



The renewed European Alliance for Apprenticeships

Action plan 2020–2021

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1.0 Introduction

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1.1 The European Alliance for Apprenticeships

The European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) aims to strengthen the supply, quality, image and mobility of apprenticeships. Since its launch in 2013 in close cooperation with European social partners, 36 countries have made national commitments under the Alliance; these include the 27 EU Member States, all 5 candidate countries and all 4 European Free Trade Association countries. Also, more than 330 pledges have been made by various apprenticeship stakeholders. Since 2013, companies, employers and intermediaries have pledged to provide over 900 000 apprenticeship and other training or first-job opportunities to young people.

Apprenticeships and other forms of work-based learning considerably facilitate the transition of young adults into the labour market. In 2016 in the EU, only 63.2 % of young adults who were not exposed to work-based learning were employed, compared to 69.1 % for those with mandatory traineeship experience, and 83.7 % for those with apprenticeship experience. However, on average only 59.3 % of recent graduates (aged 15–34) from vocational education and training (VET) in EU27 were reported to have been exposed to work-based learning in 2016, with 25.7 % being part of an apprenticeship-type programme and 33.6 % having profited from other types of work-based learning.

Apprentices that are trained now will be highly skilled workers in a few years' time. Apprenticeships lead to the skills that employers actually need, while an apprentice gains the insights, practical abilities and networks for a smooth labour market entry and active participation in society. Apprenticeships also contribute to a speedy labour market recovery. They add a skilled labour force to a wide range of sectors, enhancing the productivity and competitiveness of companies big and small across the EU. Apprenticeships should be encouraged and supported, as spearheaded by the Commission's proposal for future-proof vocational education and training.

1.2 The renewed European Alliance for Apprenticeships

In order to give a renewed boost to apprenticeships across the EU, the Commission's Youth Employment Support package of 1 July 2020 announced a renewed EAfA. The reinforced Alliance calls for new commitments on 'digital' and 'green' apprenticeships, focusing on the economic sectors that will be at the front line of the transition to a climate-neutral Europe. The economic recovery from the COVID-19 crisis offers an opportunity to accelerate reforms in VET and strengthen its resilience, which the renewed EAfA also will contribute to.

By continuing to bring together governments, social partners, businesses, chambers, VET providers, regions and cities, youth and parents' organisations as well as think tanks, the renewed EAfA will unlock decisive actions by all actors in order to further enhance the implementation of the first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships, and to improve the quality, effectiveness and inclusiveness of apprenticeships for all learners. In particular, it will involve:

- encouraging commitment among Member States and companies to quality and effective apprenticeships by fostering national apprenticeship coalitions;
- incentivising support to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in providing a stable supply of quality and effective apprenticeships;
- mobilising local and regional authorities as catalysts for apprenticeships within the local business environment;
- strengthening social dialogue through more active involvement by national social partner organisations;
- proactively engaging European sectoral social dialogue committees on apprenticeships, with a view to obtaining agreement on joint sectoral pledges;
- supporting the representation of apprentices in Member States by relaunching the European Apprentices Network (EAN).

In addition, the renewed EAfA will also address important horizontal issues, such as gender, social inclusion of socio-economically disadvantaged groups, including migrants and refugees, and internationalisation of VET. The renewed EAfA will continue to secure current pledges and encourage new ones.

The renewed Alliance will be embedded in the **Pact for Skills** as announced in the European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience. The Commission is proposing this Pact as a new engagement and governance model for skills that will help meet COVID-19 challenges and deliver on the ambitions of the recovery pathway, the European industrial strategy and the green and digital transitions. Industry, public and private employers, social partners, education and training providers and employment agencies will be called to work together and to create a shared vision and action.

1.3 The Commission's Youth Employment Support Package of 1 July 2020

The first Principle in the European Pillar of Social Rights states that everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a new economic crisis and increased social inequalities. But before the pandemic, youth unemployment was already twice as high as general unemployment. Additionally, it was already clear that not all workers in the EU had the digital skills they needed for jobs and other areas of life, and that we needed urgently to fill a skills gap in the green economy of the future.

The Commission was already working on both fronts. But the crisis accelerated the urgency to respond. Our young people and workers deserve the very best opportunities possible to develop their full potential, and in turn, shape our continent. Through the Youth Employment Support package of 1 July 2020, the Commission has proposed a fresh approach to strengthen and make vocational education and training more modern, attractive, flexible and fit for the digital age.

The **Commission Communication on [Youth Employment Support – a bridge to jobs for the next generation](#)** sets out steps to averting a new youth employment crisis. It proposes a reinforced Youth Guarantee, a modernised VET policy, a renewed focus on apprenticeships and a number of additional investment priorities to help young people. The communication also clarifies the vast array of EU funding instruments that can be mobilised to this end.

