



European
Commission

EAfA 10
YEARS

EUROPEAN
YEAR OF
SKILLS

8th Seminar for EAfA partner countries

European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) –
European Training Foundation (ETF)

11-12 October 2023 | Turin, Italy



DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, of the European Commission and the European Training Foundation (ETF) co-organised a seminar to explore opportunities in developing and implementing apprenticeship systems and schemes in EU Member States and partner countries in the framework of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA). The event provided the opportunity to learn from each other and especially from the Piedmont Region, a leading example in apprenticeships and work-based learning (WBL) in Italy. The seminar featured inspiring panel discussions and three interactive site visits over two days in Turin, Italy, and gathered around 100 participants on-site including a wide range of stakeholders coming from 30 countries¹.

Welcome session and objectives of the seminar

Chiara Riondino, Head of Unit at the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL), opened the seminar by emphasising the importance of exchanging good practices with partner countries to tackle common challenges. Chiara highlighted the European Commission's strong commitment to investing in skills within and beyond the European Year of Skills, which is a key requirement for a successful green and digital transition. As highlighted in the 2023 State of the Union Address by President Ursula Von der Leyen, addressing labour and skills shortages also remains critical.

Pilvi Torsti, Director of ETF, welcomed the participants to this special edition of the seminar for the 10th anniversary of the Alliance, highlighting the importance of ETF and EAfA's common goal of providing more and better apprenticeships and WBL opportunities in EU Member States and partner countries. Pilvi acknowledged both the remarkable progress made in partner countries to promote apprenticeships and develop programmes combining school-based and work-based learning, also through the Youth Guarantee in the EU and selected partner countries. She concluded her remarks by encouraging participants to work together to achieve impactful reforms.

This topic's importance was also highlighted by the commitment of the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU towards skills and education, as stressed by **Lydia Berrocso Rufo**, Head of vocational education and training (VET) International Relations Area at the Spanish Ministry of Education and VET. Lydia presented Spain's key developments in dual learning, including the [2020 Plan for the modernisation of vocational training](#) and the [2022 Organic Law for the Organisation and Integration of VET](#), which transformed the Spanish VET sector.

Lydia's presentation was followed by interventions from European social partners representatives **Agnes Roman**, Senior Policy Coordinator at ETUC and **Robert Plummer**, Senior Adviser at BusinessEurope, who are founding partners of EAfA. Agnes insisted on the importance of social dialogue for apprenticeships, highlighting the milestone reached five years ago with the [Council Recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships](#) (EFQEA); she also stressed the importance of supporting young people and apprentices. Robert acknowledged that employers have a common understanding of the added-value of apprenticeships as an opportunity for companies to grow their own talents. Apprenticeships are crucial for up- and re-skilling in the context of today's skills shortages in the EU and partner countries; adult apprenticeships may positively contribute to re-skilling and are gaining increasing importance.



'If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, let's do it together'

Pilvi Torsti,
Director, ETF

Employment,
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EaFA and latest developments

Beatrice Biolcati Rinaldi, DG EMPL, provided an update on the latest developments and achievements of EaFA. Over the past 10 years, EaFA members have pledged to create over 1.3 million apprenticeships, and the Alliance counts more than 400 pledgers today. She recalled the four new EaFA online Communities established last June² and announced several upcoming webinars and activities, which will take place by the end of 2023. Following her intervention, DG EMPL warmly welcomed Armenia, EaFA's 40th member country, and six newcomers to the Alliance³.



Learn from and exchange with new and old EaFA Members

Two thematic sessions dedicated to the latest developments of new and old EaFA members followed. **Magda Bolotashvili**, Deputy Director General at the Georgian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, discussed the development of 10 sector skills organisations (SSOs) by the Skills Agency Georgia and the three different WBL types existing in Georgia. She highlighted apprentice remuneration and hiring qualified instructors as key challenges for companies, which must be overcome through cooperation with education providers. Participants were then split into two breakout rooms. In the first parallel session, **Olga Kafetzopoulou**, Director for VET & LLL Planning and Development at the Greek Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports, discussed recent developments in adult apprenticeships in Greece. She stressed the usefulness of EaFA membership in promoting national cooperation between the Ministry of Labour, the Public Employment Services and other stakeholders, and in training staff and promoting apprenticeships to future employers. In the other parallel session, **Robert Van Wezel**, Senior Policy Advisor at SBB, gave an overview of the Dutch VET system, where about 28 % of students are enrolled in apprenticeship schemes; the Ministry of Education aims to increase this to 35 % by 2030. He discussed the challenges related to skills needs and shared insights on the quality assurance processes for the accreditation of work placement companies.

WBL and apprenticeships in Italy and Piedmont and the site visits

Raffaella Favro, Piedmont Region, introduced the Italian and Piedmontese apprenticeship system. Cooperating with all relevant stakeholders (i.e. businesses, social partners, VET providers), the region creates and develops educational standards for the dual system, tailors its training offer to adapt to the needs of education providers and enterprises, and simplifies the bureaucracy for companies to implement apprenticeship contracts. In the afternoon participants had the opportunity to visit three vocational training sites in Turin, learning first-hand from concrete initiatives that foster quality apprenticeships and exchange with trainers and learners.

