

The Pact for Skills

A Skills Partnership for the Agri-Food Ecosystem

Upskilling and reskilling the current workforce, and making the agri-food ecosystem more attractive to young people, while providing a life-long learning perspective to both employers and employees

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The challenge

The agriculture and food industry is the largest producing and manufacturing sector in Europe. More than 10 million farms and 22.000 agri-food cooperatives in the EU create jobs for a workforce of 20 million employees, especially in rural areas, and 289.000 food processing companies provide jobs for 4.5 million people. Overall, the agri-food ecosystem is by far the biggest employment sector in Europe; it has a significant impact on rural and urban communities, as an aggregated ecosystem that includes more than 99% of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)¹.

The agri-food ecosystem is facing acute challenges such as globalization and climate change, urbanisation, changing consumer demands, generational renewal² and strong competition from EU third countries, not to mention the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Some of these challenges represent opportunities for the ecosystem, such as digitalisation or the transition towards a more circular and bio-based economy. Workers in the agri-food ecosystem are often unskilled workers, ageing workers or third-country nationals with lower levels of qualification. The ecosystem is also dependant on mobile workers, such as cross-border or seasonal workers. The right level of STEM³ skills and the attractiveness of rural areas to workers is also vital. In addition, there is also a need for high-skilled workers such as agronomists, machinery specialists, C-level employees⁴, sustainability experts, food scientists, food technologists, and high craftsmanship in the different sub-sectors. There is often a skills gap between the curricula offered by universities and the demand from the agriculture and food industries.

In addition, transversal hard and soft skills are necessary: leadership and communication, business management, financial, marketing, financial and non-financial reporting, team management, and quality management skills, which are often challenging for SMEs. Moreover, the crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated these challenges, disrupting the dynamism of the agri-food value chain during its first months while increasing labour shortages. Certain factors explaining this situation are, however, transversal and not only caused by the Covid-19 crisis.

¹ FoodDrinkEurope (2021), Data and Trends of the European Food and Drink Industry

² For example, only 5.6 % of EU farmers are under 35 years old.

³ Science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

⁴ C-level employees or C-Suite are the top senior executives of a company: Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Financial Officer (CFO), Chief Operating Officer (COO) and Chief Information Officer (CIO).

The ambition

Investment and alignment of initiatives are needed throughout Member States to provide the right education and skills needed by the ecosystem today and tomorrow. The 'Pact for Skills'⁵ represents an opportunity **to upskill and reskill the current workforce and make the agri-food ecosystem more attractive to young people, while providing a life-long learning perspective to both employers and employees.**

To achieve this, the partnership aims to set a joint strategy to design and implement a sectoral upskilling and reskilling framework, maximising competitiveness of all the actors involved, enhancing job retention and job attractiveness of the agri-food ecosystem within the frame of the Pact for Skills. The partnership should develop the means to monitor the specific Key Performance Indicators that will measure progress towards these goals and help overcome the challenges identified.

The partnership will develop a roadmap towards this ambition. For support, it will use resources from finalised Erasmus+ projects such as Food-STA and ASKFOOD, from active projects such as the Erasmus+ project FIELDS, and current initiatives such as EIT-Food, and possibly from future relevant resources made available to the partnership. The aim is to reach all the relevant stakeholders in the agri-food ecosystem: from farmers, agri-food cooperatives, food processors, and relevant associations, to education and training organisations. The 'Pact for Skills' partnership shall provide actions, accompanied by KPIs to assess its impact.

The proposal

To reach this target, the partners jointly commit to:

- Establish a skills partnership for the agri-food ecosystem;
- Establish a culture of life-long learning for all and intensify their efforts to provide opportunities for up- and reskilling;
- Expand European and International scientific cooperation in education and training (double degrees, joint qualifications, EU and national projects);
- Collect data on occupational profiles and related skills changes and needs per sub-sector to obtain quantitative KPIs to further monitor the evolution of the partnership commitments;
- Support European and international mobility aids for students, vocational learners, workers and entrepreneurs;
- Develop partnerships between education and training organisations and innovation actors as well as businesses;
- Update information about the agri-food ecosystem and monitor its development with data on necessary skills and with guidance to education and training suppliers, particularly considering occupational profiles and sub-sector needs;
- Set up an EU-wide framework for skills and occupational profiles, building on relevant project outcomes (such as the FIELDS project); and share experience, best practices, and policy recommendations;
- Provide financial or non-financial contributions (depending on the nature of the entities) to the trainings realised under the framework aforementioned, connected to the established support schemes for individual projects in the respective regions or Member States.

⁵ The 'Pact for Skills' is an action of the European Commission under the European Skills Agenda. It was launched on 10 November 2020. <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1517&langId=en>

The following will be implemented by:

- Developing partnerships between education and training organisations, business operators, and business support organisations, to overcome the skills gap;
- Developing actions for up- and reskilling in the ecosystem;
- Mobilising students and trainees across the EU for better training;
- Highlighting the relevance of vocational education and training (VET), including apprenticeships, as well as of life-long learning across the EU;
- Ensuring better communication around the attractiveness of the agri-food ecosystem in order to attract young generations and experts to fulfil new job roles linked to the challenges faced by the ecosystem;
- Taking special care of SMEs, for a better alignment of their specific skills needs;
- Aligning and communicating amongst the employers, employees (social dialogue) and the education and training organisations for an optimal implementation of the partnership's commitments.

Monitoring and Key Performance Indicators

With the above proposal and commitments, the partnership aims to ensure in the agri-food ecosystem:

- Sectoral cooperation for up- and reskilling actions and monitoring;
- Systematic EU-wide recognition of skills and knowledge;
- EU-wide mutually accepted definitions of skills and job roles;
- Competences categorised by targeted occupational profiles.

The implementation should start in 2022.

The partnership should develop the means to monitor the progress towards these goals. To this purpose, the specific **Key Performance Indicators** will include:

- Number of stakeholders involved and coverage of the agri-food ecosystem;
- Coverage of Member States and regions;
- Number of participants in up-skilling actions in the remit of the partnership;
- Coverage of data available to the partnership to further monitor the evolution of their commitments;
- Stakeholder engagement in sectoral drivers of change, such as:
 - Digitalisation;
 - Circular and bio-based economy;
 - Sustainability;
 - Generation renewal;
 - Life-long learning schemes;
 - Institutional cooperation at national and transnational level;
 - Curricula development for sub-sectorial needs.

Consolidating existing know-how, but also developing skills needed in the future, will ensure the success of this joint partnership.

The signatories align by the aforementioned objectives and support the ambition of this joint skills partnership for the agri-food ecosystem.

Supported by:

EU associations:



Companies:



EU organisations:



National federations and associations:





Projects:



Universities:



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Training centres:



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