A modernised, more agile vocational education and training policy will enable a smoother transition from the world of education to the world of work, and it will contribute to decreasing the number of young people out of employment, education and training across the EU. The Commission's Youth Employment Support Package of 1 July 2020 sets ambitious objectives for VET learners' employability (82 %), exposure to work-based learning (60 %) and international mobility (8 %). It will also improve the quality of continued education and apprenticeship offers as part of the reinforced Youth Guarantee, helping young people who have already embarked on the school-to-work and early job-to-job transitions. At the same time, it will promote better quality assurance of vocational education and training programmes and recognition of qualifications.

The Youth Support Package also includes a **Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation on A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee**, providing a fresh look at our most established labour market intervention. It broadens the priority group to those aged 15–29 and reinforces support for those who are hardest to reach. The reinforced Youth Guarantee also steps up the skills dimension by preparing young people for an increasingly digital world of work, with priority on short duration training. Apprenticeships will also be supported, as they train young people for jobs that are in high demand and thereby provide stable labour market integration. Their role during the economic recession needs to be strengthened so that more young people can take up such an offer.

The Youth Guarantee safeguards the quality of offers by linking them to the European Pillar of Social Rights as well as to the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships, and the Quality Framework for Traineeships. Both of these have been developed since 2013, ensuring, for instance, access to social protection, reasonable duration of probation periods, a clear written contract or the clear

definition of working and rest periods. This should help make the offers taken up more stable in the long run.

Together with the Communication on Youth Employment Support, the Commission **also adopted the Communication on a European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience**. This Communication puts forward 12 EU actions aimed at supporting partnerships for skills, upskilling and reskilling for jobs and empowering people to keep learning throughout their lives. A major deliverable will be a new Pact for Skills, to be launched in November 2020 during the European Vocational Skills Week.

The Skills Agenda sets ambitious quantitative objectives at EU level and outlines how the EU will support investments in skills by implementing VET and apprenticeships reforms. These reforms may include investments in:

- curricula reforms for increased labour market relevance;
- mainstreaming of green and digital skills;
- flexibility and modularisation;
- expansion of higher VET programmes;
- setting up quality assurance and graduate-tracking systems;
- training of teachers and trainers in VET;
- supporting mobility of VET learners, teachers and trainers;
- setting up Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) linked to smart specialisation strategies and/or regional innovation and growth strategies.

Direct subsidies for apprentices in SMEs including remuneration, recruitment bonuses and temporary social contributions coverage (up to 12 months), as well as trainers' wages and/or their social contributions, will stabilise and increase the supply of quality and effective apprenticeships.

Finally, the **Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience** provides the recipe to make sure VET equips young people and adults with the skills necessary to support both the recovery and the green and digital transitions, while also ensuring inclusiveness. It also puts forward EU-level actions to support VET reform and provides clear quantitative objectives.

The support of the European Commission to Member States through implementation of the Recommendation will be gradually deployed by reinforcing support for structural reforms on apprenticeships. This will be done through the Apprenticeship Support Service and a new boost to the European Alliance for Apprenticeships in synergy with the Youth Guarantee. It will also expand support services for vocational

education and training together with Cedefop. The activities will cover a range of services, including mutual learning, expert advice, benchlearning, analytical work and capacity building to contribute to implementing the VET Recommendation.

2.0

EAFa objectives

2.0 EAfA objectives

2.1 Quality and supply of apprenticeships in a green and digital economy

A pillar of the EAfA activities, the Council Recommendation of 2018 on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships aims at increasing the employability and personal development of apprentices and contributing towards a highly skilled and qualified workforce responsive to labour market needs. The framework sets out 14 criteria in relation to working and learning conditions as well as to framework conditions. It provides a common understanding among Member States, and it will support their efforts to reform and modernise apprenticeship systems that provide an excellent learning and career pathway.

In line with the framework, EAfA encourages its members to improve the quality of the apprenticeships they offer and to increase the number of quality apprenticeships offered. However, alongside this framework, the new priorities set by recent policy measures will complement and inform the renewed EAfA action.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's ambition is that Europe will lead the transition to a healthy planet and a new digital world by bringing people together and upgrading the unique European social market economy to fit today's new ambitions. Europe must make the most of all of its strengths, talent and potential, and focus on equality and creating chances for all, whether women or men, whether from the east, west, south or north, whether young or old.

The Commission Proposal for a Council Recommendation on VET for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience aims to modernise the Union policy on VET by supporting the transitions to a green and digital economy in times of demographic change, as well as upward convergence of national VET systems. Modernisation of VET systems is also warranted as the world of work and skills is changing. Ongoing developments, such as automation and digitalisation of production and services, continue to reshape the labour markets. The broader twin transitions towards a more digital and greener economy will require VET to adapt to ensure that VET learners acquire the skills needed for the green and digital transitions, while also reconfirming and strengthening the central role of VET in the lifelong learning continuum.

