

European Trade Union Confederation*
Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe –
UNICE/UEAPME**
European Centre of Enterprises with Public Participation and
of Enterprises of General Economic Interest

14 March 2002

**« FRAMEWORK OF ACTIONS FOR THE LIFELONG DEVELOPMENT OF
COMPETENCIES AND QUALIFICATIONS »**

I. / CHALLENGES

1. The 21st century is beginning with changes, the extent of which it is difficult to assess at present for enterprises and employees, as well as for society as a whole.
2. New information and communication technologies represent one factor in speeding up trade flows. Markets globalise and simultaneously segment in order to retain increasingly mobile customers. Businesses will have to adapt their structures more and more quickly in order to remain competitive. The intensive use of team-work, flattening of hierarchies, devolved responsibilities, as well as greater multi-tasking are leading to the growth of learning organisations. This contrasts with the Taylorist work organisations, which still operate in a number of enterprises in Europe. Public service enterprises are confronted with the same challenges.
3. The ability of organisations to identify key competencies, to mobilise them quickly, to recognise them and to encourage their development for all employees, represents the basis for new competitive strategies. This allows enterprises to keep in line with customer expectations and employees to improve their employability and career prospects.
4. In the context of technological developments and of diversification of work relations and organisations, employees are confronted with greater mobility, internal and external to the enterprise, geographical and occupational, and to the need to maintain and improve competencies and qualifications levels.
5. Against this background of rapid pace of change, the social partners at European level affirm the development of competencies and the acquisition of qualifications as major challenges of lifelong learning.
6. The ageing population and the social expectations, which have resulted from higher levels of education of younger generations require a new way of approaching learning systems, ensuring that there are opportunities for all age groups – both women and men, skilled and unskilled – if significant increases in competencies and qualifications levels are to be achieved. Lifelong learning contributes to the development of an inclusive society and the promotion of equal opportunities.

* The ETUC delegation includes representatives of the Eurocadres/CEC Liaison Committee

** UEAPME - European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

II./ SOCIAL PARTNERS' APPROACH

7. Whilst lifelong learning encompasses all learning activity undertaken throughout life, the focus of this initiative by the European social partners is to:
 - make an effective and specific contribution to the realisation of lifelong learning in the context of the strategic objectives established at the European Councils of Lisbon and Feira on employment, social cohesion and competitiveness;
 - give impetus so that the development of competencies and the acquisition of qualifications are perceived as a shared interest by both enterprises and employees in each Member State;
 - affirm the joint responsibility of social partners at all levels with regard to competencies development and promote their cooperation;
 - acknowledge the broader dimension of the challenge, which calls for a close concertation with public authorities as well as education and training institutions at all levels.

8. In addition to social dialogue, the success of this initiative depends on:
 - each enterprise making the development of its employees' competencies crucial for its success;
 - each employee making her/his own competencies development crucial for the management of her/his working life;
 - the State and local communities fostering learning opportunities in the interest of competitiveness and social cohesion.

9. The social partners call for the creation, within the institutional framework of each Member State, of conditions, which will further encourage the concerted development of competencies and qualifications, in addition to existing unilateral approaches to learning.

10. The lifelong development of competencies depends on the existence of a solid foundation¹, with which individuals are equipped during their initial education.

11. This solid foundation should be jointly defined and updated by the national education systems and the social partners. It is necessary to reflect further on the subject, in order to specify the content and the conditions needed for each young person to obtain this solid foundation. The social partners must be associated with this reflection.

¹ The following elements have been identified as forming part of the solid foundation: reading, writing, numeracy and at least a second language, problem-solving ability, creativity and teamwork, computing skills, ability to communicate, including in a multi-cultural context, and the ability to learn how to learn, etc.

III./ DEFINITIONS

12. For the purpose of this initiative,

- “Competencies” are the knowledge, skills and know-how applied and mastered in a given work situation;
- “Qualifications” are a formal expression of the vocational or professional abilities of the employee. They are recognised at the national or sectoral level.

IV./ FOUR PRIORITIES

13. The social partners assert the principle of shared responsibility of players with regard to four priorities and call for the intensification of dialogue and partnership at the appropriate levels. The social partners believe that the lifelong development of competencies depends on the implementation of the following four priorities:

- identification and anticipation of competencies and qualifications needs;
- recognition and validation of competencies and qualifications;
- information, support and guidance;
- resources.

