

Online meeting: The impact of COVID-19 on apprenticeships and the role of regions and cities

European Alliance for Apprenticeships & European Committee of the Regions

— 29 September 2020

As the first in a series of three roadmap events leading to a high-level conference on apprenticeships, the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) and the European Commission's European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) organised a joint webinar with the support of the German Presidency of the EU Council, in close cooperation with the European Association of Regional & Local Authorities for lifelong learning (EARLALL), the German delegation at the CoR and the Basque Government. The live-streamed event aimed to highlight regional and local approaches to counteract the negative impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on apprenticeships, and gathered stakeholders including members from the CoR and EAfA, EU-level actors, social partners, representatives from the European Apprentices Network and other relevant stakeholders in the European vocational education and training (VET) sector.



'Apprenticeships are a part of the solution. They are giving young people the opportunity to excel. They are part of lifelong learning paths to up-skill and reskill adults. They are a part of our recovery.'

Apostolos Tzitzikostas, President of the European Committee of the Regions

KEYNOTE PRESENTATION BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

Apostolos Tzitzikostas, President of the European CoR, highlighted that young people are among the hardest hit by the crisis. Decisive action is needed to fight against rising youth unemployment and apprenticeship programmes need to be up-scaled as a part of the response to the economic challenges. Apprenticeships are an invaluable resource to develop the skills and competences needed to ensure a green, digital and balanced recovery throughout all European regions and cities.

Mr Tzitzikostas emphasised the key role of local and regional authorities, finding themselves on the front line delivering education and training in the spirit of the new European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience. Meanwhile, there is urgency to deliver the Next Generation EU recovery plan to support young people in their training and their future. In helping Europe recover, more cooperation and cohesion among European partners will be crucial.

PANEL DISCUSSION ON THE COVID-19 IMPACT AT LOCAL AND REGIONAL LEVELS

The panel discussion moderated by Sandra Parthie, German Economic Institute, explored the current situation at local and regional levels, while reflecting on possible solutions to mitigate apprenticeship disruption across Europe and to ensure recovery from the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis. The panel discussion was followed by a Q&A session.

Kicking off the panel discussion, **Petra Jendrich**, Head of Department, Vocational Schools and Securing the Supply of Skilled Workers, Ministry for Education of Rhineland-Palatinate, highlighted how COVID-19 has brought a new reality into VET with a greater variety of teaching and learning methods. Holding the current EU Council presidency, Germany aims to ensure that recent VET trends, including digitalisation and sustainability, are reflected in the forthcoming Osnabrück declaration to be adopted on 30 November 2020.

'In order for VET to support Europe in times of crisis, collaboration and communication between all actors in the sector must be improved.'

Ms Petra Jendrich, Head of Department, Vocational Schools and Securing the Supply of Skilled Workers, Ministry for Education of Rhineland-Palatinate

Ricardo Lamadrid, Director of Technology and Advanced Training, Department for Education, Basque Government, presented the key challenges faced by the Basque Country due to COVID-19 and pointed out some of the success factors of the regional response. In order to ensure that local training needs continued to be met, support measures for companies and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in particular were developed, necessary materials and resources were made available and a monitoring system adapting the decisions was put in place. The Regional authorities guaranteed the communication and the bridge between VET centers, SMEs and society. The VET centers were central players in replying to the COVID demands by the health sector and the society, boosting quick reactions and reinforcing innovation.

Ultimately, Mr Lamadrid highlighted how collaboration between all stakeholders involved made a difference and ensured the success of the regional action. He reinforced the message that the whole society pursuing together the same goal and with a similar attitude are key to adapt and be resilient.



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Virginia Raggi, Mayor of the Metropolitan City of Rome, presented the Italian capital's response to the COVID-19 crisis. Measures to facilitate a recovery included offering micro-mobility schemes to citizens and providing devices to VET students to enable distance learning. As a concrete policy, Rome initiated the European Cities4Apprenticeships network. It promoted making the hiring of apprentices a social criterion in public procurement processes at metropolitan level. The ultimate aim is to facilitate and smoothen the transition into the labour market for young people and to boost economic recovery. Ms Raggi's intervention further emphasised the urgency for a green transition and that schools are a potential driver of an ecological transformation.

Csaba Borboly, Member of the European CoR (RO/EPP), underlined the great efforts currently being undertaken by regional authorities to support local economies and safeguard jobs. However, Mr Borboly stressed the lack of a level playing field due to regional disparities created by skill gaps and different levels of unemployment. These differences impact the capability of regions to address the challenges posed by the current pandemic. In this context, the European Skills Agenda aims to tackle these regional challenges and to ensure sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience. To successfully implement skill policies on the ground, an integrated, inclusive and European approach is needed, that looks to involve social partners, universities and businesses.



'Greening schools today is an extremely cost-effective measure and can help students stay connected with nature'

Virginia Raggi, Mayor of the Metropolitan City of Rome

MOBILISING LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES AND AN IMPORTANT PLEA

Chiara Riandino, Head of Unit, VET, Apprenticeships and Adult Learning, DG EMPL, European Commission, outlined the severity of the COVID-19 crisis and how it has disrupted the VET sector which, in essence, is based on practical elements and physical presence. Meanwhile, the crisis also brings opportunities in transforming learning opportunities and training systems to become more digital, agile and resilient. A lesson that can be drawn is that in Member States with a high level of digital skills, the impact of COVID-19 has been less severe.

In its response to the current crisis, the Commission aims to put in place measures to help maintain a steady supply of apprenticeships. In addition to a renewed EAfA, the Youth Employment Support Package includes an updated skills agenda for Europe, a reinforced youth guarantee and a proposal for a council recommendation to modernise VET. For these initiatives to be successful, the Commission relies on the close cooperation of regional and local authorities capable of reaching people and creating concrete opportunities.



'We now have access to unprecedented levels of funding and the instruments are in place to allocate them. If I can make a plea – please seize this opportunity and speak to your national coordinators about investing in skills or including skill elements in their recovery plans. There is tremendous untapped potential to kick-start the economy through re- and up-skilling, and to invest in training and education that would make our societies more resilient and inclusive.'

Ms Chiara Riandino, Head of Unit, VET, Apprenticeships and Adult Learning, DG EMPL, European Commission

WHAT IS COMING UP NEXT?

Closing the meeting, **Norbert Schöbel** of the European Commission reminded participants that this event was only the first of a series of meetings focusing on the role of regions and cities. Two more online events and one physical event in Brussels will follow in 2021. Mr Schöbel also reminded participants that the network of Cities4Apprenticeships will organise a number of activities in the coming months to foster the role of cities in boosting apprenticeships across Europe. Finally, an invite was extended to all participants to attend the EAfA European Vocational Skills Week event 9–10 November: *Apprenticeships and the twin green and digital transition: Challenges and opportunities ahead*. Participants are invited to follow the online events of the [European Vocational Skills Week 2020, 09–13 November](#). #DiscoverYourTalent #EUVocationalSkills

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