The COVID-19 pandemic has seriously disrupted standard education and training activities, including VET, across Europe. Despite the fact that Member States have quickly moved towards digital learning solutions, the containment measures and ensuing crisis have put the resilience of the system to the test. The situation in VET was further aggravated by the fact that practical training – in the form of work-based learning and apprenticeships – has been suspended in most sectors.

The economic recovery from the COVID-19 crisis offers an opportunity to accelerate reforms in VET and strengthen the sector's resilience, notably by digitising learning offers and methods and by agile adaptation to changing labour market needs. This includes paying attention to the need to ensure access to digital tools and technologies for every learner, teacher and trainer, as well as appropriate guidance measures. Digital tools such as simulators, and virtual and augmented reality have the potential to increase the accessibility and efficiency of training, notably for small and medium-sized companies providing apprenticeship places. Inter-company training centres and Centres of Vocational Excellence can also play an important role here. Given the crucial role VET and, in particular, apprenticeships play in improving employability, the proposed modernisation will equally support youth employability and adults in need of continuous upskilling and reskilling. It will also include the increased use of digital tools and continued digitisation of VET systems, which will contribute to increasing their resilience.

The transition to a digital and climate-neutral economy will have a massive impact on sectors that traditionally rely on VET graduates, whether in the energy production sector, transport, construction or manufacturing, to name just a few. At the same time, forecasts also show positive projections for job creation linked to the decarbonisation process both in industry and services that traditionally employ VET graduates, including construction and waste management. The green transition needs to be just and has to pay special attention to those workers and regions particularly affected. Skills are crucial for this endeavour. At this stage, no quantitative indicators on green skills exist. The Commission will develop such indicators. It will support the development of a core set of green skills for the labour market to guide training across the economy with a view to creating a generation of climate-, environment- and health-conscious professionals and green economic operators. Defining a taxonomy of skills for the green transition will allow the statistical monitoring of the greening of our professions.

The renewed Alliance will call for new commitments on digital and green apprenticeships, focusing on the economic sectors that will be at the front line of the transition to a climate-neutral Europe.

2.2 Image of apprenticeships

The skills forecast for the 2016–2030 period, conducted by Cedefop, indicates that there will be more than 150 million job openings in the EU over this period. Nearly half of them will require a vocational qualification. Although around 50 % of young people in the EU acquire a VET qualification, VET systems in most EU countries face numerous challenges. In many EU Member States, there is a persistent lack of attractiveness of VET jobs and careers. This is partly due to popular misconceptions about VET, but also due to real gaps in the quality and labour market relevance of VET. COVID-19 came on top of all this. VET and, in particular, workplace learning and apprenticeships have been affected the most by the lockdown. At the same time, considering the few workers who continued to go to work while most of us stayed at home, it is clear how important VET is at such a critical moment.

So, while VET provides very good employment prospects in occupations highly demanded on the labour market, it still faces a challenge of low attractiveness for learners and companies in most Member States. This means that more efforts are needed to increase the attractiveness of VET by innovating and modernising the sector, notably in terms of new learning environments, tools and pedagogies, with a special focus on digitalisation.

The European Vocational Skills Week is an annual event during which local, regional and national organisations showcase the very best of VET. The Week highlights that VET is capable of empowering all people with the skills they need for a fulfilling personal and professional life, and it plays an important part in strengthening the image of apprenticeships.

2.3 Mobility in apprenticeships

In the area of vocational education and training, €3.1 billion has been made available through the Erasmus+ programme in the period 2014–2020 for mobility, strategic partnerships and policy cooperation in VET. In this, the programme has directly supported the Riga policy priorities. It has also played a key role in developing VET business partnerships aimed at promoting work-based learning in all its forms, by involving social partners, companies and VET providers and paying special attention to apprenticeship training.

Long-term mobility (i.e. with a duration of 3–12 months) of VET learners has been promoted by introducing the ErasmusPro activity into the programme as of 2018. The objective is to facilitate long-term placements in working environments in another country and provide young people with job-specific vocational skills, as well as key competences and transversal skills.

