



European Commission

EAFA 10 YEARS

EUROPEAN YEAR OF SKILLS

Celebrating 10 years of EAfA: the EAfA High-Level Event 2023

26-27 June 2023 | Brussels, Belgium



Introduction and Welcome

Joost Korte, Director-General of DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion of the European Commission (DG EMPL), opened the event by reflecting on the significant progress made by the EU since 2013 in lowering the unemployment rate, particularly among young people. He underscored the pivotal role that the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) and the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (EFQEA) have played in helping millions of young individuals acquire skills and secure jobs through high-quality apprenticeships. However, as new challenges arise such as climate change, high living costs, and global competition for talent, Mr. Korte stressed that the Alliance, in particular in the context of the European Year of Skills, remains committed to advancing quality apprenticeships and raising awareness about these pressing issues.

Welcome addresses by the European Social Partners

Ludovic Voet, Confederal Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), opened the session by reiterating that high-quality apprenticeships remain one of the best answers to precarious employment and celebrated the continuous commitment from trade unions and social partners on this topic since 2013. Following suit, **Maxime Cerutti**, Director of Social Affairs at Business Europe, emphasized that a lot has been achieved to make apprenticeships more attractive as an educational offer, thanks to good reforms and initiatives like EAfA. **Valentina Guerra**, Policy Director for Social Affairs and Training at SME United, pointed out that although SMEs initially struggled to view apprenticeships as investments rather than costs, that perspective has shifted. European crafts and SMEs significantly contribute to apprenticeship offerings, which remain an effective means to transfer skills and know-how, and nurture future entrepreneurs. The session concluded with **Guillaume Afellat**, Senior Policy Advisor at SGI Europe, who reminded the strong support provided by social partners for the development of the EFQEA. Mr Afellat also spotlighted the social partners' role in identifying and defining digital and green skills, essential in addressing climate change-related challenges.



Signing Ceremony

Manuela Geleng, Director for Jobs and Skills at DG EMPL, welcomed 20 new members of EAfA and thanked all the 65 EAfA members who have chosen to renew their pledges and the seven governments that have reaffirmed their national commitments. The full list of new pledges and renewals is available [here](#).

Panel 1 - 5th anniversary of the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships

Chiara Rioldino, Head of Unit for Vocational Education and Training at DG EMPL, stressed that, while the EFQEA already significantly contributed to enhancing the quality of apprenticeships, its implementation is still underway and in the future more focus will be put on specific sectors and geographic areas. **Srinivas B. Reddy**, Chief of Skills and Employability at the International Labour Organisation (ILO), presented the recently adopted [ILO recommendation concerning quality apprenticeships](#), which builds on and complements at international level the EFQEA. **Carl Lamote** from the Department of Education and Training in Flanders, Belgium, recalled that the EFQEA was an irreplaceable compass for the apprenticeship system reform process initiated in Flanders in 2015. He also highlighted that sectoral partnerships are the driving force of the system, playing a crucial role in maintaining its quality and success. **Sophie Grenade**, Senior Policy Advisor at IndustriAll, presented the Skills2Power project, which, in line with the EFQEA, brought together social partners and VET providers to enhance skills needs identification at national and regional level, with the EFQEA being regarded as a valuable reference for ensuring quality.

Panel 2 - Apprenticeships as a means to secure skilled employees

Adam Skokan, Event Director at AVRAR, stressed that despite apprenticeships being a solution to address worker shortages, in some Member States, the stigma towards VET still exists and requires additional action to continuously promote their potential to employers, particularly regarding the acquisition of digital skills. **Frédérique Naulette**, Senior HRBP & Youth Lead at Nestlé, conveyed the company's firm conviction towards the potential of apprenticeships, which prompted the launch of several internal initiatives such as the Nestlé Needs Youth Initiative in 2013 and the Alliance for Youth in 2014. She emphasised the essential role that tutors and mentors play in transferring skills to apprentices, beyond mere technical abilities. **Dr. Andrey Girenko**, Consultant at ECoVEM, drew attention to the fact that the Europe's microelectronics sector is falling behind and urged the need for establishing partnerships among businesses, educational institutions, and other stakeholders to develop the skills needed by the sector and essential for the green and digital transition. In this light, promoting gender equality and integrating migrants are key strategies to fill the learner gap in the sector. **Kai Reinartz**, Member of the Federal Youth Committee at DGB Youth, Germany, remarked that while Germany has a strong dual system in place and that apprenticeships are an essential means to a steady supply of necessary skills, one major challenge is to ensure that apprenticeship programmes are able to speedily adapt and meet these needs.

Presentation of EAfA Champions

During the HLE, the five new EAfA champions were presented. These champions are selected EAfA members who have been highly engaged with the Alliance, and they will act as EAfA advocates by sharing the latest EAfA news/updates with their networks.

