave and individual learning time accounts (through collective agreements or other legislative measures). They suggest that workers and their representatives should have a say in shaping company training strategies, negotiating training budgets, and ensuring that learning opportunities are relevant and inclusive.

## 5.6 Social partners' involvement in retention practices

Figure 5.4 shows the extent to which social partners are involved in supporting labour and skill retention. Overall, 44% report being involved in supporting labour retention. Trade unions are more likely than employer organisations to be involved in supporting labour retention.

**Figure 5.4**: **Social partners' involvement in supporting the retention of skilled workers by type of organisation**

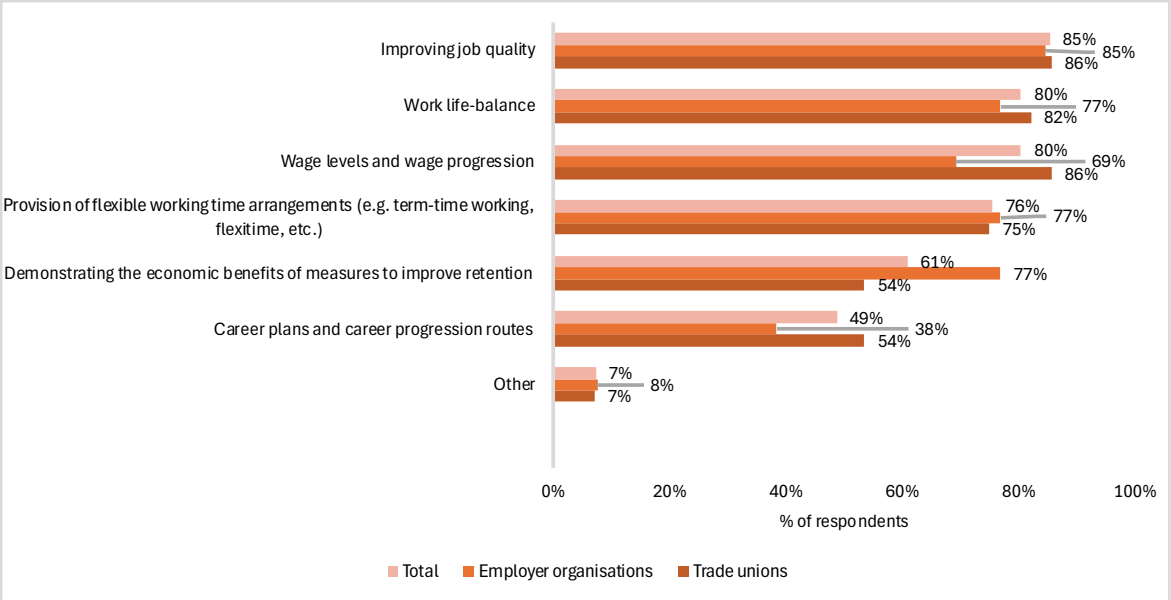



Source: Social Partners' Skills Shortages and Gaps Survey

Among those who say they provide support for the retention of skilled workers within the workplace, the most commonly mentioned activities are *improving job quality* (85%), as well as *wage levels and wage progression* and *work-life balance* (80% respectively). Other activities also indicated by respondents includes advising or assisting in the provision of *flexible working time arrangements (e.g. term-time working, flexitime, etc.)* (76%) and *demonstrating economic benefits of measures to improve retention* (61%). Finally, slightly under a half of them

(49%) report advising or assisting on *career plans and career progression routes*. The analysis by type of organisation (Figure 5.5) reveals that trade unions are slightly more engaged than employer organisations across almost all activities. The largest differences are observed on wage levels and wage progression and on career plans and career progression routes. A relatively high share of employer organisations say they are engaged in demonstrating the economic benefits of measures to improve retention.