The Erasmus+ programme post-2020, as proposed by the Commission, will be substantially reinforced, extended and more inclusive. It will provide strengthened support to VET via increased opportunities for mobility of learners, teachers, trainers and staff, as well as partnerships. It will open up opportunities worldwide through a new international dimension. According to the Commission proposal for Erasmus+, the programme will further strengthen support for the mobility of VET learners and staff. When compared to the current funding period, the increase in the proposed budget for the period 2021–2027 will allow to significantly increase the number of people benefiting from VET mobility. As the demand is much higher than what the current budget can finance, this budgetary increase seems particularly relevant, and it will: reinforce the opportunity for learning or work experience abroad to be better prepared for the labour market; improve self-confidence, language skills and the ability to interact with people, as well as the readiness to get to know other cultures. In the Commission proposal, it is suggested to give more attention to study fields linked to green and digital skills, such as renewable energy, climate change, environmental engineering and artificial intelligence. The goal is for 8 % of learners in VET to benefit from a learning mobility abroad.

3.0

**The renewed EAfA
action plan**

3.0 The renewed EAfA action plan

By bringing together governments, social partners, businesses, chambers, VET providers, regions and cities, youth and parents' organisations as well as think tanks, the reinforced EAfA will unlock decisive actions by all actors.

Priority 1: Committing to quality and effective apprenticeships, and encouraging Member States and companies to do likewise, by fostering national apprenticeship coalitions

Pledges

A total of 338 pledges have been made to the Alliance by various apprenticeship stakeholders¹. Ensuring the quality of apprenticeships is the objective of most EAfA pledges, followed by around two-thirds of the pledges focusing on increasing the supply of apprenticeships, and two-thirds focusing on improving the image of apprenticeships. One-third of EAfA pledges focus on cross-border mobility.

Besides securing the quality of current pledges and encouraging new ones, the priorities of the renewed EAfA will encompass fostering the acquisition of skills for the green transition and of robust digital competences, as well as developing entrepreneurship.

Benchlearning

Benchlearning at EU level was initially developed to help improve the performance of public employment services. The concept embodies a structured, systematic process combining benchmarking and mutual learning to support improvement. In the context of apprenticeships, the aim is to use benchlearning to improve the quality and effectiveness of apprenticeships through facilitating knowledge-sharing, networking and mutual learning to support the introduction, reform and improvement of apprenticeship systems. The process is carried out in collaboration with representatives of Member States, social partners and Cedefop.

The first benchlearning 'round', launched in January 2020 in two regions of Belgium (Flanders and the French-speaking Community), as well as Greece, Malta and Romania, functions as a pilot, with learning informing subsequent implementation. As of September 2020, the volunteering countries/regions finalised their self-assessments against a set of criteria, agreed previously among 25 Member States, and a matching process is ongoing to identify peers who would visit the volunteer countries to discuss how to improve their apprenticeship systems.

¹ 20 August 2020.

The renewed EAfA will enable and facilitate the exchange of good practices between Member States, allowing them to learn from each other and further improve their national apprenticeship systems.

National coalitions

National coalitions are a tool for building a workforce that is future-ready. A coalition allows to scale apprenticeship programmes nationwide and prepare more workers for the number of jobs that require in-demand skills. It will help close the skills gap faced by companies in hiring new employees, and it can promote policies that support all workers' career aspirations, boost local businesses and help states build strong, inclusive economies.

Examples of coalitions in Member States, EFTA and candidate countries:

- Germany: Allianz für Aus- und Weiterbildung (Alliance for Initial and Further Training). In order to strengthen vocational training, the German Federal Government sealed the new Alliance for Initial and Further Training with business, trade union and Länder representatives in the Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs and Energy on 12 December 2014.
- Spain: Alianza para la FP dual (Fundación Bertelsmann). The Alliance for Dual Vocational Training is a state network of companies, educational centres and institutions committed to improving the employability of young people through the development of quality dual vocational training.
- Norway: The Norwegian National Council for VET (the Norwegian abbreviation is SRY). The council is composed of 14 members/representatives from employer and employee organisations at national level, one teachers' union, the Students' and Apprentices' Organisation, the Ministry of Education and Research and the Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation.
- In addition, other coordination networks exist in Albania, Greece and Romania.

The renewed Alliance will encourage Member States to foster national apprenticeship coalitions of broad partnership of stakeholders, including social partners.

The Pact for Skills

The main objective of the Pact is to mobilise and incentivise all relevant stakeholders to take concrete actions for the upskilling and reskilling of the workforce by pooling efforts and setting up partnerships to address the needs of the labour market, thus supporting green and digital transitions as well as local, regional growth strategies. The Pact will also foster large-scale public-private partnerships, mobilising key stakeholders to work out scalable and sustainable solutions for training in specific sectors. It will focus on industrial ecosystems for the COVID-19 recovery process and the green transition.

The Pact will be launched in November during the 2020 European Vocational Skills Week. Individual actors and partnerships would commit to a charter and concrete actions. EAfA will contribute to promoting the Pact for Skills and its benefits.

