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Fostering and adapting vocational training as a tool for employees' success and a building block for the EU economy in the new industry 4.0

European Parliament resolution of 11 July 2023 on fostering and adapting vocational training as a tool for employees' success and a building block for the EU economy in the new industry 4.0 (2022/2207(INI))

(C/2024/3998)

The European Parliament,

— having regard to Articles 179, 180 and 181 of the Treaty on European Union,

— having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and, in particular, to Articles 6, 9, 41, 153, 162, 165, 166 and 174 thereof,

— having regard to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, in particular, to Articles 14, 15, 23, 25 and 26 thereof,

— having regard to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD),

— having regard to the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDGs 4, 8 and 9,

— having regard to the judgment of the Court of Justice of the European Union of 28 October 2021 in case *BX* v *Unitatea Administrativ Teritorială D*. (C-909-19) ([1]),

— having regard to the European Pillar of Social Rights and, in particular, to principles 1, 3, 4 and 5 thereof,

— having regard to Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 September 2005 on the recognition of professional qualifications ([2]),

— having regard to the Commission communication of 1 July 2020 entitled 'European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience' (COM(2020)0274),

— having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/694 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2021 establishing the Digital Europe Programme and repealing Decision (EU) 2015/2240 ([3]),

— having regard to its resolution of 12 February 2019 on a comprehensive European industrial policy on artificial intelligence and robotics ([4]),

— having regard to its resolution of 16 February 2023 on an EU strategy to boost industrial competitiveness, trade and quality jobs ([5]),

— having regard to the Council conclusions of 9 October 2020 on the Human Rights, Participation and Well-Being of Older Persons in the Era of Digitalisation,

— having regard to the Council recommendation of 24 November 2020 on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience ([6]),

— having regard to the Osnabruck Declaration of 30 November 2020 on vocational and education and training as an enabler of recovery and just transitions to digital and green economies,

([1]) Judgment of the Court of Justice of 28 October 2021, *BX* v *Unitatea Administrativ Teritorială D*., C-909/19, ECLI:EU:C:2021:893.
([2]) OJ L 255, 30.9.2005, p. 22.
([3]) OJ L 166, 11.5.2021, p. 1.
([4]) OJ C 449, 23.12.2020, p. 37.
([5]) Texts adopted, P9_TA(2023)0053.
([6]) OJ C 417, 2.12.2020, p. 1.

— having regard to the Council recommendation of 19 December 2016 on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults ([7]),

— having regard to the Council recommendation of 26 November 2018 on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad ([8]),

— having regard to the Council recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning ([9]),

— having regard to the Commission communication of 9 March 2021 entitled '2030 Digital Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade' (COM(2021)0118),

— having regard to the Commission communication of 19 April 2016 entitled 'Digitising European Industry – Reaping the full benefits of a Digital Single Market' (COM(2016)0180),

— having regard to the Commission communication of 5 May 2021 entitled 'Updating the 2020 New Industrial Strategy: Building a stronger Single Market for Europe's recovery' (COM(2021)0350),

— having regard to the Commission communication of 10 March 2020 entitled 'A New Industrial Strategy for Europe' (COM(2020)0102),

— having regard to the Commission communication of 10 March 2020 entitled 'An SME Strategy for a sustainable and digital Europe' (COM(2020)0103),

— having regard to the Commission communication of 1 July 2020 entitled 'Youth Employment Support: a Bridge to Jobs for the Next Generation' (COM(2020)0276),

— having regard to its resolution of 17 February 2022 on empowering European youth: post-pandemic employment and social recovery ([10]),

— having regard to the Commission communication of 13 September 2017 entitled 'Investing in a smart, innovative and sustainable industry: A renewed EU industrial policy strategy' (COM(2017)0479),

— having regard to the Commission communication of 26 August 2010 entitled 'Digital Agenda for Europe' (COM(2010)0245),

— having regard to the Commission communication of 6 October 2010 entitled 'Europe 2020 Flagship Initiative – Innovation Union' (COM(2010)0546),

— having regard to the Commission communication of 30 September 2020 on achieving the European Education Area by 2025 (COM(2020)0625), and to the accompanying Commission staff working document (SWD(2020)0212),

