



Structure and Scope of Digital Skills training programs in vocational and educational training for employment in Europe"

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1. Introduction and European Context

Digitalization has transformed the way we live and work, and its impact on the labor market is profound. In a global environment marked by rapid technological evolution, it is crucial that workers keep their skills up to date and aligned with the demands of the labor market. The European Union (EU) has recognised the importance of this challenge and has put in place a robust regulatory framework to support continuous training and the digitalisation of the workforce



European Qualifications Framework

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is one of the EU's main tools to facilitate the comparability and recognition of qualifications across Europe. The EQF establishes a common reference system that allows Member States to align their national qualifications frameworks, ensuring that competences acquired through lifelong learning are recognised in other European countries. This is essential to promote labour mobility and ensure that European workers can compete in a single market.



European Union

European
Social Fund



**Funded by the
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NextGenerationEU

In addition to the EQF, the European Skills Agenda and the Skills Pact are key policies that guide the EU's efforts to upskill. These initiatives focus on ensuring that all citizens have access to the continuous training needed to stay competitive, with a particular focus on digitalisation and green skills. These policy frameworks are financially supported by the European Social Fund (ESF) and NextGenerationEU, which play a crucial role in the implementation of lifelong learning programmes across the EU.

2. Structure of Continuing Education Programmes in the EU

The structure of continuing education programmes in the EU is robust and designed to be flexible, accessible, and aligned with labour market needs. These programmes are the result of close collaboration between governments, companies, and training providers, which ensures that the skills taught are relevant and respond to current demands.

- **Design and Development of Programmes:**

- **Continuing education programmes are developed based on an exhaustive analysis of the needs of the labor market. This includes identifying the most in-demand skills in strategic sectors such as technology, sustainability, and advanced manufacturing. The programmes are designed to be modular, allowing participants to choose courses that suit their professional and personal needs. This flexibility is key to facilitating the participation of workers of different ages and sectors.**

- **Implementation and Certification:**

- **Programmes are implemented through a network of vocational training centers, universities, and private providers. The certification obtained through these programmes is aligned with the EQF, which facilitates the recognition of competences in all Member States. This is especially important in a labor market where mobility is becoming more common. In addition, many programmes allow for the recognition of prior learning, making it easier to accumulate skills and obtain official qualifications, even for those who have acquired skills informally.**

- **Funding and Support:**

- **Funding for these programmes comes largely from the ESF and NextGenerationEU. The ESF is the EU's main financial instrument to support lifelong learning and employability, funding programmes that align with European priorities, such as social inclusion and digitalisation. NextGenerationEU, meanwhile, is a temporary recovery plan designed to help repair the economic and social damage caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This fund finances specific lifelong learning programmes with a focus on digitalisation and the green transition.**

- **Evaluation and Continuous Improvement:**

- **Continuous evaluation of programmes is crucial to ensure their effectiveness. The results of these evaluations inform the continuous improvement of programmes, ensuring that they remain relevant and effective. In addition, pilot programmes and innovative projects are promoted that explore new ways of providing continuous training, often with the support of European funds.**

3. Profile of Participants

Participants in continuing education programmes in the EU are diverse, reflecting the inclusive nature of these initiatives.

The profile of the students is detailed below according to age, the type of company, and the sectors in which they are involved.

Grouping by Age:

- **Young Adults (18-29 years old):** This group generally includes recent graduates or people with little work experience who are looking to improve their skills to enter the labor market or adapt to a first job. They actively participate in digitalization programs and new technologies. The sectors of greatest interest to this group include ICT (Information and Communication Technologies), digital marketing, and financial and e-commerce services.
- **Adults (30-45 years old):** Professionals with several years of work experience who are looking to update their skills, adapt to new technologies, or prepare for a career change. This group often participates in continuing education programmes offered by their employers, with a focus on sectors such as advanced manufacturing, renewable energy, and project management and leadership.
- **Older Adults (46-65 years old):** Workers with extensive work experience who seek to maintain their employability in a changing work environment or who need to update their digital skills. This group participates in training programmes related to professional retraining and the transition to less physical or more strategic roles, in sectors such as public administration, health and social care, and education and training.

Grouping by Type of Company:

- **Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs):** Employees of SMEs participate in continuous training due to the need to maintain competitiveness against larger companies. These workers often seek training in areas such as process digitization and small business management. Sectors such as retail, tourism and hospitality, and light manufacturing are common among this group.
- **Large Companies:** Professionals in large companies participate in training programmes organized or financed by their employers, with a focus on leadership development, advanced technical skills, and digitalization. These programmes are often part of the company's talent development strategy. Sectors such as the automotive industry, financial services, and ICT are the most representative.
- **Self-employed and Entrepreneurs:** This group includes individuals who are looking to acquire new skills to strengthen their business or adapt to new markets. They participate in continuing education programmes that help them develop entrepreneurial and technological skills, in sectors such as e-commerce, professional services, and innovation and start-ups.

Grouping by Sectors:

- **Technology and Innovation Sectors:** Young and adult professionals who seek to stay at the forefront of new technologies, with high participation in digitalization, cybersecurity, and software development programmes. This group has a prominent presence in sectors such as ICT and technological innovation.
- **Traditional Sectors in Transformation:** Middle-aged workers who need to update their skills to adapt to the digitalization and modernization of their sectors. Sectors such as manufacturing, construction, and transportation and logistics are representative of this group.
- **Services and Administrative Sectors:** Adults of all ages, with a high participation of women, who are looking to improve their administrative, digital and customer service skills. Sectors such as public administration, health and social assistance, and education are common among this group.
- **Green and Sustainable Sectors:** Professionals and technicians seeking to acquire skills in sustainability, renewable energy, and circular economy. Sectors such as renewable energy, waste management, and sustainable agriculture are key in this group.