Table 3-1 Priority 1 activities

Priorities	Actions	Activities
1. Committing to quality and effective apprenticeships, and encouraging Member States and companies to do likewise by fostering national apprenticeship coalitions	Encouraging new pledges to incorporate the acquisition of skills for the green transition and the development of robust digital competences in apprenticeships	New sections in the EAfA template for pledges on green and digital skills
		Event: Online EAfA meeting during the European Vocational Skills Week (9–10 November 2020): Apprenticeships and the twin green and digital transition (2 live discussions + a high-level event)
		Online training module 6 (April 2021): Digitalisation, innovation and entrepreneurship in apprenticeships
		Webinar 15 (May 2021): In what ways can simulation software and serious games support apprenticeships? (lead expert: Simon Broek)
	Strengthening quality and effectiveness in apprenticeships in Member States through knowledge-sharing, benchlearning and networking	Event (in-person, Brussels) (15 March 2021): 3 years after the adoption of the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships , EAfA will take stock of the reforms in Member States . The event is organised in close

		cooperation with the International Labour Organization (ILO), which works on global standards in apprenticeships
		4th benchlearning meeting (November 26 2020)
		Live discussion 12 (December 2021): How to ensure efficient and effective communications between schools and companies
	Encouraging Member States to foster national apprenticeship coalitions	Webinar 17 (September 2021): Experience from, and advantages of, national apprenticeship coalitions
	Skills Pact	Live discussion 6 (19 January 2021): Pact for Skills

Priority 2: Incentivising support to SMEs in providing a stable supply of quality and effective apprenticeships

While quality and effective apprenticeships have a vital role to play in preserving and creating youth employment, they have been particularly impacted by the COVID-19 lockdowns. Many SMEs are no longer in a position to accept candidates due to a lack of resources and activity. In response, some Member States have already called upon employers to step up their efforts in preserving apprenticeship offers.

Training centres

A stronger preventive approach and a reinforced focus of the Youth Guarantee on apprenticeships, as well as appropriate support measures (e.g. inter-company training centres or expansion of digital training tools), can ensure a stable supply of apprenticeships during unfavourable economic conditions. ICT-based simulators, and virtual and augmented reality tools have the potential to significantly modernise and innovate VET provision and increase its efficiency and accessibility, compared to expensive physical equipment. This can be particularly beneficial for small companies and apprenticeships organised in small and medium-sized companies).

The initiative on Centres of Vocational Excellence brings various stakeholders together, including chambers, VET providers and companies, with the aim of assessing the current and future skills needs at local and regional level, and then working together collaboratively to ensure the provision of those skills through inter-company training centres (among others).

Investments in inter-company training centres (whether setting up new ones, reinforcing existing ones or embedding them in Centres of Vocational Excellence), will help SMEs to provide state-of-the-art VET and apprenticeships. The renewed EAfA will promote and encourage cooperation in joint training centres.

Trainers and mentors

With the development of apprenticeships and work-based learning in most of the countries where EAfA is represented, there is a growing need for more employees from companies who can act as trainers/mentors. Some countries (e.g. Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain) have worked on (re)defining the requirements to become a trainer, introducing/updating training programmes and opening up learning opportunities through school visiting schemes.

The renewed EAfA will provide insight to trainers and mentors' roles and responsibilities, skills required and training needs, as well as how to ensure efficient and effective communication between schools and companies.

Supply models

Nestlé was one of the first companies to join EAfA in 2013 with its 'Nestlé needs YOUTH' initiative. Between 2014 and 2016, 'Nestlé needs YOUTH' created 12 000 apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities. In 2016, Nestlé renewed its pledge towards EAfA: the company committed to offer 15 000 apprenticeships/traineeships and 20 000 jobs to young people in the Europe, Middle East and North Africa zone by 2020. To create a bigger societal impact, Nestlé launched the Alliance for YOUTH in 2014. The plan was that by 2020, through the Alliance for YOUTH, the 250 participating companies will deliver 230 000 new apprenticeship, internship and job opportunities for young Europeans. Since its creation, the alliance has also set up 800 new dual learning schemes and contributed to the reintroduction of apprenticeships in countries where such traditions had disappeared (e.g. Eastern Europe).

The renewed EAfA will identify and encourage big companies to follow the example of Nestlé in establishing supply chains for SMEs.

Financial support

Operations that can be supported with Next Generation EU and the EU's long-term budget include direct subsidies for apprentices in SMEs (including remuneration, recruitment bonuses and temporary social contributions coverage), as well as trainers' wages and their social contributions to stabilise and increase the supply of quality and effective apprenticeships, and placement of apprentices from insolvent

companies into other companies or intra-company training centres. These operations are where results are expected in the *short-term*.