— having regard to its resolution of 19 May 2022 on establishing the European Education Area by 2025 – micro-credentials, individual learning accounts and learning for a sustainable environment ([11]),

— having regard to the Commission communication of 30 September 2020 entitled 'Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027 – Resetting education and training for the digital age' (COM(2020)0624) and to the accompanying Commission staff working document (SWD(2020)0209),

— having regard to the Commission report entitled 'Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2020: Human capital',

— having regard to the Council conclusions of 8 June 2020 on Reskilling and upskilling as a basis for increasing sustainability and employability, in the context of supporting economic recovery and social cohesion,

([7]) OJ C 484, 24.12.2016, p. 1.
([8]) OJ C 444, 10.12.2018, p. 1.
([9]) OJ C 189, 4.6.2018, p. 1.
([10]) OJ C 342, 6.9.2022, p. 265.
([11]) OJ C 479, 16.12.2022, p. 65.

— having regard to the Council conclusions of 16 June 2020 on countering the COVID-19 crisis in education and training,

— having regard to the European Economic and Social Committee opinion of 13 July 2016 entitled 'Industry 4.0 and digital transformation: Where to go',

— having regard to the European Economic and Social Committee opinion of 7 May 2020 entitled 'Sustainable funding for lifelong learning and development of skills, in the context of a shortage of skilled labour',

— having regard to the European Economic and Social Committee opinion of 15 March 2018 entitled 'Future of work – acquiring of appropriate knowledge and skills to meet the needs of future jobs',

— having regard to the European Economic and Social Committee opinion of 27 April 2023 entitled 'Competence and skill development in a context of the dual green and digital transition',

— having regard to the proposal of 21 April 2021 for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down harmonised rules on artificial intelligence (Artificial Intelligence Act) and amending certain Union legislative acts (COM(2021)0206),

— having regard to Decision (EU) 2023/936 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 May 2023 on a European Year of Skills ([12]),

— having regard to the Declaration of Digital Rights and Principles for the Digital Decade proclaimed on 15 December 2022,

— having regard to the EU Global Gateway Strategy,

— having regard to the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) study of February 2020 entitled 'Empowering adults through upskilling and reskilling pathways',

— having regard to the joint Cedefop and European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) report of 30 March 2023 entitled 'Fostering skills use for sustained business performance: Evidence from the European Company Survey' ([13]),

— having regard to the Council Resolution of 29 November 2021 on a new European agenda for adult learning 2021-2030 ([14]),

— having regard to European Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030,

— having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,

— having regard to the report of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (A9-0232/2023),

A. whereas education, training and skills policies are a competence of the Member States; whereas the EU plays an increasingly important role in supporting, motivating, coordinating and complementing the actions of the Member States;

B. whereas the importance of vocational education and training (VET) and, in particular, the upskilling and reskilling of workers and jobseekers, will further increase, not least as a result of the digital and green transitions; whereas decent working conditions are essential to retain and attract skilled workers; whereas training provided to workers by their employer must not negatively affect workers' remuneration;

C. whereas matching workers' skills and aspirations to the evolving EU labour market's needs is one of the main goals of the EU Year of Skills;

D. whereas among the biggest challenges continuing vocational education and training (CVET) is currently facing is its low attractiveness compared to academic education, a lack of interest among students and a lack of skilled workers;

([12]) OJ L 125, 11.5.2023, p. 1.
([13]) https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/system/files/2023-03/ef21010en.pdf
([14]) OJ C 504, 14.12.2021, p. 9.

E. whereas the digital and green transitions can only become a success if workers are provided with the necessary skills and competences;

F. whereas implementing high-quality CVET might impose a significant financial burden, particularly on micro enterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs);

G. whereas equal access to VET, including upskilling and reskilling, as well as lifelong learning opportunities for all, are crucial;

H. whereas in 2021, 45 % of workers reported having received training paid for by the employer over the past 12 months; whereas this share was lower among young workers, women, and workers on fixed-term and temporary agency contracts, pointing to inequalities in access to training ([15]);

I. whereas in 2021, 9,7 % of 18-24 year-olds in the EU had only completed upper secondary education and were not participating in further education or training; whereas 56 % of Romani people aged 16–24 were not engaged in education, employment or training (NEET) in 2021;

