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# **Making training a reality for quality jobs in European industries**

## **Trade Union Guide**

### **Summary**

## Supporting the right to training

Article 14 of the [Charter of Fundamental Rights](#) of the European Union grants everyone the right to education and to have access to vocational and continuing training.

As stressed in the [Council Recommendation of November 2020](#), continuing vocational training has a key role to play in the upskilling and reskilling of workers and in developing the knowledge, skills and attitudes which are required for them to thrive in their professional, social and personal development.

This right to continuing vocational training is formally recognised in the vast majority of EU Member States and underpinned by legislation in most countries at the national level; or by legislation at the regional level, as for example, in Belgium and Germany. These regulatory frameworks establish the basic conditions which govern workers' entitlement to temporary leave of absence for training purposes and remuneration during the training period.

In Italy, for example,

'Workers, employed and unemployed, have the right to continuing training courses throughout their lives, to increase professional knowledge and skills. The State, the regions and local authorities ensure that a training offer is structured throughout the territory and, where necessary, integrated and accredited .... The training offer must allow for personalised courses, which are certified and recognized as training credits at the national and European levels.

Training can correspond to workers' own choices or be prepared by the company, through corporate or territorial training plans agreed between the social partners'. ([Article 6.1 – leave for continuing training](#)).

In Luxembourg, for example,

'Special leave known as "training leave" is established and intended to enable employees to take part in courses, prepare for and take part in examinations, write dissertations or carry out any other work related to training.

The following may benefit from this leave: employees, normally employed in a workplace located on Luxembourg territory, linked by an employment contract to a legally established company or association and active in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and having a length of service of at least six months with the employer with whom they are in an employment relationship at the time of requesting the leave'. ([Article 234-59 of the Labour Code](#))

In order to gain a better understanding of the extent to which the right to training is underpinned in your own country, please consider the questions in the template **Part 1/Section 1/A –Supporting the right to training** on the following page.

## Engaging in social dialogue on training

The right to training, presented in Part 1/Section 1, offers a basis for a regulatory framework, which in many countries may be complemented by the provisions of social dialogue agreements. The latter may take the form of tri-partite training strategies approved by governments and social partners – trade unions and employers’ organisations, or of bipartite collective agreements negotiated solely by trade unions and employers’ organisations.

In Germany, in 2019,

the government, trade unions and employers’ organisations agreed a [National Skills Strategy](#), which included the following priorities:

- ‘Supporting the transparency of continuing vocational training opportunities and programmes
- Ensuring full-coverage, lifelong guidance and strengthening skills development advisory services, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises
- Reviewing and enhancing the quality and quality assessment of continuing vocational training programmes and products
- Increasing the visibility of and recognising the skills acquired by workers through continuing vocational training
- Developing continuing vocational training qualifications and programmes
- Supporting training staff and equipping them with the skills required for the digital transformation
- Strengthening strategic forecasting and optimising statistics on continuing vocational training’

In Sweden, in 2021,

trade unions and employers’ organisations negotiated a [national intersectoral agreement on skills development in enterprises](#).

They agreed that social partners should jointly contribute to good conditions for all employees to meet new knowledge and qualification requirements. ‘A basis for this is ongoing, systematic and goal-oriented development work that aims to:

- Increase the enterprise’s adaptability to new requirements for improved competitiveness
- Create a profitable business for the enterprise
- Expand employees' versatility and collective skills for improved flexibility and performance
- Strengthen employees' job security, so that employees should be able to have a good working environment and good salary development
- Develop the conditions for equality between women and men in the enterprise’ (Article 1)

This agreement has provided the basis for [labour law reform](#) which was introduced in 2022 and which includes the following:

- ‘The new Transitional Study Grant, which can reach a maximum of 3 EUR per month when combined with public aid and additional supplements, enhances opportunities for transition and skills support. Main agreements significantly bolster support for job-to-job transitions and lifelong learning for employees, offering a crucial benefit for job security by enabling employees to upgrade or re-skill within the labour market. This also benefits companies by fostering a more productive and skilled workforce’.

In Germany, in 2021,

the trade union IG Metall negotiated a framework agreement with the employers’ organisation from the metalworking and electrical sector on the future, competitiveness and employment security. It tackled a series of issues, including the development of employment on the one hand and staffing and qualification planning that aim to secure existing jobs and create new jobs on the other.

