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The European Union's encouragement of social dialogue pays dividends for training

The recent joint study by Cedefop and Eurofound, “Contribution of collective bargaining to the development of continuing training” (see link below) - one of the first to address the issue of how social dialogue affects opportunities for continuing training – demonstrates that collective agreements have a largely positive impact on employee training. But it also shows that training provision in small and medium enterprises, and training offered to workers over 45, is still lagging behind.

Cedefop and Eurofound held a joint seminar on 9-10 February at Cedefop's premises in Thessaloniki to discuss the conclusions of the study. The seminar focused on the main question the study set out to answer: whether and under what circumstances collective agreements can lead to more and better continuing training provision.

Pointing to the efficiency of social dialogue in providing continuing training, Cedefop Director Aviana Bulgarelli stressed that the scope of involvement for social partners ranges over all training activities as part of a general lifelong learning strategy, and that such a dialogue is achieved in conditions of mutual trust and consultation, rather than conflict. Ms Bulgarelli **linked social dialogue on training to the necessity of identifying skill needs**, not just in sectors but also at company level; to setting up **systems for the assessment and validation of skills**; and to **ensuring the best possible quality** in a very fragmented training landscape.

Manfred Tessaring, Cedefop's head of research and policy analysis, emphasised the importance of social dialogue in providing the best possible training and retraining under the present economic downturn. **A failure to train people now, he warned, may lead to the long-term unemployment which characterised previous crises.** “We are facing significant challenges”, he said, ‘including climate change, technological advances, increasing skill needs and a demographic downturn - but every challenging situation also creates opportunities: this is where social dialogue can make a significant difference’.

Since the Copenhagen Declaration in 2002, European policy has encouraged social partners to get involved in vocational education and training as a way of ensuring better provision and a better match between skills supplied and skills needed.

Encouraged by European policy, several EU Member States have supported a greater role for social partners in training provision. In France, Italy and Spain, the social partners have concluded **intersectoral agreements** which were then implemented by national laws. In Finland and the UK, the social partners were widely consulted in the preparatory phase of reform in continuing training, while the Dutch and Danish governments have

promoted wide consultation toward an in-depth revision of the entire continuing training system. New **bilateral funds** are also now providing more incentives in countries with a weak tradition of continuing training, such as Italy and Greece.

Cedefop will continue to study the impact of social partner participation in the provision of continuing training through many other projects, such as its **skills forecasts**, its work on the development of **European tools** such as the European Qualifications Framework, and the increased participation of **social partners in the Study Visits Programme** for Lifelong Learning, which is holding a seminar on 26-27 February 2009 on how social partners can help implement European tools in vocational education and training.

For further information:

Seminar: <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/news/default.asp?idnews=4171>

Joint Cedefop-Eurofound study on social dialogue:

<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/upload/etvnews/news/4171-att1-1-ef0914en.pdf>

European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions:

<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/>

About Cedefop

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), an agency of the European Union based in Thessaloniki, Greece, provides support for European policy-making in the field of vocational education and training: **www.cedefop.europa.eu**

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