



CEDEFOP
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Financing adult learning

The role of public funding

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Round table discussion: Financing adult learning – Vision for the future

Introductory statement: During the last years, we are seeing a significant policy effort at the European level in adult learning area, especially through the Council Recommendation on ILAs, mirroring the ambitious policy targets to increase population-wide adult learning participation rates. The ambition seems to be to increase Member State's public expenditure on adult learning and particularly by providing direct financial support for individuals to undertake learning activities.

Question: How do you see, from the perspective of employees and individuals more generally, the EU policies and initiatives concerning public support for individuals, both horizontal (e.g. ILA), but also those more targeted ones and the available EU financing instruments such as the ESF to enable/co-finance such initiatives? Which are the remaining gaps/shortcomings and what are the blind spots requiring further research or policy action?

Answer (Mario Patuzzi, German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) on behalf of ETUC):

I won't hide the fact that we were very critical of ILA at the beginning. Which is not surprising today. After all, ILA was presented as a kind of bank account for training and CVET. Thus, it must be pointed out again and again that the Council Recommendation on ILA represents a broader approach and that it is about rights and entitlements. It is about strengthening training and CVET for individuals, either employees / workers or citizens and inhabitants in the EU.

These initiatives reflect a commitment to increasing participation in adult learning and addressing the challenges posed by digitalization, decarbonization, and the evolving labour market. The goal of achieving 60% participation in training by 2030 is also important. I would particularly like to emphasise the importance of the right to training as a fundamental principle, aligning with the European Pillar of Social Rights.

The right to training

But what does the right to training actually mean? If you are looking for definitions, you are welcome to look them up in the relevant ETUC position papers. From the perspective of ordinary employees, but also of the unemployed and citizens, the main concerns are updating their skills and competences to make work better and easier, or for reasons like job security, professional development, professional reorientation. To do this, they need enough time, sound financial and enabling non-financial support, and good and quality



assured training opportunities. The way in which they do this can be arranged in different ways. The important thing is that they are given the opportunity and can take advantage of it. That is what the right to training is all about.

Training most often takes place within the company. Many companies do not offer further training (around 40% in Germany as an example). When they offer further training, it is primarily managers who benefit. However, it is also true that many companies, especially SMEs, lack the resources, meaning that there is not only a lack of further training opportunities, but also a lack of capacity for targeted personnel and qualification planning.

To be clear: employers are responsible for employee training. This should take place during working hours and be paid for by the employer. And, of course, employees and their representatives should have a say in what training is necessary. However, we must take care to ensure that public funding is not increasingly used for this purpose. ILA should serve individuals, not companies. Instead, training fund concepts should continue to be promoted. They are a suitable means of mobilising financial and non-financial resources for workplace training.

However, employees are also in a position to decide for themselves which training courses they want to take, especially when it comes to professional development or reorientation. The ILA Recommendation provides important key points for this.

Paid leave is one of them. We know that this is a difficult issue for many, but in view of the future shortage of skilled workers, we need solutions here so that employees can gain further qualifications. It would be helpful if there could be pilot projects at EU level to implement paid leave. In particular, employees in SMEs and micro-enterprises, employees with atypical employment contracts and low-skilled employees, as well as people with deficits in basic skills, should be given special consideration and addressed.

Recommendations

What other recommendations can we make? With regard to research, I also share the view that we already have a lot of data. At least, I can say that for Germany. It is important to make use of this data in a more diverse way and to incorporate it into sustainable monitoring. But what I think is lacking overall is qualitative research. In other words, looking beyond the raw figures and data.

Two other things I want to raise at the end: first, quality assurance, which is crucial for good training provision. Second, social dialogue must also be strengthened. Here, we need to build capacity more than we have had in the past.