J. whereas, in 2021, the proportion of persons in the EU aged 25 to 64 in education or training was 10,8 %, and the share of people aged 25 to 64 in education and training increased by 1.7 percentage points compared with 2020, and therefore returned to 2019, or pre-COVID-19, levels ([16]);

K. whereas Europe is experiencing shrinking labour markets and by 2030, 40 % of Europeans will be living in regions where the number of jobs is declining ([17]); whereas 77 % of EU companies have reported difficulties in finding workers with the necessary skills; whereas this skills mismatch between workers and jobs in the EU labour market entails significant costs for economies, undertakings and individuals; whereas improving working conditions and job quality factors, such as pay, employee autonomy and work-life balance, in addition to investments in skills and learning at company level, would contribute to reducing labour shortages ([18]);

L. whereas one objective of the European Skills Agenda is to have a participation rate in learning of 50 % among 25-64 year-olds by 2025 (compared to 38 % in 2016); whereas the objective for participation among 16-74 year-olds with at least basic digital skills is 70 % (compared to 56 % in 2019); whereas around 42 % of Europeans lack basic digital skills, including 37 % of those in the workforce; whereas the Union wishes to increase the share of the population with at least basic digital skills to 80 % by 2030;

M. whereas quality VET and lifelong learning are fundamental to achieving the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR); whereas one of the objectives set out in the EPSR Action Plan is to achieve a share of 60 % of adults in training every year and at least 78 % in employment by 2030;

N. whereas the EU's target under the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET2020) for participation in adult learning (15 % in 2020) was not achieved in the previous cycle, particularly for people belonging to vulnerable and marginalised groups and/or with fewer opportunities; whereas older persons are the age group least likely to participate in adult learning; whereas other dimensions of exclusion assessed by Eurostat are gender-related and related to the individual's level of education and active labour market status;

O. whereas inequalities in access to adult learning and VET for workers and job seekers continue to persist; whereas the educational attainment, occupational group, economic sector of activity and size of the establishment co-determine adult participation in VET; whereas the most frequent barriers in access to adult learning are costs, inaccessibility, the lack of care infrastructure, low literacy and low self-esteem; whereas one in three companies that do not organise training cite heavy workloads and lack of time as reasons, while 28 % point to the high cost of continuing vocational training ([19]); whereas both time and cost are major barriers to adult learning from an individual perspective;

([15]) 'Working conditions in the time of COVID-19: Implications for the future', Eurofound, 29 November 2022, available at: https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2022/working-conditions-in-the-time-of-covid-19-implications-for-the-future.

([16]) Eurostat Adult learning statistics, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Adult_learning_statistics.

([17]) McKinsey Global Institute, 'The future of work in Europe: Automation, workforce transitions and the shifting geography of employment', p. iv.

([18]) https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/en/news/2023/skills-alone-will-not-solve-labour-shortages-europe

([19]) Continuing Vocational Training Survey 2015.

P. whereas only 45 % of workers across the Union are able to use their existing knowledge and skills in their primary employment, while for the remainder, part of their knowledge and skills are underutilised ([20]); whereas apart from labour shortages and skill mismatches, difficulties in recruiting skilled workers also reflect the poor quality of jobs available, a lack of people-orientated HR policy and untapped job design opportunities ([21]);

Q. whereas the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which encompasses the full digitalisation of service provision and production processes, is shaping today's labour and education markets and societies, creating both challenges and opportunities for workers and companies such as the disappearance of some tasks and occupations and the creation of others, the dynamic reallocation of job tasks, a redesign of job content; whereas further investment by companies is needed in order to develop strong VET across the Union and to promote competences for working with new technologies, such as smart production and machinery, advanced robotics, cloud computing, artificial intelligence, data processing and the Internet of Things; underlines the importance of accommodating upskilling and reskilling needs on the one hand and tackling the digital divide on the other;

R. whereas the share of employees (11,8 %) and workers (11,5 %) in adult education and training is higher in comparison with the adult population at large, but has shown similar trends in recent years; whereas there are significant differences in this regard between Member States ([22]);