**Figure 5.5: Retention practices in which social partners are involved by type of organisation**

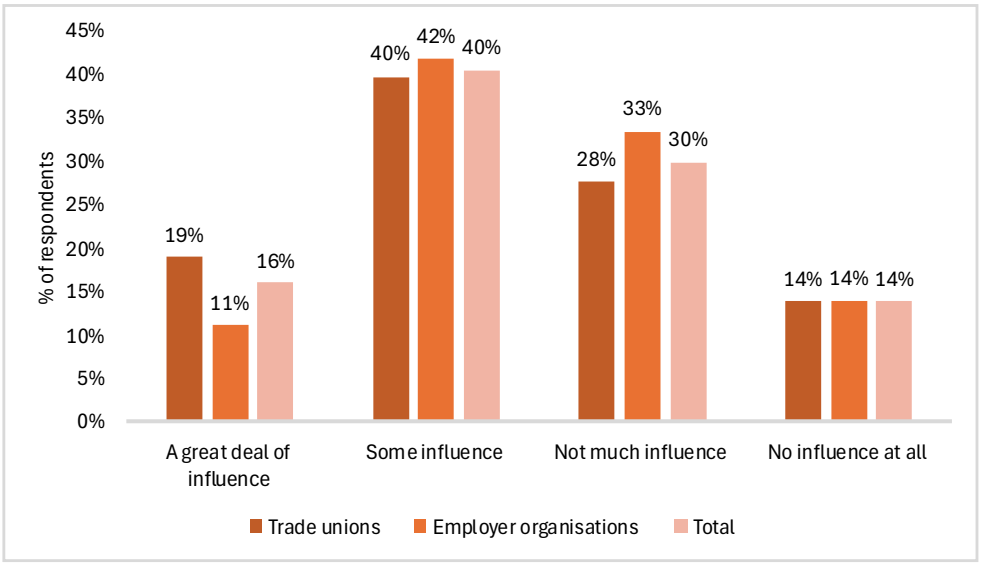



Source: Social Partners' Skills Shortages and Gaps Survey

## 5.7 Social partners' influence over retention practices

Respondents' opinion on their level of influence over labour and skill retention practices in the workplace is, overall, positive, with 40% indicating having some influence, 16% a great deal of it, while 30% not much influence and 14% no influence at all. The analysis by type of organisation does not show much difference between the two groups (see Figure 5.6).

**Figure 5.6: Respondents' perceived influence over skill retention practices by type of organisation**




Source: Social Partners' Skills Shortages and Gaps

In response to the survey question 'What are the reasons for your previous answers [how much influence your organisation has on labour and skill retention practices in the workplace]?' respondents considered the following to be important.

- Strong dialogue and cooperation between social partners, particularly strong collective bargaining, collective agreements, other legislative.
- Identifying training needs and financing/providing continuing training.

Respondents attribute their organisation's level of influence on labour and skill retention practices to the strength of the dialogue and cooperation between social partners. Where respondents perceive their influence to be low, this is because their role is consultative or because social dialogue is not common or ineffective.

## 5.8 Future social partners' role on retention practices

To increase employee retention, social partners mentioned the importance of providing a good work environment improving employee satisfaction and supporting inclusivity. A **German** employer organisation suggests that demographically resilient personnel policies, talent management, a conscious approach to diversity, and an increasing focus on life phases, including the reconciliation of private and professional life, are effective responses to an ageing society and a declining workforce. To fully exploit the advantages of mobile working, modern working time regulations with flexible working hours are needed.

Social partners from **Belgium** suggest that an attractive financial offer was no longer enough to retain staff. The current generation expects more in terms of flexibility (working hours, teleworking, etc.), training, autonomy, a 'good place to work' (an inclusive, ethical and caring work environment), and prospects for development. To satisfy this requirement, measures addressing both employers and employees to improve recruitment, retainment and understand potential career paths and skilling needs have been developed, managed by the social partners, through the Skills management platform.

In response to the question 'Looking to the future how should the role of your organisation, and the social partners more generally, be developed to assist with the retention of skilled workers by enterprises?' respondents say the following are important:

- strengthened dialogue and collaboration between the social partners;
- stronger collective bargaining with more say over company training;
- sharing of information and best practices; and
- creation of career pathways, mapping of skills, training provision and supervision and financial support throughout training.

Both trade unions and employer organisations are looking forward to an improved dialogue and collaboration between the social partners with respect to:

- increased local cooperation between the social partners and local authorities;
- closer cooperation with employers to identify retention challenges and share best practices;
- stronger bipartite and tripartite sectoral cooperation; and
- increased participation in designing public incentives for companies that invest in talent development and loyalty.

Trade unions emphasise the need for stronger collective bargaining and greater influence of trade unions on company training that included:

- training rights and career development opportunities in collective agreements;
- training leave, career progression pathways, and recognition of informal learning;

- collaboration with companies to create continuous training programmes that help workers maintain and update their skills;
- benefit packages and incentives that meet the needs of workers, such as retirement plans, health insurance, and wellness programmes;
- policies that help workers better balance work and personal life, such as flexible work, telecommuting, and parental leave; and
- policies or provisions in collective agreements that encourage job stability, such as reducing precarious work and promoting permanent contracts and fair wages.

The trade unions say that they can create support networks for workers by offering consulting and mentoring services. These networks can help workers feel more connected and supported within the company. Employer organisations tend to emphasise their role as a hub in order to improve the exchange of information and best practices, including an increased virtual presence, and promotion of learning ambassadors. They suggest this initiative may take the form of closer cooperation with employers to identify retention challenges and share best practices. It may also take the form of a joint campaign with the government, allocating resources for understanding the importance of the issue and sharing best practices.