1. IDENTIFY AND ANTICIPATE THE COMPETENCIES AND THE QUALIFICATIONS NEEDED

14. Identifying competencies and qualifications needs and anticipating their development represents a complex task given the numerous socio-economic factors, which must be taken into consideration, but it is imperative nevertheless. The social partners regard this identification and anticipation as taking place at two levels:

The enterprise level:

15. Identification of competencies at enterprise level must become a main axis of human resources policies covering all employees in enterprises and an issue for in-depth social dialogue:

- responsibility lies at the highest managerial level for deciding the overall competencies development plan necessary for the success of a company's business strategy;
- defining and answering competencies needs require the joint involvement of employers and employees;
- individual competencies development plans jointly elaborated by the employer and the employee are important to foster joint efforts to develop the employee's competencies;
- developing a learning environment is also important for success; professionals and managers play a crucial role in this respect.

The national and/or sectoral level:

16. The collective analysis of competencies needs and of the development of vocational or professional qualifications is a priority in relation to what is at stake for:

- young people in the context of their career guidance and integration into working life;
- employees in the management of their careers and their capacity to remain in employment;
- job-seekers, in view of the developments on the labour market;
- companies, in terms of their competitiveness.

17. In order to put this identification and anticipation into practice, the European social partners consider it necessary to:

- work in partnerships with education and training providers at all levels;
- develop networks to collect information and exchange experiences, including by making effective use of existing European instruments such as the European monitoring centre for change or Cedefop.

2. RECOGNISE AND VALIDATE COMPETENCIES AND QUALIFICATIONS

18. The European social partners regard the recognition and validation of competencies as essential, in order that:

- each employee is aware of and encouraged to develop her/his competencies in the course of her/his occupational life;
- each enterprise has the tools to better identify and manage the competencies in the company.

19. The social partners consider it necessary to deepen dialogue with the aim of improving transparency and transferability, both for the employee and for the enterprise, in order to facilitate geographical and occupational mobility and to increase the efficiency of labour markets:

- by promoting the development of means of recognition and validation of competencies;
- by providing a system for transferable qualifications;
- by identifying the possible links and complementarities with recognised diplomas.

20. At European level, social partners will contribute to on going discussions on transparency and recognition of competencies and qualifications.

3. INFORMING, SUPPORTING AND PROVIDING GUIDANCE

21. In order that both employees and enterprises can pursue a strategy for competencies development, it is necessary:

- to enable each employee and each enterprise to access all the necessary information and advice;
- to provide SMEs with suitable information and to assist their managers through the creation of customised support.

With this aim in mind, the social partners call for:

- the development of facilities allowing employees and enterprises to be supported in their choices of learning, and to tailor the content according to competencies they have already developed, for example through a one-stop-shop facility in Member States, including a database on lifelong learning possibilities and opportunities for career evaluation;
- these facilities to be easily accessible and relevant with regard to labour market developments.

22. To promote a lifelong learning culture, both trade union and employer organisations have a key role to play in informing, supporting and advising their members and need to develop in house expertise to perform this role.

4. MOBILISING RESOURCES

23. Mobilising resources for the lifelong development of competencies is a key question, which cannot be regarded as depending exclusively on social partners. Other players have also an important role, notably:

- public authorities in order to promote labour market integration;
- the enterprise in order to develop its key competencies;
- the employee in order to play a part in her/his own development.

All players (enterprises, employees, public authorities, social partners) need to seek new and diversified sources of financing.

24. As regards the social partners, they consider the lifelong development of competencies as a priority and assert the principle of shared responsibility for mobilising and optimising resources. The social partners want to promote co-investment and to encourage new ways of resourcing lifelong learning, through the effective and creative management of funding, time and human resources.

25. They call upon the whole range of players in this effort and advocate that it should operate in the following directions:

- to promote exchanges between national social partners and public authorities within Member States, with the aim of ensuring that the taxation of

enterprises and individuals encourages investment in competencies development activities;

- to direct the use of structural funds, and particularly the European Social Fund, towards giving a stronger encouragement to social partners to develop initiatives and innovations.

V./ ACTIONS AND FOLLOW-UP

26. The member organisations of UNICE/UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC² will promote this framework in Member States at all appropriate levels taking account of national practices. Meetings can be organised at national level for presentation of this document. Given the interest of the matter under consideration, the social partners also decide to transmit this document to all interested players at European and national levels.
27. The social partners will draw up an annual report on the national actions carried out on the four priorities identified.
28. After three annual reports, the social partners will evaluate the impact on both companies and workers. This evaluation can lead to an update of the priorities identified. The ad hoc group on Education and Training will be entrusted with this evaluation, which will be presented in March 2006.
29. When preparing the structured work programme of the social dialogue, the social partners will take account of this framework of actions.

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