Operations to avert a new youth employment crisis, in particular by making use of the resources of Next Generation EU and the EU's long-term budget, include implementing VET and apprenticeship reforms (which may include investments in curricula reforms for increased labour market relevance, flexibility and modularisation), expansion of higher VET programmes, setting up quality assurance and graduate-tracking systems, training of teachers and trainers in VET, and supporting mobility of VET learners, teachers and trainers. These operations are where results are expected in the *medium and long term*.

Examples of Member States supporting apprenticeships in reaction to the COVID-19 crisis in 2020

Germany – €0.5 billion: The government foresees that SMEs will receive a one-time premium of €2 000 for each newly concluded training contract and €3 000 for new additional training contracts. SMEs that are unable to continue the training within their premises will be given a temporary subsidy to continue the training of their apprentices in a joint inter-company training centre. Companies that additionally take on apprentices who are unable to continue their training due to the insolvency of their training company will receive a take-over bonus.

Austria – approximately €20 million: The government grants support to any apprentice employed between 16 March 2020 and 31 October 2020. Companies now receive a €2 000 bonus per new apprentice in order to save about 10 000 endangered apprenticeship places.

Denmark – €725 million: A tripartite agreement will reallocate a surplus from the Employers' Education Grant to provide a wage subsidy scheme for apprenticeships. From 1 May 2020 until the end of 2020, companies will receive 75 % of their ongoing apprentices' salaries. Wage subsidies are also granted for new agreements, respectively 45 % for short agreements and 90 % for ordinary education agreements. In addition, all employers receive an extraordinary subsidy to support the continued creation of apprenticeships.

France – €1 billion: State support for hiring apprentices under 18 years of age will be raised from €4 125 to €5 000, and for apprentices 18 years or over – from €5 125 to €8 000.

The renewed EAfA will communicate about financial and non-financial support for SMEs, identify good practices and provide a platform for sharing them.

Table 3-2 Priority 2 activities

Priorities	Actions	Activities
<p>2. Incentivising support to SMEs in providing a stable supply of quality and effective apprenticeships</p>	Identifying and encouraging big companies to follow the example of Nestlé in establishing supply chains for SMEs	<p>Webinar 18 (November 2021):</p> <p>Experience from, and advantages of, supply chains for SMEs</p>
	Promoting cooperation in joint training centres	<p>Webinar 14: (April 2021) Inter-company training centres and Centres of Vocational Excellence</p>
	Trainers and mentors	<p>Online training module 4 (November 2020): In-company trainers: roles and responsibilities, skills required and training needs – specific focus on SMEs</p>
	Informing about financial and non-financial support for SMEs	<p>Webinar 13 (February 2021): National financing systems and differences in apprentice pay</p>
	EAFa will identify good practices and provide a platform for sharing them	<p>Webinar 16 (July 2021): Financial and non-financial support for SMEs</p>
		<p>Fact sheet (Beginning 2021): Why invest in apprenticeships?</p>
		<p>Live discussion 8 (April 2021): Why might employers be reluctant to establish apprenticeships in their organisations? Understanding barriers to implementation in SMEs</p>
		<p>Webinar 10 (September 2020):</p>

		Role of the chambers (with a focus on SMEs)
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Priority 3: Mobilising local and regional authorities as catalysts for apprenticeships within the local business environment

Local and regional authorities play a central role in fostering and implementing apprenticeships. Their importance has been stressed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent need for prompt and concrete answers to short- and long-term needs. For this reason, EAfA supports these dimensions through a number of activities.

Local approaches

On 11 June 2020, stakeholders from 14 European cities met online to launch the new European Network of Cities4Apprenticeships. The Network of Cities4Apprenticeships is led by the Metropolitan City of Rome, with support from the European Commission within the framework of EAfA. One of the primary goals of the network will be to raise awareness of the potential that cities have to support apprenticeships. Ultimately, through the network, cities will be able to learn from each other, collaborate, develop tools, share good practices, and provide and receive technical and policy assistance.

The renewed EAfA will continue to support the network through the Apprenticeship Support Service, and encourage cities and municipalities to join the network and commit their pledges to the Alliance.

Regional approaches

EAfA cooperates closely with the European Committee of the Regions (CoR), EARLALL, the Basque Government, the Presidency of the EU Council and other regional organisations on the role of regions and cities in delivering high-quality apprenticeships. Together they also organise joint webinars and conferences.

Centres of Vocational Excellence

The initiative on Centres of Vocational Excellence defines a bottom-up approach to excellence, where VET institutions are capable of rapidly adapting skills provision to societal and economic needs through partnerships between employers, education providers and other stakeholders. Together, they co-create 'skills ecosystems' that contribute to regional development, innovation, industrial clusters, smart specialisation strategies and social inclusion, while contributing to 'upward convergence'² of VET in Europe. They operate in a given local context, closely

² CoVEs foster 'upward convergence' by bringing together organisations active in the field of VET, or in the world of work, that are at different stages of development in vocational excellence approaches, and allowing a smooth and effective exchange of expertise and knowledge among those partners.

embedded in local innovation ecosystems, while working with centres in other countries through international collaborative platforms.