Western Balkans Alliance for WBL

On the second day of the seminar, **Tina Saric**, Director at ERISSE, presented the recent activities of the Western Balkans Alliance for WBL, including the development of regionally based occupational standards and qualifications, guidelines for teachers on environmental, social and gender aspects, and teaching and training material. She stressed the factors that have led to positive results, such as the partnership between VET centres, Chambers of commerce and ERISSE; innovative and flexible approaches; the identification and anticipation of needs; and continuous respect, listening and dialogue with WBL stakeholders.

Thematic sessions: Higher level apprenticeships and in-company trainers

Two thematic panels followed. In the first panel, moderated by **Lisa Rustico**, Human Capital Development Expert at ETF – Work-Based Learning and Country Liaison for North Macedonia, **Matteo Sgarzi**, Head of Mission International Relations at Centre d'études et de recherches sur les qualifications, discussed the challenges of the long standing higher level apprenticeship programmes in France, also in light of the 2018 reform. He flagged the sustainability of the funding system and competition between private and public higher education institutions as key challenges.

ENGIM is a VET provider offering WBL opportunities to young people and adults, and aims to support the transition from school to work. In collaboration with partner companies such as GERLA, a historic pastry shop in Turin, apprentices are trained for qualifications in a given sector within 'company academies' with the objective of being hired in permanent roles.

Piazza dei Mestieri is a foundation with educational purposes, working towards better training and youth access to the labour market. It focuses on social inclusion policies and on the prevention of different kinds of youth disadvantages and early school leaving. It offers various forms of WBL including apprenticeships and on-the-job training to around 550 students aged 14 to 18 who are part of three- or four-year vocational programmes.

Participants learned about a second level specialising master's in *Digitalisation and Autonomous Commercial Vehicles for a Carbon-Free Logistics* organised by the **Turin Polytechnic** in collaboration with **Iveco Group**. They offer higher level apprenticeships where students are hired by the company as apprentices and receive both academic and on-the-job training, focusing on the development of skills for the use of innovative technologies in the automotive sector.

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Tatjana Marinkovic, Professor at the Academy of technical applied studies Belgrade, presented the new higher level apprenticeship programmes in Serbia, stressing the need for more in-company trainers who are able to exchange knowledge with higher education institutions. **Carlo Cavicchioli**, Educational Designer at Piedmont Aerospace Higher Technical Institute (ITS), emphasised the success of higher level apprenticeships in Piedmont, where ITS foundations facilitate training co-design and matching between learners and companies. Finally, a video from **Sigal Korem**, Director at Braude College in Israel, highlighted the National Practical Engineering Training Programme as a good practice in the landscape of apprenticeship for adults' up- and re-skilling.

In the second panel, moderated by **Stefan Thomas**, Senior Human Capital Development Expert – Work-Based Learning and Africa Team at ETF, **Alessandra Biancolini**, Policy Officer at ANPAL, presented QUALIT, a capacity-building project in Italy in cooperation with Germany, that set a system for the development and qualification of in-company trainers for dual programmes; over 300 individuals have been trained and awarded such a qualification in Italy through this project. **Mergim Jahiu**, Senior Advisor at the Swiss Federal University for VET, introduced the Swiss approach where teachers and trainers receive tailored training. **Sara Mandis**, Policy & Research Assistant at the European Apprentices Network, dived into the characteristics of good in-company trainers, stressing their role in providing tailored support, ensuring a healthy work environment and coordinating between education providers and companies. The audience highlighted the need for supporting learners with special needs. Ideas were put forward, such as peer-learning for in-company trainers and discussing issues directly with apprentices and trainers to propose effective solutions.

Concluding remarks

Georgios Zisimos, Head of Policy Advice and EU Programming Unit at ETF, thanked the event participants and organisers. He reaffirmed ETF's commitment to continue working with partner countries as part of its mandate and acknowledged the strong, beneficial international dimension of EAFA inside and outside the EU; he then announced ETF's upcoming work on system overviews for WBL in some enlargement countries. Concluding the seminar, **Chiara Rioldino**, DG EMPL, thanked the participants and ETF for a successful cooperation in the framework of this 8th edition of the EAFA-ETF seminar with partner countries, stressing the call for 'togetherness' in designing and implementing quality apprenticeship schemes, and that further work is needed to simplify the system and offer operational solutions to practical problems. Chiara reminded participants that skills are not a cost but an investment, and that VET helps building a skilled workforce and enhance its employability.



'Skills are gold. They are the most precious resources for our stability, prosperity, and resilience.'

Chiara Rioldino,
Head of Unit, DG EMPL

¹ Participants included governments, business, social partners, chambers, VET providers, regional authorities and apprentices representatives.

² More information on the EAFA Communities is available [here](#).

³ The six new member organisations were Cappadocia Innovation Institute, EEO, European Entrepreneurs CEA-PME, GAN Global, OECON Group and SBB. The full list of new pledges is available [here](#).



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