S. whereas Eurostat figures on enterprises in the EU with 10 or more employees (excluding financial sector enterprises) show that 98 % use computers and 97 % have internet access; whereas some 60 % of all people active on the jobs market use computers, laptops, smartphones, tablets or other portable devices at work ([23]);

T. whereas a reduction in the number of medium-skilled, medium-wage jobs can be observed in favour of an increase in low-paid, low-skilled jobs owing to job automation;

U. whereas 21 % of workers in Europe indicate that their primary job functions have changed due to the introduction of new software or hardware ([24]);

V. whereas the 2022 edition of the European Innovation Scoreboard shows improved results in innovation over the years 2015-2022; whereas serious disparities persist between Member States ([25]);

W. whereas three out of four EU companies face difficulties in finding staff with the right skills ([26]); whereas there is an emerging skills gap;

X. whereas transversal skills such as people skills, multilingualism, learning skills, communication, customer handling, problem-solving, critical thinking, entrepreneurship, creativity, intercultural competences, teamwork and digital and media literacy are increasingly considered by employers as crucial for employment; whereas transversal skills have an impact beyond employment and require a shift in the mindset of all VET stakeholders;

Y. whereas the following competences have been identified and agreed by all Member States as key to ensuring a lifelong learning approach: literacy, multilingualism, competences in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), digital competences, personal, social and learning to learn competences, civic competence, intercultural skills a and entrepreneurship; whereas there is a disproportionate lack of women participating in STEM;

Z. whereas between 2020-21 6 in 10 EU+ workers undertook at least one formal or non-formal education and training activity to learn job-related skills ([27]);

([20]) Cedefop, Second European Skills and Jobs Survey.
([21]) https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/3092_en.pdf
([22]) Annexes to the proposal for a joint employment report from the Commission and the Council accompanying the Commission communication of 17 December 2019 on the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2020 (COM(2019)0653), available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52019DC0653&rid=5.
([23]) Eurostat, Digital Economy and Society Database, 2018.
([24]) Eurostat, Digital Economy and Society Database, 2018.
([25]) European Innovation Scoreboard, https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/statistics/performance-indicators/european-innovation-scoreboard_en.
([26]) Cedefop Policy brief, 'Challenging digital myths – First findings from Cedefop's second European skills and jobs survey', https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/9173_en.pdf.
([27]) CEDEFOP, Second European Skills and Job Survey.

AA. whereas the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant negative impact on the systematic implementation of education and training policies; whereas the related crisis has changed the way of work and reinforced the need to update the skills repertoire of the European workforce, particularly in terms of digital skills;

AB. whereas there is a growing demand for digital skills; whereas new digital technologies were introduced in 44 % of workplaces between 2020 and 2021; whereas 4 in 10 adult employees more often used digital technologies to perform some of their work tasks and about one third (36 %) participated in more online than offline job-related learning ([28]); whereas the digital transition towards industry 4.0 requires enhancing basic digital skills for all workers and facilitating the acquisition of more advanced digital skills, while ensuring their proper recognition across the Member States; whereas particular attention has to be paid to the risks and therefore to the provision of skills related to cybersecurity and digital safety;

AC. whereas tasks can be automated in many sectors and to a differing extent, resulting in significant changes in employment, labour productivity, skills requirements and the size of the workforce in the Union, with pronounced regional differences; whereas 35 % of workers fear that new digital technologies can or will perform their job in whole or in part in the future ([29]); whereas 45 % are also concerned about technological skills becoming obsolete and the need to acquire new knowledge and skills; whereas 49 % of the activities that people are paid to do in the global economy have the potential to be automated by adapting currently demonstrated technology ([30]);

AD. whereas one in five adult EU+ workers (and 31 % of those not using digital technology) would benefit from training in the most basic digital skills, i.e. navigating the web; whereas from 70 % to 90 % could be retrained in more advanced database and computer programming skills ([31]);

AE. whereas according to EU targets, 75 % of EU companies should be using cloud computing, AI and big data technologies and more than 90 % of SMEs should reach at least a basic level of digital intensity ([32]);