So far, 12 platforms of Centres of Vocational Excellence have been selected for funding in 2020. Among them, the project BRIDGES (Blue Region Initiatives for Developing Growth, Employability and Skills in the Farming of Finfish) targets the development of an aquaculture VET and higher VET transnational platform in Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. Together the partners aim to provide flexible responses to the training, innovation and entrepreneurship needs of the finfish industry, with a strong emphasis on the modernisation and digitalisation of work-based learning and apprenticeship systems. The renewed EAfA will initiate cooperation with the CoVEs that focus on apprenticeships in order to mobilise local and regional authorities as catalysts for apprenticeships within the local business environment.

Table 3-3 Priority 3 activities

Priorities	Actions	Activities
3. Mobilising local and regional authorities as catalysts for apprenticeships within the local business environment	Cooperating with the European Committee of the Regions	Events (organised jointly by CoR and EAfA) on the role of regions and cities in delivering high -quality apprenticeships (29 September 2020): The green and digital transitions (26 January 2021): The role of regions and cities – green and digital transitions (23 March 2021): The role of regions and cities (topic TBC)
		Event (November 2020): European network of Cities for Apprenticeships online workshop
		Event (21 January 2020): European network of Cities for Apprenticeships online workshop
		Event (in-person, Brussels) (June 2021): The role of regions and cities in delivering high-quality apprenticeships

		(organised jointly by the CoR and EAfA)
	Supporting the Cities4Apprenticeships	Event (in-person, Spring 2020, Rome): Cities4Apprenticeships
	Cooperating with CoVEs	Encourage pledges from CoVEs and present EAfA in CoVEs' network.

Priority 4: Strengthening social dialogue through a more active involvement of national social partner organisations

Promoting youth employment requires strong cooperation with social partners. European social partners call themselves 'co-founders' of EAfA and have been involved in the Alliance since the launch event in 2013. They have contributed to the success of the Alliance by making valuable contributions in almost all meetings.

In terms of number of pledges, after business (108) and VET providers (68), social partners constitute the third largest stakeholder group with 46 pledges (mainly national trade unions, but also some important national employer organisations, like Confindustria in Italy).

The renewed EAfA will continue to cooperate closely with social partners and request their advice on how to best involve them in the efforts to strengthen the supply, quality, image and mobility of apprenticeships.

Table 3-4 Priority 4 activities

Priorities	Actions	Activities
4. Strengthening social dialogue through a more active involvement of national social partner organisations		Online training module 5 (February 2021): Involvement of social partners at different stages of apprenticeships
		Webinar 11 (25 November 2020): Role of employer organisations

Priority 5: Proactively engaging European sectoral social dialogue committees in apprenticeships, with a view to agree on joint sectoral pledges

So far, we have nine joint sectoral pledges under EAfA in the following sectors: contract catering, commerce, construction, chemicals, education, electricity, food and drink, hospitality and metal. Since there are more than 40 sectoral European social dialogue committees, there is still a huge potential to convince social partners at sectoral level to join EAfA with a joint pledge and to include activities related to apprenticeships in their joint work programme. EAfA will participate in the Liaison Forum and inform about the renewed Alliance and its benefits. It will encourage sectoral social committees to follow the example of the sectors who have already joined the Alliance.

The renewed EAfA will, in particular, engage sectors contributing to a circular economy, the blue economy, sustainable building construction and renovation, agriculture, smart mobility, and energy.

Table 3-5 Priority 5 activities

Priorities	Actions	Activities
5. Proactively engaging European sectoral social dialogue committees in apprenticeships, with a view to agreeing on joint sectoral pledges	Informing European sectoral social partners about the benefits of joint sectoral pledges	Liaison Forum (12 October 2020)
	Initiating pledges from European sectoral social partners	Live discussion 9 (June 2021): Discussions on sector dimension

Priority 6: Supporting the representation of apprentices in Member States by relaunching the European Apprentices Network

The European Apprentices Network is a network of apprentices, youth organisations and other bodies related to apprenticeships at European level. EAN was established in April 2017 to ensure that young apprentices both in secondary and third-level education were shaping the discussion and policymaking related to VET, in particular for apprenticeships. The network benefited from the organisational structures and expertise of the Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU), as well as the institutional and political support from the European Commission.

EAN has set up a new structure to expand its membership, which used to be based on individuals only. So far, EAN has focused a lot on making its structure representative, innovative, inclusive and accountable. The idea is to be a representative voice for institutions and stakeholders at all levels on issues concerning apprenticeships and to:

- support active individual apprentices coming from existing national organisations in developing new structures;
- engage national bodies;
- engage European organisations active in the field of apprenticeships in capacity building and advocacy.