Respondents to the survey want to improve the collection of data and research-based decisions (e.g. "*Social partners should […] create a talent and retention observatory containing data, trends and success stories*"). There was a suggestion that a skills retention framework should be created and provided. There is also a need to promote sectoral recommendations on retention policies adapted to businesses of different sizes and business realities.

## 5.9 Conclusions

The social partners are involved in upskilling and reskilling of those already in employment, mostly through (i) the negotiation of collective agreements which include training clauses; (ii) the provision of information on the benefits of providing training; and (iii) the design of training and apprenticeship programmes. They also advise on skills needs, focusing mostly on digital and green skills, technical skills related to specific occupations or sectors, and soft skills. They are also actively involved in promoting measures to improve labour / skill retention. While the provision on continuing training may have a positive impact on labour and skills retention, it needs to be complemented by measures which create a good working environment. Social partners provide information and guidance to employers about working practices which are conducive to skills and labour retention.

# 6. Conclusion

The survey results reveal that improving social dialogue and collaboration between social partners is regarded as important to improve skills matching. There is an appetite from social partners for engagement in every stage of the skills policymaking process from design to implementation, where they can work collaboratively with stakeholders, including ministries, universities and research institutions, education and training providers, enterprises, and PES to improve the supply of skills to meet labour market demand.

What is the alternative to social partnership in the skills domain? If it is left to the market to determine the demand for, and the supply of, skills, then there is every likelihood that skill mismatches will persist simply because labour market signals about the demand for skills are not always well articulated, quickly transmitted, or clearly understood. Even if the signals are well understood, training supply is not so flexible that it can quickly respond to market demand.

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. The evidence points to social partners developing policies, practices, tools, and programmes designed to anticipate and mitigate skill mismatches. Evidence presented in the preceding chapters demonstrates that the unique insights the social partners have into the causes of skill mismatches and how they might be effectively addressed results in solutions which are tailored to a particular situation. This relates to the expertise and experience they can bring to bear in shaping interventions which improve the overall operation of the skills system, improves recruitment, and increases the provision and take-up of upskilling and reskilling.

The engagement of social partners in various activities related to redressing skill mismatches across Europe is uneven. This varies by country and it varies by type of activity as documented in the findings presented in the preceding chapters. There is no one size fits all model of social partnership which can be applied across countries. It depends upon existing institutional arrangements and the way social partners are engaged in those institutions. And it is not just about collective bargaining. This bolsters the influence of social partners on policy at a range of levels (sectoral, regional, or national), but there are other forms of social partnership which result in bi-partite or tr-partite (where the state is also involved) engagement on a range of skill issues.

Social partners are engaged in a variety of demand-side activities related to the articulation of current and future skill needs and, in some countries, have a data collection and analysis function. Before supply-side interventions can be designed there needs to be a clear understanding of the problem they are trying to solve. As already noted, social partners are well placed to identify emerging skill needs. On the supply-side, evidence has been provided on the breadth of activities in which social partners are involved, including the design of vocational qualifications and curricula design in relation to both IVET and CVET. The social partners, in some countries, are also involved in the funding of training to support upskilling and reskilling of workers. They also have a say in the operation of apprenticeships and other kinds of vocational education delivered to young people which can have a beneficial impact on skills matching.

It is, perhaps, taken as read that the social partners have a beneficial impact on the skills system and the development of responses to current and anticipated skill mismatches. There is a danger that is taken for granted. There is scope to clearly communicate the way in which social partnership has improved the matching of skills supply to demand while, at the same time, playing a role in raising the equilibrium level of demand. Good practice needs to be made clearly visible and its beneficial impacts recognised. This has implications for the future of social partnership in relation to skills. Social partners – both employers and trade unions – report that their engagement with the skills system is sometimes difficult to maintain where skills policy making is fragmented across sectors

and regions, or within government where various governmental agencies have responsibilities for particular parts of the skills system. This can stretch the resources of social partners.

What to do? The future of social partnership across Europe is likely to be dependent upon a number of things, including the following.

**#1** Make a clear case for social partnership in the realm of skills. This needs to provide transferable practices related to the benefits which flow from social partners being involved in the skills system and their influence on recruitment and upskilling/reskilling.

**#2** There is an expectation that the social partners can be readily engaged in a wide range of activities across a variety of agencies. This stretches resources. It may be that the financial and human resources required to maintain the level of engagement required can be found from somewhere, but failing this, there needs to be some consideration of how the engagement of social partners can be efficiently organised.

**#3** While social partnership may be limited in some cases because of a shortage of resources there are, in some cases, other kinds of barriers which need to be addressed, such as social dialogue being weakly developed such that social partner engagement proves difficult.