There has been a cascading effect, and agreements have been signed at the regional level – for example, in [Bavaria](#), and at the company level – for example, in [Bosch](#), [GKN Automotive](#), [Mahle](#), [Opel](#), [Stabilus](#) and [Till Hydraulik](#).

In Italy, in 2021,

the employer’s organisation and the trade unions in the metalworking industry signed a three-year [sectoral agreement](#) which included a section on continuing vocational training.

‘Workers with at least 5 years of seniority will be able to request, over the entire period of their working life, a period of unpaid leave equal to a maximum of eleven months....in order to complete compulsory schooling, achieve a secondary qualification, university diploma or degree or to participate in training activities other than those implemented or financed by the employer.

The worker must submit a written request to the employer at least 30 days in advance for leave lasting up to 10 days and at least 60 days in advance for leave lasting more than 10 days, specifying the reasons for the request and attaching the relevant documentation’ (Article 9).

At the time of writing, the three Italian trade unions representing workers in the metalworking sector have published a [common negotiating platform](#) which includes a section on training.

In order to gain a better understanding of the extent to which social dialogue can make to the provision of workers’ training, please consider the questions in the template **Part 1/Section 2/A – Engaging in social dialogue on training** on the following page.

## Implementing training policies and programmes

In many countries, trade unions have a statutory right to be involved in the deliberations of sectoral training bodies which are responsible for implementing continuing vocational training policies and programmes.

In Italy,

trade unions and employers' organisations are responsible for managing [Joint Interprofessional Funds for Continuing Training](#), which, in the metalworking sector, have the following functions:

- Promoting and guaranteeing workers access to training, through the reduction or elimination of costs for enterprises
- Promoting the qualification of workers' skills, and providing a greater guarantee of employability
- Promoting the development of enterprises and increasing their competitiveness

In Italy, there are 19 different Joint Interprofessional Funds, which are funded on the basis of 0.30% of the compulsory contribution that employers pay per employee for insurance against involuntary unemployment. The Joint Fund for the manufacturing sector, Fondimpresa, was set up in 2002 on the basis of a [collective agreement](#). According to its latest [Annual Report](#), 48% of enterprises in the industrial sector carried out training activities in 2020. Of these enterprises, 71% provided training activities to update existing staff members' skills and 13% trained staff to perform new tasks.

In the Netherlands,

trade unions and employers' organisations are jointly responsible for managing bipartite Training and Development Funds, better known as [O&O Funds](#). They are 89 in number and have a fundamental role in funding continuing vocational education and training programmes. The training fund for the metalworking industry, [OOM](#), aims to raise the level of craftsmanship in the sector, bringing the prospect of 'lifelong learning' to the attention of approximately 15,000 enterprises and 160,000 employees. OOM is funded on the basis of a social partner agreement which stipulates that enterprises should contribute 0.625% of their payroll costs annually.

In Portugal,

trade unions are represented on [sector consultative bodies](#) which support the work of the National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Training. Their main task is to update the National Qualifications Framework, in the light of the specialised technical knowledge of the skills needs of the sector that they represent. They submit proposals for the inclusion, exclusion and/or changes to qualifications, and they facilitate coordination between different stakeholders in each sector. They cover 18 sectors, including the chemical, metalworking and fashion sectors.

In Spain,

trade unions are represented on sectoral joint committees that have been established through collective agreements, according to the requirements of the 2015 [Law regulating the Vocational Training System in the Workplace](#). These committees are responsible for establishing the guiding criteria and the general priorities of sectoral training programmes (Article 26).

In order to gain a better understanding of the extent to which trade unions are involved in the implementation of training policies and programmes, please consider the questions in the template **Part 1/Section 3/A – Implementing training policies and programmes** on the following page.

## Navigating the conditions for access to training opportunities

As already seen in the previous sections, the conditions for accessing training opportunities vary considerably from one country to another.

Let's take a closer look at one particular case study – France.

In France,

the government, in conjunction with employers' organisations and trade unions, set up a programme [Collective Transitions](#) in 2021, which aims to help employers and workers address changes in work organisation and technological transition. It specifically aims to promote the mobility of workers in vulnerable professions.