AF. whereas aligning curricula and people's aspirations with the competences and skills necessary to achieve both personal and professional empowerment and address labour market and societal needs is one of the main challenges for the education systems of the Member States; whereas more than half of children entering primary school will be employed in jobs that do not currently exist;

AG. whereas it is crucial that optimal conditions and incentives are established to enable employers to have access to high-quality VET that will ensure a useful learning experience and the development of a relevant set of skills for employees;

AH. whereas promoting a competence-based learning process could ensure the smooth adaptability of the learning process to the needs of the learners and to fast-paced societal changes;

AI. whereas, over the years, the nature, quality, perception and societal evaluation of VET have evolved thanks, among other things, to campaigns and policies on VET, better career prospects, mobility opportunities and to digital solutions in education; whereas, despite improvements in the status and image of VET, it is still often not a first choice of young people and is seen as a second, less attractive option after general education;

AJ. whereas demographic changes in the Member States have been accelerating and are expected to continue doing so in the coming decades, reinforcing the need to make use of the full potential of all working-age adults through continuous investment in their skills, knowledge and qualifications, as well as putting more people into active employment; whereas companies may experience problems related to the loss of knowledge with the retirement of experienced workers; whereas workplaces and working conditions have to be adapted to the needs of the ageing workforce; whereas it is crucial to foster learning between more and less experienced workers in companies and secure the transfer of knowledge, also between generations, through tutoring, coaching and mentoring programmes;

([28]) https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/9173_en.pdf, p. 9.
([29]) https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/9173_en.pdf, p. 16.
([30]) https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/9173_en.pdf, p. 16.
([31]) https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/9173_en.pdf, p. 14.
([32]) European Commission, Europe's Digital Decade: digital targets for 2030, available at: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/europes-digital-decade-digital-targets-2030_en.

AK. whereas decent working conditions and access to social security systems, quality social services and an attractive living environment will play a prominent role in retaining and attracting skilled workers; whereas strengthening personal development and learning guidance from an early age and supporting equal access to information can help people to choose suitable learning pathways to quality employment opportunities;

AL. whereas demographic changes are ongoing; whereas it is estimated that Europe's working-age population (aged between 20 and 64 years) will decline by 0,4 % every year between now and 2040; whereas the demographic decline is also causing changes in the structure of the labour market and an increasing demand for workers in some sectors, such as the healthcare or care sectors;

AM. whereas 28 sectors were classified as having shortages of a skilled workforce, including healthcare, hospitality, construction, IT services and security; whereas there is a general shortage of workers, in particular women, with STEM backgrounds; whereas teachers are one of the top five occupations with shortages in Europe, with differences based on geographical region and subject, which impacts the capacity to provide the education and training that all learners need in order to adapt to the digital and green transitions and the Fourth Industrial Revolution;

AN. whereas employers' increasing demand for specific skills makes the case for a stronger engagement of companies in VET;

AO. whereas the European Parliament has repeatedly condemned the practice of unpaid traineeships as a form of exploitation of young workers and a violation of their rights;

AP. whereas, as part of the European Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030, the Commission has committed to enabling persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life; whereas it is crucial to provide better opportunities for persons with disabilities to participate in VET and acquire new skills, which is a prerequisite for employment and independence;

1. Highlights the importance of lifelong learning and vocational education and training, including upskilling and reskilling, for harnessing the full potential of individuals, as well as for the sustainable development of the Union, while paying attention to the specific needs of the most vulnerable or disadvantaged groups; reiterates its call on the Commission and the Member States to establish a European Vocational Education and Training Area (EVETA) ([33]);

2. Highlights that employees should have access to vocational training during working hours;

3. Underlines the need to ensure the sustainable and just twin transition of workplaces, while keeping the existing workforce; stresses that employers should provide internal training to workers, while ensuring support measures for persons facing difficulties regarding training;

4. Stresses that each person needs opportunities to develop, update and upgrade their skills in order to keep up with the rapidly changing realities in the world of work and to succeed in their private lives and careers; stresses that this requires a systemic approach to lifelong learning and skills development, supported by accessible, quality and inclusive initial vocational education and training (IVET), as well as well-functioning and modern CVET systems in order to enable all adults to benefit from learning and training opportunities, and to offer support for employers to provide such training; regrets the fact that women are underrepresented in STEM and VET; underlines the importance of increasing support for women's participation in this regard and to tackle any related stereotypes;

5. Underlines the need for the active inclusion of younger and older people in the vocational learning process in order to avoid age discrimination related to skills and vocational training;

([33]) As mentioned in paragraph 32 of Parliament's resolution of 11 November 2021 on the European Education Area: a shared holistic approach (OJ C 205, 20.5.2022, p. 17).