**#4** There is no one size fits all model which might be applied across countries with differing approaches to social partnership and skills development, but there needs to be some agreement about the principles which should underlie any institutional architecture which allows social partnership to influence skills policies.

**#5** In relation to the above point, bipartite dialogue and agreements between social partners are a key means through which social partners can shape skills policies and practices, taking into account differing national industrial relations systems. At the tri-partite level, sector skills councils, or something similar, are likely to provides pointers for a relatively efficient solution to the point raised in #4. Similarly, social partner representation in the lead agencies responsible for skills anticipation provides a means of making social partnership agreements on skills being generally applicable.

The evidence provided in the preceding chapters demonstrates that where social partnership has influence it brings benefits. The report demonstrates how social partnership can tackle shortages. It is all a question of how to make the most of existing good practice to inform those areas where social partnership within the skills system requires further development.

# ANNEX 1: International Conference *Improving Skills Matching in Europe*, Brussels, 6 March 2025

## AGENDA

**Social partners knowledge-sharing Conference**
**"Skills development: reducing skills mismatches and skills shortages"**

6 March 2025, Brussels

DoubleTree by Hilton Brussels City,
Ginestestraat 3 Rue Gineste,
1210 Brussels, Belgium

**Languages**: English, French, German, Italian, Spanish

**Thursday 6 March 2025**

| | |
|---|---|
| **09:00 – 09:15** | Registration |
| **09:15 – 09:45** | **Welcoming word – introducing the project**<br>- Ludovic Voet, Confederal Secretary, ETUC<br>- Robert Plummer, Senior Adviser, BusinessEurope<br>- Guillaume Afellat, Senior Policy Advisor, Social Affairs, SGI Europe<br>- Valentina Guerra, Social Affairs and Training Policy Director, SMEunited |
| **09:45 – 10:15** | **Topic 1 – The role of Social partners in shaping the system**<br>*In the focus: defining skills mismatches, updating qualifications and attractiveness of jobs*<br>- Presentation by Prof. Seamus McGuinness, Economic and Social Research Institute in Dublin, FGBs Research team<br>- Q&A in plenary |
| **10:15 – 11:10** | **Topic 1 – Discussion in working groups** |
| **11:10 – 11:30** | *Coffee break* |
| **11:30 – 11:45** | **Topic 1 – Reports from working groups** |
| **11:45 – 12:15** | **Topic 2 – Skills matching and recruitment**<br>*In the focus: looking for workers and entering to jobs: reducing skills shortages (e.g. recruitment processes, introduction to jobs via trainings)*<br>- Presentation by Prof. Terence Hogarth, University of Warwick, FGBs Research team Q&A in plenary |
| **12:15 – 13:45** | *Lunch break* |
| **13:45 – 14:40** | **Topic 2 – Discussion in working groups** |
| **14:40 – 14:55** | **Topic 2 - Reports from working groups** |
| **14:55 – 15:15** | *Coffee break* |
| **15:15 – 15:45** | **Topic 3 - Transitions and retention: upskilling and reskilling** |

| | |
|---|---|
| | *In the focus: employee trainings, career and training guidance possibilities, training funds, etc*<br>- Presentation Dr Liga Baltina, Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini, FGBs Research team<br>- Q&A in plenary |
| **15:45 – 16:45** | **Topic 3 - Discussion in working groups** |
| **16:45 – 17:00** | **Topic 3 – Reports from working groups** |
| **17:00 – 17:15** | **Conclusions**<br>FGB |
| **17:15 – 17:30** | **Final remarks**<br>- Robert Plummer, Senior Adviser, BusinessEurope<br>- Guillaume Afellat, Senior Policy Advisor, Social Affairs, SGI Europe<br>- Valentina Guerra, Social Affairs and Training Policy Director, SMEunited<br>- Claes-Mikael Ståhl, Deputy General Secretary, ETUC |

In preparation for the conference, delegates were presented with a series of questions to think about based on the findings from the literature review. These are provided below.

**The role of the social partners in shaping the skills system**

- How do the social partners in your country or sector define skill mismatches, and what kinds of skill mismatches are most important for you to address?
- Are the social partners active players in collecting and analysing information on skill mismatches in your country's sector? If not, why is that the case?
- What is the role of the social partners in the design of curricula (IVET and CVET) or the design of training programmes? Are there any barriers that prevent more active participation in this activity?
- At what level does social partnership impact identifying and anticipating skill mismatches most influential – workplace, regional, sectoral or national levels? Why is that the case?
- Can you please provide examples of programmes, involving the social partners, which have effectively and successfully engaged with the skills system to improve the supply of skills?

