BUSINESSEUROPE

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Lessons drawn by BusinessEurope from the Deloitte study on Access to Skills

Access to skills is a major concern for European employers and an increasingly important factor for Europe's competitiveness. Companies across sectors face difficulties in recruiting the talent needed to respond to technological, environmental, demographic and organisational change. The Deloitte Study on Access to Skills points to the need for better coordination between existing skills initiatives at European, national and sectoral levels. Lifelong learning should also be organised in ways that reflect working realities.

BusinessEurope publishes today the findings of a study on "Access to Skills" which was conducted by Deloitte. The study was commissioned as part of a project carried out by BusinessEurope and involved several EU sectoral organisations with financial support from the European Union.

The objective of the Study has been to provide **systematic knowledge on employers' challenges with skills access**, expertise on solutions developed to address skills shortages and mismatches, and possible further action at EU and national level to improve access to skills and talent, including through social dialogue. It also examines the role of social partners and social dialogue in developing and implementing effective responses to these challenges.

The study goes beyond documenting challenges, policies and practices. Its primary purpose is to produce actionable evidence on how skills systems, education, training and labour market policies can better respond to employers' needs, thus contributing to enhancing competitiveness, economic growth and employment. Through extensive consultation with national employer federations, European sectoral organisations, and companies, it identifies the barriers that limit access to skills and highlight effective approaches that can inspire reforms or be scaled across Europe.

Specifically, the study analyses:

- **Effective solutions and approaches to improve employers' access to skills**: In relation to education and training systems, these solutions include swifter procedures to build up and update curricula, qualifications and training solutions. In relation to skills mobility, faster procedures to identify and recognise qualifications.

- **Understanding how to mobilise EU resources**: The analysis of best practices and solutions considers the use of EU funding and support tools, aiming to help employers access and make use of EU funds.

- **National and EU sectoral best practice examples**: The study provides evidence on how a more coordinated and efficient skills landscape could be built, based on proven successful examples and maintaining the primacy of national competences in the field of skills training. The analysis of best practices has helped to build solutions, considering the diverse industrial relations, education and training contexts.

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- **Progress in the provision of skills required by education and training systems:** Examples analysed have included initiatives and practices providing a good sample to understand skills systems dynamics at national and sectoral level, including the overall challenge of improving the responsiveness of curricula to changing job content. This includes the capacity of well-designed EU sectoral initiatives to respond rapidly to emerging skills needs, as well as the use of targeted occupational profiles and modular curricula to make training more relevant to labour-market needs.

Lessons learnt

The evidence gathered through the national consultations, sectoral analysis and company survey points to a **diverse training landscape** concerning the provision of training**:** Provision involves vocational education and training (VET) and higher education institutions, adult learning centres, public employment services, private providers, sectoral organisations and companies themselves. It also covers a broad range of work-based learning, from informal on-the-job learning and peer support to apprenticeships, and structured workplace training. In several sectors, employers are directly involved in shaping or delivering training through partnerships, internal academies and sector-specific training centres.

Training provision remains uneven across sectors, regions and company sizes: sectoral evidence highlights particular constraints where provision requires specialised infrastructure, up-to-date equipment or highly qualified trainers. For companies the main barriers to organising training are practical rather than purely financial. Workload and lack of time were by far the most frequently ranked as the main barrier, followed by limited capacity to organise or provide training and high training costs or lack of resources. Suitable provision may exist, but companies still struggle to fit training around day-to-day operations, particularly where staffing and organisational capacity are limited.