4. Objectives of Digitalization

The digitalization of the workforce through continuous training has differentiated objectives according to the personal interest of the workers and the interest of the companies.

- **Personal Interest:**

- **For workers, the main objective of digitalization through continuous training is to improve their employability and professional development. Continuous training allows workers to update their digital skills, helping them adapt to rapid technological changes and improve their performance in their current roles. In addition, it prepares them for new job opportunities in emerging sectors. It is also crucial to bridging the digital divide, ensuring that all workers, regardless of age or sector, can fully participate in the digital economy.**

- **Interest of Companies:**

- **For companies, the digitalization of the workforce through continuous training is essential to increase productivity, efficiency and competitiveness. Equipping employees with advanced digital skills allows companies to implement new technologies, optimize processes, and foster innovation. This is particularly important in a global market where adaptability is a determining factor for business success. In addition, continuous training in digital skills allows companies to align with market demands and stay competitive in sectors that are undergoing rapid transformations.**

5. Expected Results

Continuing education programmes are designed to achieve several key outcomes that benefit both individuals and businesses.

- **Improved Employability:**

- **One of the main expected outcomes is a significant improvement in employability. Continuous training allows workers to acquire and update skills that are in high demand in the labour market, which contributes to reducing structural unemployment and improving labour mobility.**

- **Adaptation to Digitalization:**

- **Another expected outcome is the adaptation of the workforce to digitalization. As technology advances, it is essential that workers are equipped with the digital skills needed to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the digital economy. This includes everything from basic digital literacy to advanced skills in areas such as cybersecurity and artificial intelligence.**

- **Social inclusion:**

- **Continuing education programmes also aim to promote social inclusion, especially by bridging the digital divide. Ensuring that all citizens, regardless of age, gender or geographical location, have access to lifelong learning is crucial to ensure full participation in the economy and avoid social exclusion.**

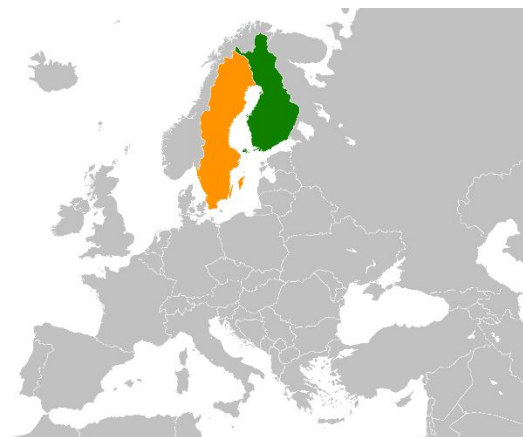
- **Strengthening Economic Competitiveness:**
 - **Strengthening the competitiveness of national and regional economies is another expected outcome. Upskilling the workforce not only increases productivity, but also facilitates the adoption of new technologies and innovative practices, which is essential to staying competitive in a global marketplace.**
- **Support for the Green and Sustainable Transition:**
 - **Finally, continuous training programs support the transition to a greener and more sustainable economy. Equipping workers with skills related to sustainability and renewable energy is critical to addressing environmental challenges and seizing the opportunities arising from the green economy.**

6. Progress by Country

Progress in the implementation of continuing education programmes varies significantly between EU Member States, depending on factors such as investment in education, collaboration across sectors, and the ability to adapt to economic and technological changes.



- **Germany and Austria stand out as leaders in the integration of dual training and digitalisation, with high participation rates in lifelong learning and a strong focus on innovation. These countries have achieved a high level of employment and economic competitiveness, with a workforce that adapts well to technological changes.**



- **Sweden and Finland also show remarkable progress, especially in integrating digital and sustainable skills into lifelong learning. Both countries have a strong focus on innovation and sustainability, which has allowed them to maintain high economic competitiveness and a workforce well adapted to the demands of the future.**



- **Spain and Italy have made significant progress in digitalisation and social inclusion, with the support of European funds such as the ESF and NextGenerationEU. However, these countries still face challenges in terms of regional cohesion and reduced inequalities. In particular, Spain has made progress in reducing unemployment and improving digital skills, but still faces challenges in rural areas and among vulnerable groups.**



- **Greece and Poland are in development phases with a focus on modernization and reducing inequalities. Although both countries show positive progress in improving digital skills, challenges remain in regional cohesion and the integration of traditional sectors into the digital economy.**

7. Conclusion and Final Thoughts

In conclusion, the digitalisation of the workforce through continuous training is a strategic priority for the European Union. Lifelong learning programmes are designed to be inclusive, adaptive, and aligned with labour market needs, ensuring that the European workforce is well equipped to meet future challenges. However, the success of these programs depends on continued collaboration between governments, businesses, and workers, as well as the ability to adapt quickly to technological and economic changes.

As we move forward, it is crucial to continue to evaluate and improve these programmes, ensuring they remain relevant and effective. By doing so, we will not only improve employability and competitiveness, but also contribute to a more sustainable, digital and inclusive European economy. Continuous training is not only a tool for adaptation; it is an investment in the future of the European workforce and in the long-term competitiveness of our economies.



THANKS FOR YOUR ATTENTION