As not all countries have national representation, regional representation may also be a starting point for making the voice of apprentices heard. EAfA will invite representatives from EAN to participate in meetings with local and regional authorities and ecosystems.

Table 3-6 Priority 6 activities

Priorities	Actions	Activities
6. Supporting the representation of apprentices in Member States by relaunching the European Apprentices Network	Reinforcing the European Apprentices Network	Live Discussion 7 (February 2021): What does quality mean in practice? Integrating the apprentice's perspective
		Event (in-person, Barcelona) – Second half 2021 Relaunch of EAN: The Learners' perspective in apprenticeships (in cooperation with Generalitat de Catalunya and Fundación Bertelsmann)
		Webinar 12 (11 December 2020): Rights and protection of apprentices at work

Horizontal issues

The renewed EAfA will continue to address important horizontal issues such as gender, social inclusion, health and safety, and internationalisation of vocational education and training. Given the transversal nature of these topics, they will be integrated and considered in many EAfA activities linked to the six main priorities. However, specific activities have also been foreseen to give them stronger emphasis in the context of EAfA action.

Gender

Gender differences in apprenticeships are substantial, with women being less likely to have a VET degree in most countries, and those who have a VET degree specialising in different fields than men. For example, in 2017 in the EU28, women represented only 13 % of learners in the field of engineering, manufacturing and construction, and 16 % in the field of information and communication technologies. On the other hand, 82 % of learners are women in the field of health and welfare (Eurostat, 2017). Gender imbalances in particular fields or types of programmes can raise equity issues – in an apprenticeship system dominated by the construction sector, the benefits yielded by apprenticeships go disproportionately to men. Policies typically aim to address this in two ways: widening the coverage of programmes (e.g. expanding apprenticeships into traditionally female occupations) and encouraging entry into non-traditional occupations (e.g. women training as electricians).

A similar analysis carried out by Cedefop brought to light that apprentices continued their training at work, particularly in companies providing essential services such as healthcare and food. This is so, as long as health and safety measures are observed. By contrast, apprentices discontinued their company attendance in sectors whose activities were shut down by regulation, such as, in most countries, hospitality, well-being and tourism. Given the high prevalence of women in these sectors, it is estimated that they have been particularly affected.

Table 3-7 Horizontal issues (gender) – activities

Priorities	Actions	Activities
Horizontal issues	Gender	Live discussion 10 (September 2021): Ensuring gender balance in apprenticeships

Social Inclusion

Quality apprenticeships can contribute to fostering active citizenship and social inclusion of socio-economically disadvantaged groups, including migrants and refugees, by integrating people of different social and personal backgrounds into the labour market. It can be a powerful and reliable pathway for people from all kinds of backgrounds to obtain the competencies required to access decent jobs and pursue

rewarding careers. For companies, inclusive apprenticeships enable access to a wider pool of talent and create a positive image of the enterprise.

EaFA will contribute to sharing knowledge on how apprenticeships can be used as a tool for social inclusion.

Table 3-8 Horizontal issues (inclusion) – activities

Priorities	Actions	Activities
Horizontal issues	Inclusion	Live discussion 11 (October 2021): How can apprenticeships be used as a tool for social inclusion?

Internationalisation

Internationalisation of vocational education and training is a strategic orientation included in both the Bordeaux Communiqué (2008) and the Bruges Communiqué (2010). In 2020, it is being reinforced through the proposal for a Council Recommendation on vocational education and training for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience.

Over the years, internationalisation has become an integral part of VET policy at national and regional level and changed the role and nature of VET systems. It has triggered international partnerships, sharing of knowledge and experiences. There have been competitions. Global agendas have been developed, as have curricula and qualification standards. VET should follow the approach 'think global, act local', ensuring that it provides young people and adults with the skills to support regional economic and social development strategies, while at the same time establishing international cooperation networks to share best practices. Work on common challenges can be progressed, such as preparing people with skills for the green and digital transitions, and contributing to social inclusion as well as to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

EaFA members promoting these collaborations as cooperation at international level can speed up the transmission of innovation, creating institutional champions for improved practices across national frontiers. International partnerships can address common problems, leaving space for diverse solutions and showing how VET can collaborate with business, research organisations and economic development organisations.

Table 3-9 Horizontal issues (internationalisation) – activities

Priorities	Actions	Activities
<p>Horizontal issues</p>	<p>Internationalisation</p>	<p>Event (24 September 2020):</p> <p>Webinar with the European Training Foundation (ETF) for Candidate Countries: Key developments on work-based learning since the Riga summit</p> <hr/> <p>ETF regional seminar (September 2021): In-person, Belgrade, TBC</p>