To be eligible for retraining, workers must:

1. Be employed – on an indefinite contract, on a fixed term contract, or on an 'interim' contract - in a post which is identified as vulnerable.
2. Be prepared to take up a 'future-proof' occupation, which is defined as a new area of activity or as a profession in demand in sectors that are struggling to recruit.
3. Be supported by a professional development adviser and have the authorisation of the employer.
4. Enrol on a training course which
  - is carried out over a maximum period of two years or 2,400 hours
  - is organised by a registered training organisation
  - leads to a vocational qualification recognised by the State or by a process of validation of knowledge and experience

During the period of training, workers are entitled to:

1. Maintain their employment contract.
2. Be paid, in line with the minimum wage.
3. Be exempt from paying training fees.

In order to gain a better understanding of the types of conditions that may determine workers' access to training, please consider the questions in the template **Part 1/Section 4/A – Navigating the conditions for access to training opportunities** on the following page.

## **Establishing a trade union strategy for training**

In 2023, the Executive Committee of industriAll European Trade Union adopted a document [\*Urgency to invest in workers, training and quality to loosen the tight labour market and meet the shortages\*](#), which included a series of demands for training and employability for future-proof occupational pathways, as follows:

- General demands
- Demands towards policymakers
- Demands towards employers

### **General demands**

- An individual right to training negotiated collectively and preferably guaranteed by collective agreement, to secure access to training for ALL, irrespective of age (young/senior), gender, level of occupation (blue/white collars), type of contract (open-ended, precarious)
- High-quality training leading to qualifications which are validated (quality assurance) and recognised (thanks to a qualification framework comparable between Member States)
- Obligation to elaborate skills forecasts at sectoral/regional levels (e.g., local skills observatories) and at company level (e.g., strategic skills planning, including career guidance)
- Much major public and private investment in vocational education and training (VET). Work-related VET (to adapt to one's occupation) must be cost-free for workers and provided during working hours
- Full involvement of trade unions (and social partners, more broadly) in all skills-related initiatives/strategies designed at company, local, sectoral and national levels
- Flanking industrial and employment policies to secure that re- and up-skilling lead to quality/sustainable jobs in thriving industries

### **Demands towards policymakers**

- Set social conditionalities that link all national and/or EU public funding opportunities and tax incentives to the creation of quality jobs, respect for collective bargaining and for trade union rights and training
- Ensure that all workers have access to education and training, regardless of their age, gender, level of occupation or type of contract
- Develop national, regional and local skills strategies with the full involvement of trade unions, including in the design and implementation of training programmes

- Make full use of all available opportunities of EU funding to step up sustainable public budgets for life-long learning
- Work together with the social partners at all relevant levels to reach the targets of the [European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan](#) by 2030 (at least 60% of all adults should participate in training every year, and at least 80% of those aged 16-74 should have basic digital skills)
- Ensure that social protection systems and employment policies are adequately designed to facilitate job-to-job transitions, including across sectors, by providing adequate schemes, income security, career guidance and care services (in line with the [Council Recommendation on ensuring a fair transition towards climate neutrality](#))
- Fight against labour migration exploitation by ensuring equal treatment for equal work, involvement of trade unions, both in countries of origins and destination at relevant levels, and ensure that minimum requirements and quality standards are imposed on Private Employment Agencies in accordance with [ILO Convention C181](#)
- Secure a clear and comparable system of skills/qualifications recognition to ensure the respect of the principle of equal treatment for migrant workers

## **Demands towards employers**

- Invest in workers, workforce planning and training: offer good-quality jobs and step-up funding and access to on-the-job training
- Ensure all workers are equipped with the skills required to cope with changing industries through good quality, cost-free training during working hours
- Engage in social dialogue and collective bargaining at all company and sectoral levels to ensure skills identification and an adequate training programme for all workers
- Ensure that periods of workload reduction are used for training, especially in anticipation of the twin transition, but also other relevant training
- Ensure the validation of formal and non-formal training through qualifications and concrete forms of compensation
- Engage in reindustrialisation

In order to gain a better understanding of the different ways in which trade unions can establish a strategy for training, please consider the questions in the template **Part 1/Section 5/A – Establishing a trade union strategy for training** on the following page.



## Workplace Level

### Examining existing training support and provision

In certain countries, for example Austria, France and Germany, works councils provide an opportunity to shape workers' training at the workplace.

In Austria,

trade unions are not formally represented on works councils, as members are elected by all employees. However, quite often members are trade union representatives. The rights of the works council with regard to vocational training are underpinned by the [Labour Constitution Act](#).