**The role of social partners in recruitment**

- What are the main barriers for enterprises to adopt more effective recruitment and retention practices?
- Where enterprises, or sectors as a whole, experience recurrent and persistent recruitment and retention problems, what measures are they taking to address these issues (e.g., enhanced training provision for new recruits, improved wages and benefits, better career progression opportunities, or other improvements in terms and conditions of employment)?
- How can policies and practices be further developed by the social partners to improve the effectiveness of recruitment and retention practices?
- What strategies and initiatives of the social partners can best support recruitment and retention in SMEs, and which approaches are likely to be most effective for these businesses? What are some

notable examples of good practice in recruitment and retention among SMEs, and how can these be used to benefit other businesses?

- To what extent are employers turning to the recruitment of mobile workers or third country nationals to help address their skills needs? Are there examples of effective national policies/initiatives which involve the social partners?

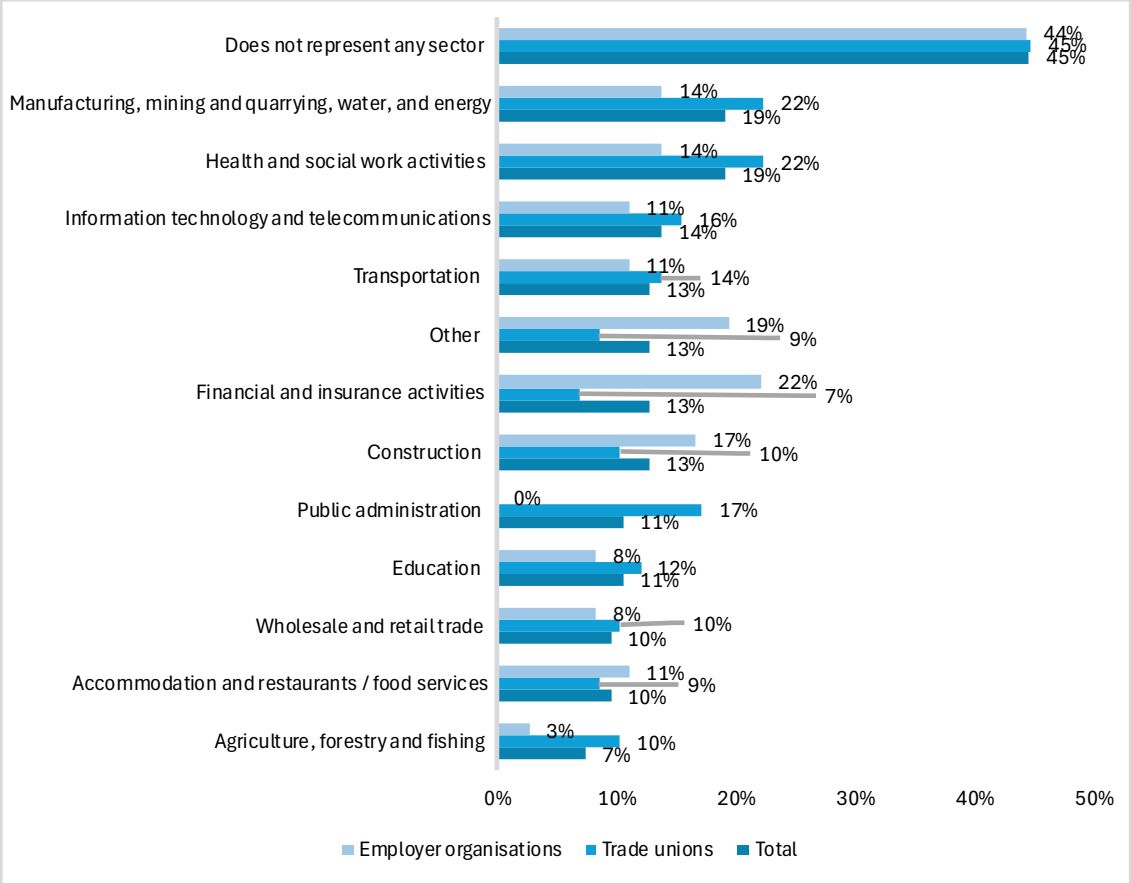
**The role of the social partners in upskilling, reskilling and aiding skill retention**

- To what extent are social partners effectively shaping upskilling/reskilling strategies at different levels (national, sectoral, company) for all types of workers in different sectors?
- How can funding mechanisms, at the EU and national level, be made more effective, and how can social partners encourage the use and management of funding mechanisms by employers and employees?
- Vocational training policies can be set in legislation, through collective agreements, at various levels, or agreed directly between employers and employees in the workplace. What policies / initiatives are helpful to foster access to training (having in mind recent EU level initiatives and policies, including, among others, the European social partners framework agreement on digitalisation; the Directive on Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions and efforts to promote training funds)?