6. Highlights that some of the factors hampering VET at company level are:

— the lack of recognition of VET as a career opportunity and way to improve resilience and excellence;

— employers' belief that the available skills and qualifications of their staff are sufficient and appropriate;

— companies' preference to recruit new staff instead of reskilling and upskilling their existing workforce;

— obstacles to the provision of training, including its affordability, access to training provided by the employer (both in terms of location and timing) and the high workload of undertakings;

— the attempts to shift the responsibility for training from employers to workers;

— age discrimination, such as preventing older workers from participating in training;

— the lack of recognition of the skills acquired beyond the needs of the labour market and for the purpose of the individual worker's development;

7. Highlights the key role of the social partners with regard to VET; stresses the importance of a properly functioning social dialogue and the role of collective agreements in ensuring VET provision to all workers;

8. Recalls that skills and labour shortages are, in some cases, the result of unattractive jobs and poor working conditions; emphasises, therefore, that tackling those issues, by means of decent working conditions and retention policies, is important for a properly functioning future labour market; stresses that improving job quality in sectors and companies with poor working conditions is an important element in addressing the issue of brain drain, which results in growing inequalities between regions, unequal development and an unequal capacity to drive innovation and create jobs;

9. Notes that the acquisition of a range of skills related to the use of basic software or simple computerised machines should be provided and paid for by all employers, as it is the core of the twin transition;

10. Highlights that VET policies remain fragmented at national and Union level; calls on the Commission and the Member States to work towards greater convergence between national systems on the basis of best practices; points out that efficient VET systems require the development of systematic strategies and adequate resources, aligned with skills strategies, developed through social dialogue in order to empower people, help them to make the most of their potential and ensure sustainable economic competitiveness;

11. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to ban the practice of unpaid traineeships and to propose a common legal framework aimed at ensuring fair remuneration for traineeships and for apprenticeships in order to avoid exploitative practices;

12. Highlights the importance of VET for persons with disabilities and learning difficulties; stresses the need to develop strategies and to provide vocational education and training opportunities for all, in particular for NEETs and early school leavers, older workers, adults with a low level of skills and job seekers, as well as people from remote and rural areas and people belonging to marginalised groups who experience institutional, environmental and attitudinal barriers, in order to tackle skills mismatches and labour shortages; underlines that such training opportunities should provide skills for future-oriented jobs, including in the green and digital transitions; calls on the Member States to prioritise the reskilling and upskilling of people in situations of vulnerability in order to facilitate their active participation and integration in the labour market, by, for example, adapting upskilling and reskilling to their capacities and wishes and ensuring tailor-made support; stresses the need to assure support to civil society organisations, as they play a key role in reaching people from diverse backgrounds;

13. Draws attention to the need to provide VET for adults at an individual level, including for low-qualified and low-skilled people, for those who have the least access to training in basic skills and competences, as well as for older people, women, persons with disabilities and those trying to reintegrate into the labour market after long absences caused by, inter alia, chronic or severe health problems, or the need to provide informal care; stresses that appropriate support and incentives should be provided and that VET learning pathways should be flexible, learner centred and outcome oriented; underlines the importance of financial and non-financial support, developing career guidance and VET information campaigns in order to achieve higher and inclusive participation in learning and training opportunities; underlines, in this context, the importance of paid training leave;

14. Reiterates its call on employers to invest in the development of their workers' skills and competences, particularly with regard to the skills and competences needed for the digital and green transitions, as well as transversal soft skills;

15. Points out that undertakings, in particular SMEs, social economy and non-profit organisations, must be extensively involved, encouraged and supported by the European Union to provide learning and training opportunities; calls on the Member States to ensure accessible and inclusive reskilling and upskilling for all, leaving no one behind;

