In her State of the European Union Address on 14 September 2022, the European Commission President von der Leyen identified a “workforce with the right skills” as a crucial factor for the current and future competitiveness of the European social market economy.

Among the head targets of the European Pillar of Social Rights action plan is to achieve that by 2030, at least 78% of the population aged 20 to 64 is in employment and at least 60% of all adults participate in training every year. According to the latest figures from Eurostat, only 37% of adults currently undertake training on a regular basis.

In the context of demographic change reducing the workforce, the demand for both high and low-skilled workers has been growing. In 2021, 28 occupations were classified as having shortages, including the healthcare, hospitality, construction and service sectors, in addition to shortages of IT and security specialists, in particular cybersecurity experts, and workers with science, technology, engineering and mathematics background. The skills gap is particularly visible in digital skills: almost half of the EU population has no or very low level of digital skills and about 70% of businesses report a lack of staff with adequate digital skills as an obstacle to investment.

While education, professional training and lifelong learning are in the competence of EU Member States, the EU plays a role in coordination, guidance, exchange of best practice, data collection and provides significant financial support. The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) remains the main EU funding tool to invest in more and better skills of the workforce, but EU funding for reskilling and upskilling is available through other sources. These include: the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Just Transition Fund (JTF), the InvestEU programme, the Digital Europe Programme, Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, the Programme for Environment and climate action (LIFE), the Modernisation Fund and the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI).

On 12 October 2022, the Commission put forward a proposal for a decision to make 2023 a European Year of skills.

The objective of the initiative is to:

- promote effective and inclusive investment into training and upskilling,
- strengthen skills relevance to match the identified gaps,

- match people’s aspirations and skills-set with labour market opportunities,

- attract people from third countries with the skills needed by the EU and facilitate the recognition of qualifications.

To achieve these objectives, the Commission proposed several types of measures at EU, national, regional or local level, such as conferences, fora, working groups, technical meetings, information and awareness-raising campaigns, dialogue in stakeholder groups, networks and platforms as well as implementing skills intelligence tools and promoting funding opportunities and projects.

Member States will be responsible for the organisation of participation in the Year and are asked to appoint a national coordinator for this purpose.

By 31 December 2024, the Commission is to present a report assessing the initiatives undertaken.

The proposal will now be discussed by the co-legislators in view of an adoption before the end of 2022.

In the European Parliament, the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) takes the lead, with rapporteur Loucas Fourlas (EPP, Cyprus).

The Committee on Culture and Education (CULT) contributed with an opinion on 6/12/2022 to which amendments were tabled on 12/12/2022.

After the vote in the EMPL committee on 6/02/2023, final Proposal for a decision of the European Parliament on a European Year of skills was published by the Council of the EU on 15/02/2023.


The European Parliament’s position adopted at first reading under the ordinary legislative procedure amends the Commission’s proposal as follows:

As proposed by Members, the period from 9 May 2023 to 8 May 2024 will be declared the ‘European Year of Skills’. New types of measures were added by Members to achieve the main objectives of the initiative:

- online and face-to-face conferences;
- initiatives targeting, among others, individuals, employers, in particular SMEs;
- strengthening dialogue with social partners and existing stakeholder groups and networks;
- promoting the development of national, sectoral and company-specific skills strategies and training;
- promoting the implementation of tools and instruments to increase the transparency of qualifications, including those issued outside the EU, and to validate non-formal and informal learning.

Each Member State will designate a national coordinator or coordinating body, in line with national circumstances and practices, with competence in the field of labour policies and skills.

By 31 May 2025, the Commission will present a report on the implementation, results and overall assessment of the initiatives provided for in this Decision and implemented in the Member States and across the Union as a whole.

Further Reading:

- European Commission, Commission kick-starts work on the European Year of Skills, press release, 12 October 2022
- European Commission, Proposal for a decision on a European Year of Skills 2023, COM(2022) 526
- European Commission, The European Pillar of Social Rights action plan, website
- European Commission, The Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI), website
- European Parliament, European Year of Skills 2023, procedure file, 2022/0326(COD)
  - European Parliament, on 30 March 2023 legislative resolution text adopted by Parliament, 1st reading/single reading

For further information: Gundars Romanovskis, Members' Research Service, legislative-train@europarl.europa.eu

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