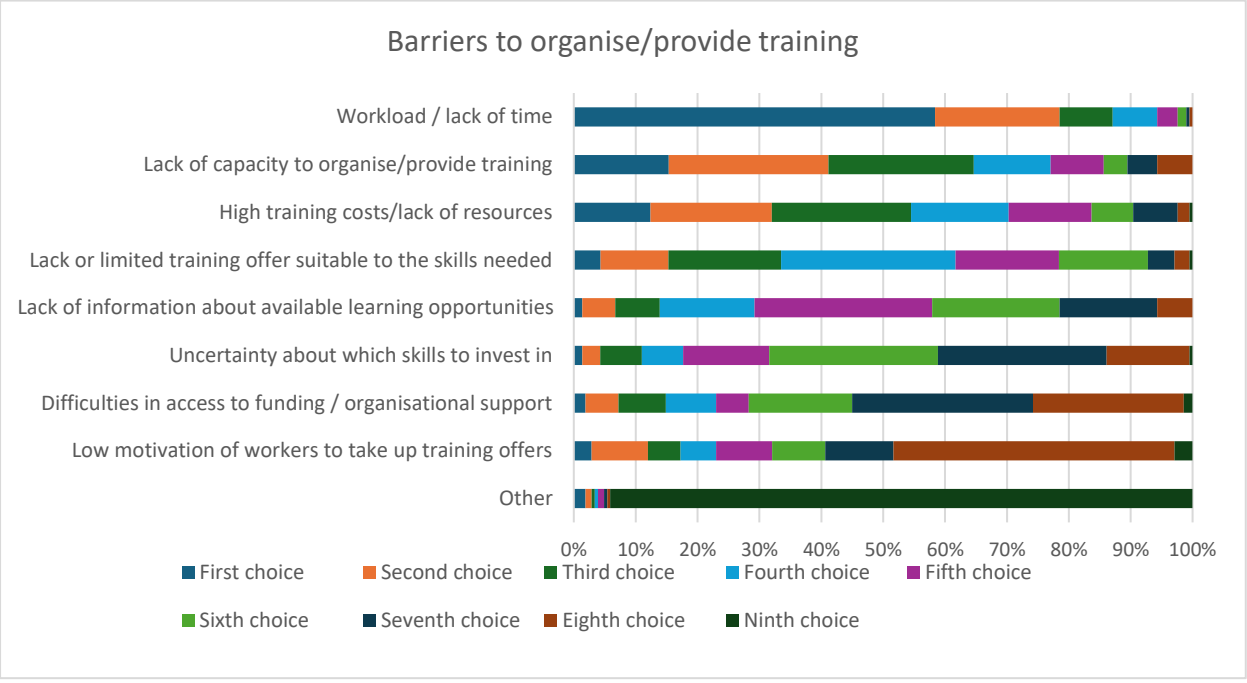


Figure 1. Barriers to organising or providing training within companies

The lessons learnt point to three priority challenges:

1. Responding to demographic pressures by making mobility and third country nationals work more effectively;

2. Reducing skills mismatches by placing lifelong learning at the centre of skills policy;

3. Improving the attractiveness of sectors and occupations facing persistent recruitment difficulties.

Read the report Access to Skills.

For BusinessEurope, the answer lies in:

1. Relevant skills training: Employers are committed to training their workers. A key priority for employers is that the training responds to skills shortages and is directly relevant to daily business operations. To the extent possible, skills data and intelligence, can support skills identification in line with national circumstances. This is particularly important at a time when the interaction between human skills and AI-powered technologies needs to be at the forefront of EU and national skills policy agendas, so that the digital transition contributes to innovation, competitiveness and economic growth.

2. Appropriate funding of skills training: It is important that the future Multi-Annual Financial Framework for the EU budget earmarks sufficient funding to help employers, to develop skills development initiatives where needed, including for the provision of training within the workplace. This requires the availability of sufficient funding for skills development and support to employers within the future European Social Fund, including through a dedicated earmarking, but also in the European Competitiveness Fund and Erasmus+. EU funding for skills should be subject to systematic impact assessment, focusing on whether funded initiatives deliver relevant skills and measurable labour market outcomes. The results should inform future funding priorities and programme design. A funding architecture is also needed that facilitates the participation of employers in accessing funding through these means.

3. EU governance aspects: The governance of EU level sectoral skills initiatives would benefit from greater coordination and information exchange between sectoral as well as national social partners and Member States. In particular, for initiatives such as the Sector Skills Blueprints, which sometimes develop training content and certifications, it would be relevant to create an opportunity for sectoral social partners to discuss the outcomes of their initiatives among each other with a view to better feeding into the identification of skills needs in diverse national skills systems.

BusinessEurope calls on the Commission:

- To ensure that more emphasis is put on labour market relevant training and to proper impact assessment of EU funded skills project, which goes beyond participation rates or formal procedures and rather focus on whether training has reduced skills gaps, improved employment outcomes and enhanced innovation, competitiveness and productivity.

In this regard under the European Semester process, the implementation of the 2025 Herning Declaration and 2026 EU Council recommendation on human capital are relevant.

- **To encourage peer learning between Member States** in identifying and addressing common and best practices of improving skills needs.

- **To better target EU financial support for skills by ensuring proper impact assessment of EU funding for skills**, in cooperation with Member States, towards identified labour market needs.

- **To simplify access to EU skills funding** and reduce the complexity and administrative burden associated with participation, particularly for companies and social partners.

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