# ANNEX 2: The Survey of Social Partners

In total, there were 94 respondents to the survey which was conducted between May and July 2025. Of these, 58 (62%) were trade unions and the remaining 36 (38%) were employer organisations. With regard to their level of representation, 85% of respondents represented interests at the national level, while over one third of them (31%) at the regional/local level, and a similar share (30%) represented interests from across EU and EU candidate countries. Just under a half of respondents represented general confederations of employers or trade unions (45%). Among the remaining respondents, the largest share represented *health and social work* and *manufacturing, mining and quarrying, water, and energy* (19% each), followed by *information technology and telecommunications* (14%). Across nearly all sectors, responses were obtained from employer and trade unions (see Figure A2.1). The share of respondents representing each group is more or less balanced across the sectors. For example, in information communications and telecommunications, accounted for 11% of employer organisation respondents and 16% of trade union respondents. But there are some sectors where social partners are not represented, such as public administration where there were no responses from employer organisations.

**Figure A2.1: Sectoral representation of respondents**




Source: Social Partner's Skills Shortages and Gaps Survey

Table A2.1 shows the countries represented by each type of social partnership organisation. Respondents mainly represented countries from the EU. Belgium accounted for the highest share of respondents (15%).

**Table A2.1: Number of respondents from each country**

| Country | Total | Employer organisations | Trade unions |
|---|---|---|---|
| Belgium | 8 | 5 | 3 |
| Pan-European organisations | 8 | 4 | 4 |
| Finland | 7 | 2 | 5 |
| Germany | 6 | 2 | 4 |
| Spain | 5 | 2 | 3 |
| Sweden | 5 | 1 | 4 |
| Bulgaria | 4 | 2 | 2 |
| Croatia | 4 | 2 | 2 |
| Czechia | 4 | 1 | 3 |
| France | 4 | 1 | 3 |
| Italy | 4 | 1 | 3 |
| Austria | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| Cyprus | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| Denmark | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| Greece | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Portugal | 3 | 3 | 0 |
| Albania | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Latvia | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| Lithuania | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Norway | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Türkiye | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Estonia | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Hungary | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Ireland | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Luxembourg | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Malta | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Netherlands | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Poland | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Romania | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Serbia | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Slovakia | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Total | 94 | 36 | 58 |

Source: Social Partners' Skills Shortages and Gaps Survey

# ANNEX 3: Selection of countries for follow-up after the survey

A series of mini case studies were conducted following the survey in order to understand in more depth how social partners had been able to influence skills mismatching. The survey provides a Europe wide perspective on the current role of social partners within skills systems. The focus of the study has been upon the social partners' role in:

- Shaping skills policies;
- Skills matching and facilitating recruitment ; and
- Upskilling, reskilling, and skill retention.

For each of the dimension mentioned above, respondents to the survey were asked to provide examples of initiatives and projects in which they are engaged. The aim was to map ongoing developments across countries and to identify initiatives that could serve as good practices for informing future policy recommendations. In its next phase, the study will seek to gain a deeper understanding of some of the practices implemented in respondents' countries. The selection involves two steps.

## Step 1. Clustering the countries that respondents represent

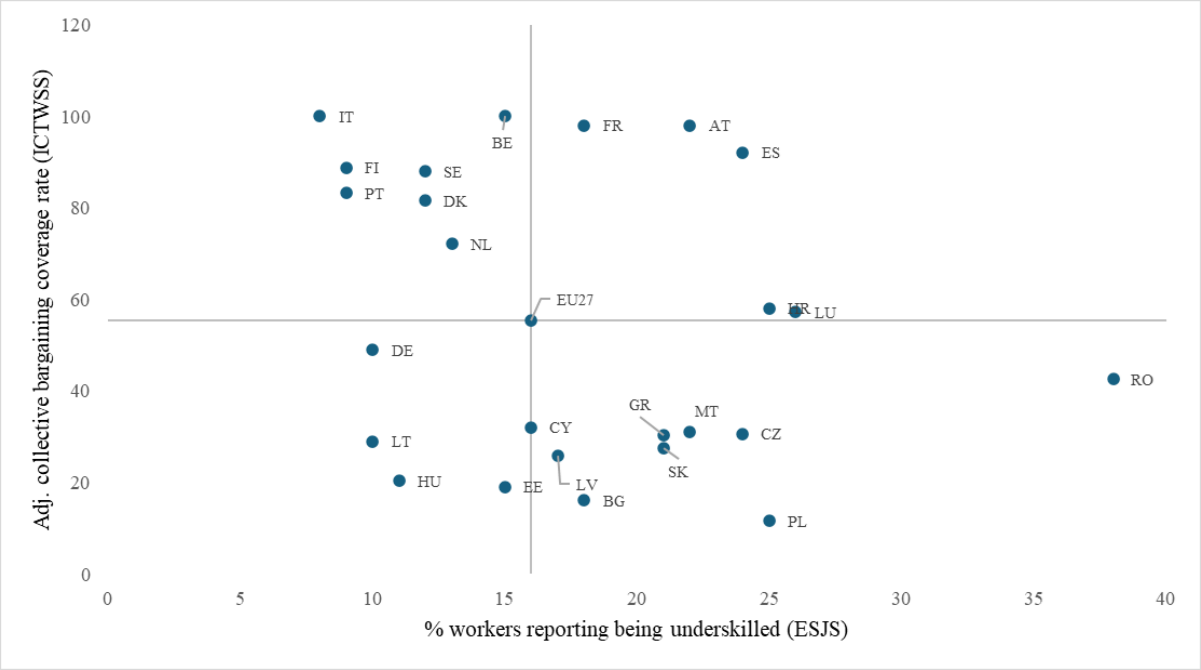
Starting from the assumption that each initiative is embedded within its national context and that the analysis is aimed at covering the greatest diversity of countries, the first step was to produce a cluster of countries based on the nature of the social dialogue in the country and the level of skill mismatches, both measured using proxy variables. Specifically:

