

# Live Discussion: A focus on EU sectoral dialogue – How sectoral social partners collaborate to promote and develop apprenticeships

European Alliance for Apprenticeships

— 10 November 2021

The 11th Live Discussion hosted by the European Commission's European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) explored the issue of how sectoral social partners collaborate to promote and develop apprenticeships. In this context, panelists across Europe representing officially recognised social partner organisations from the hospitality and construction sectors came together to share how European employers' associations and trade unions within the hospitality and construction sectors address European challenges while promoting vocational education and training (VET) and quality apprenticeships.

## Introduction by the European Commission, DG EMPL

**Norbert Schöbel**, Team Leader within the Vocational Education and Training Unit at DG EMPL, opened the event by stressing the importance of EU sectoral social dialogues and their bipartite committees. According to Article 154 of the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union, these committees formally need to be consulted prior to presenting any legislative proposal on social policy. Social partners have the right to enter into contractual arrangements. Their agreements could be implemented either by national social partners in all Member States or via a legislative proposal adopted by the Council. More broadly, EU sectoral dialogue serve as a forum leading to concrete outputs, such as tools and guidelines disseminated at sectoral level. Norbert further shared that 9 out of 43 of the sectoral social dialogue committees have joined EAfA, including hospitality and construction. Sectoral partners were invited to [join the Alliance](#) via a joint pledge, since the EAfA serves as a platform where the best VET practices in Europe are shared and new partnerships are established.

*'Social partners are key drivers behind European social policy. They are consulted via the EU sectoral social dialogue committees, which represent an important body for EU-wide negotiations and discussion between employers and trade unions at sectoral level.'*

Norbert Schöbel, Team Leader, Vocational Education and Training Unit at DG EMPL, European Commission

## Concrete examples from the EU social dialogues and EAfA sectoral pledges

Opening the Live Discussion, **Kerstin Howald**, Political Secretary at the European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions (EFFAT), provided an overview of EFFAT's initiatives to promote apprenticeships in the hospitality sector. EFFAT and the Association of Hotels, Restaurants, and Cafés (HOTREC) in Europe have agreed to encourage their member organisations to promote apprenticeships through a joint EAfA pledge to enhance the quality and attractiveness of apprenticeships in their sector. This will help to facilitate workers' entry into the labour market and counteract youth unemployment. In terms of positive developments, Kerstin highlighted the European Hospitality and Tourism Skills Passport in 2014, the positive impact of the March 2018 Council Recommendation on Quality Apprenticeships, and implementation of the EAfA Apprenticeship Support Services in 2019 for fostering quality in apprenticeships. **Marta Machado**, Deputy Director General of HOTREC, discussed the advantages of sectoral dialogue meetings and how they provide insight into best practices and support members to develop apprenticeships and other VET opportunities. Through their campaign 'Together for Hospitality', HOTREC aims to mitigate the severe impact of COVID-19 by bringing together sectoral stakeholders and focusing on promoting apprenticeships, lifelong learning, and up- and re-skilling. **Angela Martina**, Italian Entrepreneur and Chairwoman of the Commission for VET at the European Construction Industry Federation (FIEC), presented the 'Construction Blueprint' project. With the overall goal of attracting and retaining young people in the construction sector, this FIEC initiative aims to implement a new strategic and coordinated approach by identifying existing and emerging skills needs in order to translate them into VET curricula and apprenticeship schemes. Another relevant example is the Italian-Spanish project 'Co-Tutor', which aims to improve small and medium-sized enterprises' (SMEs) involvement in VET in

the construction industry by offering training programmes across seven different building schools in the two countries. Finally, **Rolf Gehring**, Political Secretary for Safety and Health at the European Federation of Building and Woodworkers (EFBWW), discussed the benefits of joining EAfA for working on quality criteria for apprenticeships, including using EAfA as a platform and network for communication and cooperation, and a resource hub for VET knowledge. The EAfA pledge and the Pact for Skills represent important starting points for the launch of the new Erasmus for Apprentices, which aims to increase the mobility of apprentices by offering programmes with a duration between six months and a year.



A virtual group photo of the panellists and the Moderator. From the top left: **Jeff Bridgford** (Moderator), **Kerstin Howald**, **Angela Martina**, **Norbert Schöbel** (Chair), **Marta Machado**, **Rolf Gehring**

## Challenges faced by the sectors & making apprenticeships a part of the solution

Both hospitality and construction face significant future challenges. **Marta Machado** stressed that the COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated pre-existing skills-shortages, particularly in terms of digital and green skills in the hospitality and tourism sectors. This can be addressed by updating curricula in close cooperation with social partners, governments, educational establishments, and companies, to reflect business needs as well as technological and societal changes. Another challenge was shared by **Kerstin Howald**, who highlighted the ongoing shift from permanent work contracts to more precarious employment as being detrimental to working conditions and social benefits. **Angela Martina**, from the construction

sector, pointed out that the lack of workers, and specifically of skilled workers, is also a significant challenge in construction. While many companies in the sector are interested in establishing apprenticeship schemes, they (particularly SMEs) often lack the necessary resources and know-how to make the required long-term investments. Rolf Gehring drew attention to traditional challenges faced by construction, including how to make the sector more attractive to young people, and new challenges, such as the unfolding green and digital transitions, and related new forms of employment and technologies. To stand ready, the sector must implement large-scale training measures, and promoting and implementing apprenticeships will be key for reaching young people better.

## The lessons learned

In the final part of the Live Discussion, **Rolf Gehring** discussed the important role of EU social dialogue as a platform not only for social partners, but also for other stakeholders across the VET system, including training institutes and education providers. **Marta Machado** highlighted that strong collective bargaining facilitates positive development of quality apprenticeship schemes, and invited other social partners to be involved in the EAfA and the development of apprenticeship schemes as much as possible. **Kerstin Howald** stressed how important social partners have been in enabling apprenticeship schemes to continue throughout the pandemic by providing frameworks and funding opportunities. Finally, **Angela Martina** talked about the importance of social partners in helping construction companies to identify what green and digital measures are, which ones to go forward with, and how to implement them.

## Conclusion and the upcoming Live Discussion

The Live Discussion addressed how sectoral social partner collaboration contributes to the development of quality apprenticeships across the EU. Numerous tangible examples exist of practical joint initiatives undertaken by the social partners to foster skills and qualifications in the hospitality and construction sectors. These practices are bound by a shared commitment to attract people to and retain them in the respective sector, promote fair working conditions, and include relevant stakeholders.

After hearing the panellists and conclusion of the Live Discussion, the audience were cordially invited to the [EAfA Regional seminar for candidate countries on 19 November](#). Don't miss it!

#ApprenEU

Find more about EAfA's live discussions [here](#)  
Join our LinkedIn group [here](#)

Sign up to receive our quarterly EAfA newsletter [here!](#)