

Boosting continuing vocational education & training in the MET industries

An industriAll Europe & Ceemet joint position

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Re- and upskilling adult workers: the skills challenge in the MET industries

The metal, engineering and technology-based [MET] industries are confronted with one of the greatest skills challenges in modern times. Ceemet and industriAll Europe both strongly believe that robust MET industries rely on a skilled workforce and that vocational education and training is a shared responsibility between employers, workers and public authorities. With millions of European MET jobs being about to be transformed and long-standing skills shortages (e.g. engineers, welders, ICT experts, highly skilled experts) still unsolved, the reskilling and upskilling of workers through continuing vocational education and training [CVET] all along their career must urgently be stepped up for all.

Throughout Europe, the twin green and digital transitions, which the COVID-19 crisis has further accelerated, are placing MET companies and workers before a change of a never-before-seen pace and scale. The challenge might even be much greater for those MET sectors hit exceptionally hard by the pandemic and at the same time by structural change (automotive, aerospace and others) along their supply chain. If not properly anticipated and managed, the transformation of the MET industries could lead to such a disruption in companies and jobs that strategic know-how is at risk of being lost. This cannot be an option. And yet, despite the massive need for re- and upskilling, only a minority of adult workers engage in training. For example, in the EU, 10.8% of adults participated in lifelong learning in 2019¹: a figure which has barely changed in the past 15 years, and which even dropped to 9.2% in 2020². Moreover, this overall figure hides major discrepancies, as CVET failed to benefit those most in need, be it vulnerable workers or SMEs. Even if MET industries perform above this average³, upskilling and reskilling of workers through CVET must be boosted.

The EU set ambitious targets to remedy an otherwise likely growing skills gap. By 2025, 50% of the adult population (25-64 years) should participate in learning every year (according to the [2020 New Skills Agenda](#)). The aim is to raise this figure to at least 60% of all adults by 2030 (according to the [2017 European Pillar of Social Rights](#)). Unprecedented efforts have been made to increase the

¹ Note: on-the-job learning is also part of life-long-learning and may not be reflected in the statistics.

² See [Eurostat's adult learning statistics](#) and the [European Commission's communication on the European Education Area](#).

³ MET companies and workers have been using CVET for decades

opportunities and amount of EU funding available for skills development across Europe, through the ESF+, Erasmus+, NextGenerationEU programmes, as well as the Recovery and Resilience Facility.

IndustriAll Europe and Ceemet welcome these new EU initiatives, as CVET is instrumental to ensure a high level of employability and enable companies to remain innovative, competitive and fit for the future. Quality CVET throughout the career fosters future-proof occupational pathways and job-to-job transitions, and hence maintains the necessary skills base in the MET industries. However, these initiatives are at risk of falling short of their objectives should they not be accompanied by three elements, which industriAll Europe and Ceemet see as priorities: 1/ an enabling framework, 2/ strategic skills policies and 3/ attractive and quality training all along the career.

Priority #1: An enabling framework to support CVET for all

First and foremost, social partners should be actively involved in the **governance of education-and training systems** that are fully in line with national systems. As they are best placed to know workers' and companies' needs, the MET social partners at the national, regional and local levels must be able to play a role in the design of the occupational profile and corresponding development of courses, training programmes and curricula, to ensure that the needs of our fast-moving sector are met. The recent CVET platform in the MET Italian industry is a good example.

Sectoral social dialogue is also a key instrument to facilitate the exchange of information and best practices at all levels.

Funding efforts will however be useless if access to training is not ultimately facilitated for each and every worker in all of the MET companies. Both employers and workers are committed to upskilling and reskilling. Job-related CVET is a shared responsibility between employers and workers. Public authorities should support SMEs to develop the right skilling initiatives. Individual workers have a responsibility to take up training to further develop their skills and competences, whereas employers have a responsibility to invest in the upskilling and reskilling of their workforce. Specific support and adapted measures for SMEs and vulnerable workers most in need of training – many of whom have been hit hard by the COVID-19 crisis and still remain in a very uncertain situation – should be deployed for the EU training targets to be met.

Indeed, while employers and employees bear the main burden of financing, sustainable investment in and funding of future-proof CVET systems must be stepped up. In this vein, the different available EU funds, including parts of the Recovery and Resilience Facility targeted for skills development, must be seized by all countries as an opportunity to address the re- and upskilling challenge coming, among other things, from the green and digital transition. A broader debate about how to direct substantial budgets for the needed (re-)training of millions of workers must take place at the earliest convenience between public authorities and social partners at all relevant levels. Social partners should thus be involved in the discussions and deployment of the national recovery plans in the skills area.

CVET initiatives are successful when they lead to quality jobs in thriving industries. We need a strong industrial base and manufacturing sector in Europe to offer favourable employment prospects which

attract skilled workers and offer incentives for upskilling and retraining efforts. **Flanking industrial and employment policies are therefore needed as much as skills policies.**

Priority #2: National, sectoral and company skills policies of a strategic nature

Devising skills policies which can genuinely support the MET industries also requires a strong connection with sectors' and companies' needs. Skills intelligence – that is the anticipation of skills requirement – has become a prerequisite step involving social partners at all levels: in companies; at the local/regional/national level, especially in relation to the smart specialisation strategies; and at the European level, as fostered by EU-supported sectoral partnerships (such as the blueprint for sectoral cooperation on skills, or the pacts or skills of which industriAll Europe and Ceemet are a partner). Here too, particular attention must be paid to SMEs which often do not have the same resources as large companies to carry out forward-looking strategic skills planning.