- The nature of social dialogue is proxied by the Adjusted collective bargaining coverage rate,[61] derived from the OECD/AIAS ICTWSS database;[62]
- The level of skill mismatches is proxied by the share of employee who are underskilled[63] derived from 2021 Cedefop's European Skills and Jobs Survey.

Figure A3.1 below show the result of the clustering exercise.

[61] The adjusted collective bargaining coverage rate refers to the number of employees (in thousands) covered by collective agreements in force resulting from collective bargaining between bona fide trade unions and employers or its representative organisation and/or Unclassified - Non classifié 26 | resulting from an administrative extension (or a functional equivalent), as a percentage of employees (in thousands) with the right to collectively bargain and covered by the national legislation on collective bargaining.
[62] For each country, the latest data available were considered.
[63] The share of under-skilled employees refers to the share of employees who believe that their skills are lower than those required to perform their current job adequately.

**Figure A3.1: Collective bargaining coverage rate by degree of skills mismatch**




Source: OECD/AIAS ICTWSS, European Skills and Jobs Survey

## Step 2. Selection of case studies

The selection of best practices considered two dimensions.

1. The coverage of countries in each quadrant of Figure 1.
2. The coverage of each dimension where social partners' role was analysed in the questionnaire. These are: (i) shaping skills policies; (ii) skills matching and recruitment; and (iii) upskilling/ reskilling and retention.

The focus of the case studies will that of summarising approaches at national or sectoral levels to the three subjects of interest. The grid below (Table A3.1) shows the result of such selection, where 12 practices have been selected.

**Table A3.2: Case study selection grid (provisional by policy focus)**

| Country type / Dimension | Shaping the skills system | Skills Matching | Transitions and retention: Upskilling reskilling |
|---|---|---|---|
| High collective bargaining coverage/ Low skills mismatch | The flexibility and shared responsibility between the state and the social partners in **Denmark** | Social partners supporting recruitment and facilitating matching in **Italy** | Inclusion of training clauses in collective agreements in the **Netherlands** |
| High collective bargaining coverage / High skills mismatch | Role of social partners in developing training curricula in **Austria** | Facilitating change in job requirements to address sector shortages in **Croatia** | Adult apprenticeships in **Luxembourg** |
| Low collective bargaining coverage / Low skills mismatch | Role of the social partners in forecasting skills and training needs in **Estonia** | Exchange of recruitment best practices in **Latvia** | Services offered by the partners to the young adults in **Germany** |
| Low collective bargaining coverage / High skills mismatch | Role of the social partners in the creation of the National Register of Qualifications and Occupations in **Czechia** | Engagement of social partners in the improvement of recruitment policy in **Romania** | Social partners' engagement in the design and provision of CVT in **Greece** |