- The employer must inform the works council about planned measures for in-company vocational training as well as in-company training and retraining
- The works council has the right to make proposals as regards in-company vocational training, training and retraining. The employer is obliged to discuss these proposals with the works council
- The works council has the right to participate in the planning and implementation of in-company vocational training as well as in-company training and retraining measures
- The works council is entitled to take part in all official inspections that affect the planning and implementation of in-company vocational training
- The works council has the right to take part in the administration of company and company-owned training and educational institutions (Article 94)

In countries with no statutory right to consultation at the workplace level, for example in the United Kingdom, trade unions have established other ways of shaping workers' training, through networks of union workplace learning representatives who have certain roles and responsibilities for training.

These roles and responsibilities of the Unite union learning representatives may include:

- Working with other union representatives to raise Unite's profile through learning
- Increasing awareness of the benefits of learning
- Providing advice and guidance on learning to fellow workers
- Ensuring equality in learning
- Identifying and promoting learning opportunities
- Identifying and addressing barriers to learning
- Conducting learning surveys to identify employees' needs and interests
- Forwarding details of course and individual learning outcomes to the Learning Organiser
- Compiling and submitting learning case studies ([ULR Handbook of Unite the Union](#))

With or without statutory institutional support, trade union representatives at the workplace level will need to prepare the ground and gather the evidence so that they are a credible and authoritative interlocutor for the development of workers' training.

## **Identifying workers' training needs and experiences**

In order to negotiate on the behalf of workers, it is obviously essential to know what their training needs are, what training they may have had and what is their opinion as regards their training experience.

Establishing a dialogue on training with workers may not be an easy task. Their experience of formal education may have been a disappointment, and they may not wish to be reminded of these times. Moreover, at a time of considerable change or indeed upheaval, they may not be willing to divulge what they cannot do and do not know.

Contacting workers may also be a challenge. So, it is advisable to develop a survey questionnaire which is simple for workers to use and easy for union workplace representatives to analyse. It should include an invitation for further information and advice which could lead to some form of training guidance. It must, of course, be confidential.

The responses to the survey questionnaire will be central to any negotiation with employers' representatives. Trade union representatives will be the custodians of information that employers will not have. On this basis, they will be able to enter into negotiations with employers on an equal footing.

## **Preparing trade union demands for training**

Part 2/Section 1/A has provided a clearer understanding of the existing provision for training within the company, and Part 2/Section 2/A has provided a clearer understanding of workers' needs and experiences.

This represents an abundance of significant information that can provide the backdrop for trade union demands:

- Is there a workplace agreement as regards training?
- What investment has been made in the past?
- What types of training were on offer?
- Were workers eligible for time off to take up training?
- Were workers remunerated during the training period?
- Were training costs covered by the employer?
- Did the training lead to a recognised qualification?
- Who has benefitted (and importantly, who has not)?
- What was the experience of the beneficiaries?
- What present and future training needs have been identified?

- Who is interested in taking up training?
- What is the motivation for taking up new training opportunities?
- Do workers need counselling and guidance for training?

## **Entering into an agreement with employers**

The previous sections in Part 2 have examined existing training provision, identified training needs and experiences and prepared trade union demands, with the purpose of entering into negotiations with the employer.

The aim of Part 2/Section 4 is to prepare trade union representatives so that they are in a position to negotiate a workplace training agreement.

For this, it will be necessary to determine the aims of a learning agreement which identifies priorities for workers' training, within a broader context regarding enterprise objectives and funding opportunities. The next step would be to establish a series of priorities for training. There would also be a need to design different types of training programmes – their aims and their duration. The learning agreement should include the creation of a joint employer-trade union committee to ensure that the training process is managed effectively and to ensure that workers' interests are protected.

## **Reconnecting with workers**

This Resource Guide has been prepared to enable trade union representatives to advise and support workers, to enter into a dialogue with employers and to negotiate a learning agreement which will make training a reality for quality jobs.

Without the active (and passive) support of workers – before, during and after the negotiation process - this initiative will not succeed, and so it is imperative to keep them fully on board throughout.

As a result, it will be necessary to provide them with regular information as regards:

- Trade union training objectives
- Brief evaluations of the ability to achieve these objectives
- Challenges that were faced and ways in which these challenges were overcome
- Results of the responses to the survey questionnaire and explanations for the different priorities that were established
- Outcomes of the negotiations with the employer and details of the learning agreement
- Content of the new training programme and how it will be implemented