Devising skills policies which can genuinely support the MET industries equally requires a strong connection with workers' needs. Individual counselling and career guidance are instrumental in incentivising workers to take on learning activities, as they decide about a tailor-made competence development cycle that will lead to a quality job. Indeed, social partners play a key role in awareness-raising of the value of training, as well as in counselling, advice, and career guidance of workers, in particular targeting low-skilled workers.

A regular assessment of a worker's existing skills set, as part of a competence development approach to lifelong learning, is also relevant to identify future skills needs of MET companies. Organising the assessment of workers' acquired competences is therefore a preliminary step, which entails the urgent improvement of the recognition of on-the-job learning and the validation of formal and non-formal training.

Ceemet and industriAll Europe have long been arguing that VET, including VET targeting adult workers at different stages of their career, can only be enhanced by **a close cooperation between VET providers and the industry.** Such a partnership can secure that CVET systems become more responsive, as flexible and quick-to-adapt training programmes that respond to labour market needs can be elaborated in a joint manner. VET providers can also greatly benefit from a closer connection with the MET workplaces, including social partners at all levels, because they provide them and their trainees with a unique access to up-to-date technologies and contribute to the upskilling of their own trainers. Ceemet and industriAll Europe therefore welcome initiatives aimed at fostering that cooperation, such as the European platforms of Centres of Vocational Excellence, which help pool the resources and know-how among companies and VET providers of a same sector.

Priority #3: Combining attractive and quality training

Improving the attractiveness of VET, especially towards adult workers, has always been a priority for industriAll Europe and Ceemet. **Innovative and flexible ways of delivering training in companies must be further developed,** as they help incentivise workers to engage in learning activities and turn companies into lifelong learning environments. Creative training formats, such as adult apprenticeships, e-learning, blended learning, training split into training modules, or delivered in

languages other than the national language(s), can meaningfully complement more traditional learning. Short-time working schemes, where applicable, can also be usefully combined with time spent in training for upskilling. Initial VET, continuing VET, as well as higher education, should all be seen as part of a single ensemble of training pathways which work together, that trainees can easily jump to and from. Permeability between CVET and higher education must thus be improved and bridges built between training programmes.

In this context, support for SMEs and their workers to develop attractive CVET, including the right-skilling initiatives, should also be deployed.

Developing attractive ways of delivering training must not be carried out at the expense of training quality. CVET should thus focus on the learning outcomes and, whenever possible, lead to a full qualification recognised through the **certification of acquired skills using transparent and clear recognition systems which allow comparability**.

The demand for basic, intermediate and advanced digital and green skills is skyrocketing as it follows the acceleration of the twin green and digital transitions. The need for transversal soft skills, such as analytical thinking, teamwork, innovative spirit and the ability to learn, for instance, should however not be overlooked, as they are needed as much as technical skills. .

From 'Sunday speeches' to reality: industriAll Europe and Ceemet's implementation roadmap

How to turn industriAll Europe and Ceemet's key principles into reality? Skills development is a shared responsibility between employers, workers and their trade unions and governments. If workers and companies does not possess the right set of skills, both competitiveness and social cohesion are at risk. Ceemet and industriAll Europe therefore:

- **Call on policymakers to** place future-proof CVET high on their recovery agendas and dedicate the corresponding funding to part of their national skills strategies. Member States must significantly increase their financial investment in CVET, making use of all possible EU instruments. Social partners must be fully involved all along the process, including when discussing the 'skills chapter' of national recovery strategies. Social partners' involvement means genuine dialogue before final decisions are made, i.e. going beyond consultation only.
- **Recommend social partners to** promote, within the scope of their responsibilities, CVET, including at company level. A joint effort must be made to improve the information to workers about the training offer and provide them with career guidance. Social partners are encouraged to make the most of collective bargaining and social dialogue on employment and skills planning and the corresponding training policies. CVET should be seen as a shared responsibility.
- **Commit to** fully engage in EU-level initiatives. Ceemet and industriAll Europe, and their members, are already taking part in several blueprints for the sectoral cooperation on skills (automotive and upcoming project on mobility) and sectoral pacts for skills (automotive and aerospace industries). Ceemet and industriAll Europe will continue to seize the opportunities to make the voice of the MET social partners heard in future EU debates on CVET.

IndustriAll Europe, Ceemet, and the respective trade unions and employers' organisations at national level, confirm their willingness to take on the challenge of adult learning and CVET to secure the future of robust MET industries.

ABOUT

[Ceemet](#)

The **Council of European Employers of the Metal, Engineering and Technology-based industries** is the European employers' organisation representing the interests of the metal, engineering and technology-based industries. Through its national member organisations, it represents 200 000 companies across Europe. The vast majority of these are SMEs, providing over 35 million jobs of direct and indirect employment.



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[IndustriAll European Trade Union](#)

IndustriAll European Trade Union is the voice of 7 million working men and women across supply chains in manufacturing, mining and energy sectors across Europe. We aim to protect and advance the rights of the workers.



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