EAfA / Pact for Skills updates

Diana Spiridon, Team Leader for Adult Skills, Unit B2 at DG EMPL, provided EAfA members with an update on the Pact for Skills that now counts more than 1 500 signatories and eighteen Large-scale Skills Partnerships over fourteen ecosystems. Diana also mentioned that the initiative shares synergies with EAfA, noting that several members of the Alliance are also Pact members, creating new opportunities for cooperation. **Anna Barbieri**, Team Leader for Apprenticeships and Erasmus+, Unit B3 at DG EMPL, highlighted that EAfA is experiencing significant momentum as it reaches its 10th anniversary. For the upcoming year, the Alliance will explore the use of micro-credentials for apprenticeships and focus on digital and green transitions. Additionally, the Alliance is launching a new initiative, the EAfA communities that will bring members together to collaborate on themes they care about.

3rd Panel: Adult apprenticeships

Jürgen Siebel, Executive Director of Cedefop, started by stating that there are 128 million adults in the European workforce in need of upskilling, and apprenticeships are one of the best methods to tackle the upskilling and reskilling challenge. For this reason, the EFQEA should apply to both young and adult apprentices, with flexibility, adaptation, and validation of prior knowledge being crucial for adult apprenticeships. **Lina Konstantinopoulou**, Policy Director at Eurochambres, pointed out that the green and digital transition, along with the pandemic, are driving the need for a more agile workforce and exacerbating skills mismatches. However, the idea that apprenticeships are predominantly for young people still persists among employers and VET providers, creating a major obstacle to their more widespread adoption. **Petri Lempinen**, Director General at the Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland, mentioned that Finland has supported adult apprenticeships since the 1990s, focusing on reskilling and upskilling during the economic recovery. Apprenticeships allow participants to continue earning income while receiving training, making them appealing for both companies and individuals and, in 2021 in Finland, approximately one-third of individuals were engaged in apprenticeship training. **Pilvi Torsti**, Director at the European Training Foundation, concluded the session by mentioning that adult apprenticeships in the Western Balkans, particularly among EU candidate countries, are gaining traction but efforts are still needed to promote awareness that apprenticeship models are also suitable for adults. Furthermore, the definition of "adults" varies widely, making it challenging to generalise their needs and circumstances and adapt apprenticeships accordingly.

4th Panel: Apprentices as agents for a sustainable future

Ben Kinross, European Apprentice Network (EAN), highlighted that actions such as providing structured and democratic spaces for apprentices to discuss challenges in work and education with employers and implementing effective representation structures for apprentices, including workplace representation supported by trade unions, are key for empowering apprentices. **Barbara Archesso**, Project Manager at ENAIP NET / EVTA, explained that through collaborating with local employers who have already focused on green skills, VET providers have the opportunity to then pass this knowledge to companies that have not yet worked on these skills. This was the aim of LIFE Foster project that brought together VET providers, universities, and companies, to develop a systemic approach to training green skills. **Maria-Christina Sørensen**, Senior Learning Partner at Arla, AEDIL, showed that even in industries that value their long-standing traditions, such as the dairy industry, the sector is slowly incorporating sustainability into apprenticeship programmes. Waste reduction is currently a key focus, as even small individual efforts can have a cumulative impact, and frontline workers, including apprentices, are essential for the achievement of sustainability goals. **Ainhoa Rotaetxe Etxebarria**, Training Department at CONFEBASK, concluded the discussion by mentioning that close collaboration between companies and schools, as well as discussions between companies and apprentices, are essential to effectively tackle the twin transition. However, a new paradigm for design and production is still required to fully tackle this topic.

Closing remarks

Lydia Berrocoso Rufo, Head of International Relations for Vocational Training Area at the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, Spain, emphasised that apprenticeships have been at the core of the Spanish VET system reform since 2020, to the point of ensuring that any VET courses included an element of dual education. The clear aim of the reform was to increase the number of students in VET and integrate more businesses, including SMEs, into the VET ecosystem. Ms. Berrocoso Rufo also took the opportunity to stress that the upcoming Spanish Presidency of the Council will prioritize the focus on citizens' welfare, education's contribution to EU autonomy, and promoting EU values, digital competencies, and citizenship.



Manuela Geleng, Director for Jobs and Skills at DG EMPL, closed the event by reaffirming that apprenticeships and work-based learning (WBL) remain high priorities in the EU political agenda. The reason behind this significance lies in their close alignment with the labour market, as apprenticeships and WBL are expected to play a crucial role in managing the green and digital transition successfully. While there is room for improvement, this will be possible only through close collaboration among SMEs, large companies, and social partners. Continuous investments in upskilling and reskilling efforts through apprenticeships are also crucial for both young people and adults. This event was only the beginning, and the visibility and importance of apprenticeships will be further highlighted during the European Year of Skills.

Main takeaways

1

The EU labour market has improved, yet apprenticeships remain crucial in equipping employees with skills for the green and digital transition.

4

Continued efforts are required to improve the governance of apprenticeships and boost their image as a pathway to quality employment, ensure fair wages, and promote inclusivity for groups such as NEETs and migrants.

2

Apprenticeships can effectively upskill and reskill the adult population, aiding in reaching the 60% social target, provided the programs cater to the diverse needs of adults.

5

The European Alliance for Apprenticeships has achieved a lot, with 1 million+ apprenticeships pledged, but its role remains crucial. It welcomed 20 new members and celebrated 65 updated pledges at the event.

3

The European Framework for Effective and Quality Apprenticeships has guided apprenticeship reforms within the EU, and provided inspiration for the new ILO recommendation on apprenticeship standards.