# ANNEX 4: The list of organisations participating in the case study interviews

| Country | Organisation | Trade Unions | Employer Organisations |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Denmark** | Danish Trade Union Confederation (FH) | x | |
| **Denmark** | Confederation of Danish Employers (DA) | | x |
| **Austria** | Austrian Trade Union Federation (ÖGB) | x | |
| **Austria** | Austrian Federal Economic Chamber (WKÖ) | | x |
| **Germany** | German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) | x | |
| **Germany** | Confederation of German Employers' Associations (BDA) | | x |
| **Germany** | Employer representative | | x |
| **Greece** | General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE) | x | |
| **Greece** | Hellenic Federation of Enterprises (SEV) | | x |
| **Netherlands** | Federation of Dutch Trade Unions (FNV) | x | |
| **Netherlands** | National Federation of Christian Trade Unions (CNV) | x | |
| **Netherlands** | Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (BZK) | | x |
| **Latvia** | Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia (LBAS) | x | |
| **Latvia** | Employers' Confederation of Latvia (LDDK) | | x |
| **Czechia** | Czech-Moravian Confederation of Trade Unions (ČMKOS) | x | |
| **Czechia** | Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic (SP ČR) | | x |
| **Estonia** | Estonian Trade Union Confederation (EAKL) | x | |
| **Estonia** | The Estonian Employers' Confederation | | x |
| **Croatia** | Croatian Employers' Association (HUP) | | x |
| **Luxembourg** | Luxembourg Confederation of Christian Trade Unions (LCGB) | x | |
| **Luxembourg** | Union des Entreprises Luxembourgeoises (UEL) | | x |
| **Italy** | Italian General Confederation of Labour | x | |
| **Italy** | Italian Union of Labour | x | |
| **Italy** | Italian Confederation of Workers' Trade Unions | x | |
| **Italy** | UIL Scuola – Trade union for education and school staff | x | |
| **Italy** | Italian Confederation of Craft Trades and Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (Confartigianato) | | x |
| **Romania** | The Concordia Employers' Confederation | | x |

## ANNEX 5: Final Validation Conference *Skills Development: Reducing skills mismatches and skills shortages*, Brussels, 13 February 2026

**AGENDA**
**Social partners final validation conference**
**"Skills development: reducing skills mismatches and skills shortages"**
13 February 2026, 09:00-16:00

DoubleTree by Hilton Brussels City, Ginestestraat 3 Rue Gineste,
1210 Brussels, Belgium

**Languages**: English, French, Italian, Polish, Spanish

| | |
|---|---|
| **08:30 – 09:00** | Registration<br>*Pagoda foyer (8th floor)* |
| **09:00 – 09:15** | **Welcoming words**<br>*Pagoda Room (8th floor)*<br><br>- **Claes-Mikael Ståhl**, Deputy General Secretary, ETUC<br>- **Robert Plummer**, Senior Adviser, BusinessEurope<br>- **Guillaume Afellat**, Head of Social Affairs, SGI Europe<br>- **Valentina Guerra**, Social Affairs and Training Policy Director, SMEunited |
| **09:15 – 09:45** | **Presentation of the project report and main findings**<br>*Pagoda Room (8th floor)*<br><br>- **Terence Hogarth, Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini**<br>Followed by comments and questions |
| **09:45 – 10:00** | **Keynote speech**<br>*Pagoda Room (8th floor)*<br><br>-**Anna Banczyk,** Head of Unit for VET, European Commission |
| **10:00 – 11:00** | **Discussion of project findings**<br>*Pagoda Room (8th floor)*<br><br>**Moderated by Terence Hogarth, Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini**<br><br>- **Anna Banczyk,** European Commission<br>- **Riikka Heikinheimo**, BusinessEurope<br>- **Rym Gouvier-Seghrouchni**, UNSA, France<br>- **Thomas Mayr,** WKÖ/ibw, Austria<br>- **Samantha Howe,** EPSU |

| | |
|---|---|
| | Followed by comments and questions |
| **11:00 – 11:15** | *Coffee break*<br>*Pagoda foyer (8th floor)* |
| **11:15 – 12:15** | **Parallel workshop discussion - Draft project report**<br>*Pagoda Room (8th floor)*<br><br>Group 1 moderated by **Agnes Roman**, **ETUC** & FGB ***Pagoda Room (8th floor)***<br>Group 2 moderated by **Astrid Nordberg, SGI Europe** & FGB ***OAK Room (2nd floor)*** |
| **12:15 – 13:45** | *Lunch break*<br>*Pagoda foyer (8th floor)* |
| **13:45 – 14:45** | **Parallel workshop discussion - draft recommendations**<br><br>Group 1 moderated by **Ludovic Voet, ETUC** & FGB ***Pagoda Room (8th floor)*** Group 2 moderated by **Valentina Guerra, SMEunited** & FGB ***OAK Room (2nd floor)*** |
| **14:45 – 15:15** | **Reporting from workshops in plenary**<br>*Pagoda Room (8th floor)*<br><br>**Moderated by Nils Elofsson, BusinessEurope**<br><br>Followed by comments and questions |
| **15:15 – 15:30** | **Concluding remarks**<br>*Pagoda Room (8th floor)*<br><br>- **Valentina Guerra**, Social Affairs and Training Policy Director, SMEunited<br>- **Guillaume Afellat**, Head of Social Affairs, SGI Europe<br>- **Ludovic Voet**, Confederal Secretary, ETUC<br>- **Robert Plummer**, Senior Adviser, BusinessEurope |
| **16:00** | **End of conference** |

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