

Skills for Europe's competitiveness

20th Cedefop Brussels Seminar organised in cooperation with the Cypriot Presidency of the Council of the European Union

CONCEPT NOTE

General information

Organiser	Cedefop
In cooperation with	The Cypriot Presidency of the Council of the EU
Format	Physical
Participant profile	Stakeholders from the Permanent Representations of Member States to the EU, representatives from the European Commission and the European Parliament, European social partners, Brussels-based stakeholders working on skills, employment and competitiveness
Working language	English

POLICY CONTEXT

Over the past decade, the European Union has consistently strengthened its focus on skills as a strategic driver of competitiveness, resilience, and social fairness. Initiatives such as the [2016 European Skills Agenda](#) and the [2020 European Skills Agenda](#), together with their flagship actions like the 2023–2024 [European Year of Skills](#), have contributed to steady progress towards key targets on employment, inclusion, and lifelong learning.

This commitment has been further reinforced by the current European Commission. The 2025 [Competitiveness Compass](#), the EU plan to reignite Europe's economy, identified promoting skills and quality jobs as one of its pillars to drive competitiveness, resilience, and social fairness. In particular, the subsequent [Union of Skills](#) plan aims to improve high-quality education, training, and lifelong learning. One of its cornerstones is to provide people with opportunities to regularly update and learn new skills. Similarly, the 2026 [Council Recommendation on Human Capital](#) aims to tackle labour and skills shortages across the EU.

These actions show that productivity gaps and lagging competitiveness relative to major competitors remain a major concern, as already underlined by the 2024 [Draghi report on EU competitiveness](#). This report identified insufficient technological innovation as the primary cause of low productivity, together with high energy costs and geopolitical and demographic shifts. However, while the relationship between skills and productivity is



widely acknowledged, it does not sufficiently translate into workplace practices and policy design.

Competitiveness increasingly depends not only on what skills individuals possess, but also on how these skills are developed, deployed, and continuously updated within workplaces. Strengthening EU competitiveness therefore requires a coordinated, multi-stakeholder approach that better integrates skills development with organisational practices and innovation strategies. This includes equipping individuals with the skills required for quality jobs, while ensuring targeted upskilling and reskilling in response to technological change. Sustained investment in both initial education and continuous workforce development remains essential to these efforts.

In this context, enhancing workers' problem-solving capabilities through continuous learning, effective use of skills, and improved job quality emerges as a critical pathway to boosting productivity and long-term competitiveness in Europe. Addressing this challenge also requires a better understanding of how workplace environments shape skills demand and utilisation, and how these factors interact with broader economic and technological transformations.

EVENT CONCEPT

Against this backdrop, the 20th Cedefop Brussels Seminar aims to facilitate an in-depth discussion and generate actionable insights on how skills development and workplace learning can contribute more effectively to EU competitiveness and job quality, and inform future policy and stakeholder action in this area.

The seminar will address the following key questions:

- How can workplace skills development translate into both higher job quality and stronger labour market competitiveness?
- To what extent do organisational practices enable or hinder the effective use and development of skills within firms?
- What role does workplace learning play in strengthening the link between technological innovation and productivity gains?
- What policy frameworks are required to strengthen the links between skills development, job quality and competitiveness?

In line with the initiatives promoted by the Cypriot Presidency of the Council of the EU and under the Union of Skills – both of which support fair, inclusive employment and adequate working conditions – the seminar focuses on the intersection of workplace learning and job quality as a key dimension of competitiveness.

Cedefop will contribute evidence-based insights to inform this policy debate, with a particular focus on the drivers of low skills demand and formation, and on how these dynamics can constrain organisational performance and limit competitiveness. The discussion will draw in particular on findings from Cedefop's [European Training and Learning Survey \(ETLS\)](#), the first pan-European survey to map systematically the determinants of learning and skills development in workplaces. The ETLS has provided unique insights into worker participation in learning activities and how skills development is shaped by both individual and workplace characteristics.

Additional evidence from Cedefop's [European Skills and Jobs Surveys \(ESJS\)](#) and [European Company Survey](#) will complement this analysis, offering further insights into job skill requirements, skill mismatch, job design, and employment relationships, as well as the ways in which organisational practices influence the effective use of skills.



2 June 2026



9.30-14.00 CET



Brussels

By bringing together policymakers, social partners, researchers, and practitioners, the seminar will provide a platform for constructive dialogue on how to strengthen EU competitiveness through human-centred technological innovation, more effective skills utilisation, and improved job quality. It will also foster a shared understanding of the conditions under which skills investments can translate into tangible economic and social outcomes.

During the event, Cedefop will unveil the details of the 2026 European Skills and VET Week, which will take place from 13 to 20 November. Through a series of events and activities across Europe, the Week will invite the wider skills and VET community to share insights and discuss how different approaches to upskilling, reskilling, and VET can help the EU remain competitive, economically strong, and strategically independent.



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