16. Notes that the labour market inclusion of NEETs and other vulnerable groups should become a major focus and cornerstone of high-quality VET, requiring specific transversal skills from teachers and trainers; recalls that transversal skills and competences are increasingly included in the Member States' VET curricula; stresses the need to improve the validation and the formal recognition of skills and competences in cooperation with the social partners, in particular the skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal education and experience, such as long-term care, or volunteering, as well as skills and competences acquired in third countries; stresses the need to improve current and explore other tools for facilitating the recognition of skills and qualifications of third-country nationals; calls for a common recognition framework transversal skills;

17. Underlines the need for a new learning culture oriented towards the development of transversal skills in formal, informal and non-formal learning environments, ensuring that all adults, young adults and young people are empowered for jobs as well as for full participation in society and personal development, in particular through acquiring skills such as customer service, interpersonal skills, including teamwork and communication, problem-solving, management, including time management, critical thinking, learning to learn, sustainability competences and digital skills, including cybersecurity competences;

18. Underlines the importance of workplace-based learning and gaining practical experience; highlights, in this context, examples of best practices related to dual education systems, which combine quality apprenticeships in undertakings with vocational school education, thereby bringing together the world of work with the world of education and giving young people access to the labour market; encourages the Member States to further develop dual education systems; calls, therefore, on companies to pay more attention to the role of VET and lifelong learning; stresses that employers need to dedicate a substantial part of their resources to ensuring that their employees have the necessary skills and competences to be able to work with the latest technologies and in new organisational environments, as well as to prevent digital exclusion; calls, further, on companies to allow for high levels of task discretion and organisational participation of workers, as these forms of work organisation are associated with better access to training and skills development; highlights that employers should strive to create appropriate conditions and a safe space for employees undertaking or wishing to undertake formal or non-formal education and develop their competences; calls on the Member States to pay special attention to SMEs, which find it particularly challenging to meet those needs; stresses that companies, including SMEs, would benefit from structured cooperation with VET experts;

19. Recalls the fundamental role of teachers and trainers who work in parallel in VET institutions and companies, and who can help to tie VET provision more closely to employers' needs by bringing innovation to schools and addressing the shortage of VET teachers; recalls that better cooperation between VET institutions and companies could efficiently address the shortage of VET teachers and bring VET curricula closer to employers' needs; stresses the need for teachers and trainers to acquire new competences by having access to upskilling and reskilling opportunities; underlines that opening the continuous professional development (CPD) courses delivered in VET schools to trainers and, conversely, offering in-company training to VET school teachers, could be mutually beneficial in addressing their needs, while associating them with the design of the curricula; calls on Member States and educational institutions to urgently invest in and elaborate further their CPD strategies for VET teachers and trainers, and provide them with better recognition;

20. Stresses that in order to adequately respond to the needs of transforming industries and the challenges posed by the twin transition, as well as to retain European industry's competitiveness on the global markets, continuous investment in CVET infrastructure, teacher training and quality assurance systems will be necessary;

21. Calls on the Member States and on the regional and local authorities concerned to strengthen measures to fight unemployment, poverty and social exclusion, including through the strengthening of public employment services, the promotion of lifelong learning and dedicated measures focused on professional development;

22. Highlights that education and training, as well as integration into the labour market, are important instruments in combating poverty and inequalities; urges the Commission and the Member States to support measures aimed at disadvantaged and low-skilled groups, with an emphasis on education and training that allow for the development of social, scientific and professional skills, in particular basic digital skills; calls on the Member States and on the regional and local authorities concerned to ensure the diversification of the education and training on offer;

23. Stresses that employers need to foster learning between more and less experienced workers so as to reduce skills differences; recommends, therefore, also in the light of demographic change, the creation of incentives for mentoring in order to allow the sharing of skills and experience, also between generations, to encourage the upgrading of the skills of all workers and to tackle labour shortages and mismatches; underlines the importance of volunteering, which can contribute to counteracting social exclusion;

24. Calls on firms to use methods for predicting the impact of artificial intelligence on jobs, such as supervised machine learning, for the purpose, among other things, of identifying the occupations where changes are most likely and to adapt to them in optimal time;

25. Encourages companies to help workers assume greater responsibility for their careers by pointing out alternative career paths and helping them determine what they should aim for, to suggest the skills required for this and organise appropriate training in this regard; recommends that this offer also be provided for persons undergoing professional and/or industry education (students and trainees) through cooperation between firms and educational establishments;

26. Draws attention to the opportunities and challenges arising from the increasing number of third-country nationals in the EU, as a result, among other things, of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine; underlines the importance of providing support to migrants, asylum seekers and refugees to upskill and reskill and to access quality jobs and information regarding working conditions and social protection; stresses that key measures to make better use of their potential include financing language learning as a basis for communication and work, as well as facilitating recognition and validation of their skills and competences; underlines the crucial role of VET systems and pathways, including upskilling and reskilling, as major tools for the social and economic integration of third-country nationals, asylum seekers, migrants and refugees;

27. Stresses the need for lifelong learning for all persons in society, particularly older persons, allowing them to learn and acquire new skills and to stay physically and mentally active;

28. Stresses the importance of vocational education and the acquisition of new skills and competences, especially those needed for the green and digital transitions; calls on the Member States to develop, in cooperation with VET stakeholders, including social partners and the relevant regional and local authorities, curricula focused on occupations required to adapt to the challenges of the green and digital transitions;

29. Taking into account that promoting the Pact for Skills is one way towards achieving this, calls on the Commission to frame the European Year of Skills 2023 in a holistic and broadly based manner, avoiding the portrayal of education, training and reskilling or upskilling solely as a means to increase competitiveness and employability;

30. Calls on the Commission and the Member States, in cooperation with tripartite advisory bodies and the European Alliance for Apprenticeship, to carry out educational campaigns and activities, including during the European Year of Skills and through events such as EuroSkills, in order to promote the attractiveness of and opportunities offered by quality VET and adult learning, as well as exchange of best practices in this area;

31. Calls on the Member States to simplify administrative procedures related to VET and to provide certain undertakings, such as SMEs and social economy organisations, with assistance, such as consultancy services, to identify training needs and to apply for financial support; points out that where SMEs are not able to offer training courses, organisations such as chambers of craftsmen or chambers of commerce could provide such training; calls on the Commission and the Member States to increase investments in measures aimed at integrating disadvantaged youth and NEETs into the labour market, as well as reducing the school dropout rate, which is particularly prominent among Romani people; calls on the Member States to invest in the health of pupils and students to prevent early school leaving and to support study and career counselling; calls on the Member States to make better use of the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), the Recovery and Resilience Fund and the Just Transition Fund in this context;

32. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to increase investment through the ESF+ to support measures aimed at integrating disadvantaged youth and NEETs into the labour market as well as reducing the school dropout rate;

33. Encourages the Member States, in cooperation with the social partners, to set up a mechanism for certifying undertakings that offer high-quality apprenticeships and training in line with the quality standards of the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeship, so that they can be identified and supported;

34. Highlights the benefits that international mobility provides both for learners and educators in VET, and underlines the need to facilitate permanent mobility schemes, reducing the existing barriers to mobility; recalls that VET participants are eligible for Erasmus+ and underlines that support within this programme should be tailored according to the socio-economic background and needs of participants, also taking into account the cost of living in host Member States; urges, therefore, the Commission and the Member States to use the European Year of Skills to create momentum to further strengthen the vocational learning mobility framework;

35. Stresses that there are both challenges and opportunities related to technological developments, particularly those in the fields of artificial intelligence and virtual reality, which will change the area of VET, also in terms of making training opportunities more accessible and affordable for a greater number of companies and workers; highlights the responsibility of educational institutions and employers to prepare students, apprentices and workers for the presence of artificial intelligence in the workplace and to develop, in particular, critical thinking skills in this regard; underlines the importance of cooperation between educational institutions and employers in order to enhance digital competences and knowledge about tools using artificial intelligence and algorithmic management;

36. Welcomes initiatives that aim to increase participation in education and learning, such as the Council recommendation on individual learning accounts ([34]), and valuable Member State policies, such as remunerated educational leave;

37. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.

([34]) Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on individual learning accounts (OJ C 243, 27.6.2022, p. 26).