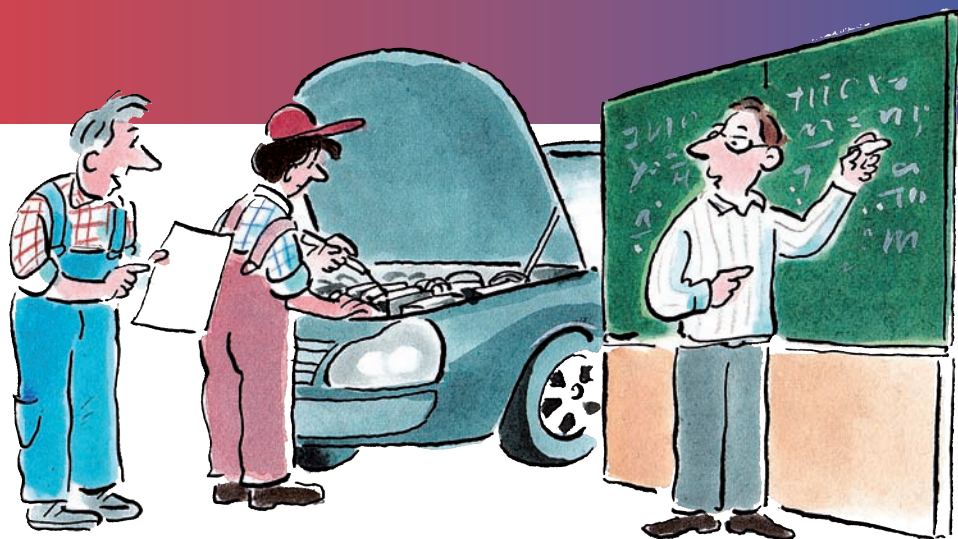


# Effective Vocational Training as an Important Task for Workers' Organisations





With kind support of the European Union

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**Author:** Helmut F. Skala

**Layout:** HellaDesign, Emmendingen

**Illustration:** © Klaus Puth, Mühlheim/Main, [www.klausputh.de](http://www.klausputh.de)

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# 1 Foreword

Dear Readers,

The dramatic figures on youth unemployment in recent years have triggered off lively debates in many European countries on the importance of vocational training for young people joining the labour market.

It is becoming increasingly clear that effective vocational training systems can make an important contribution to a successful entry into the labour market.

Many factors are crucial in this: a good, balanced relationship between imparting theoretical and practical knowledge, as well as gearing to the requirements of the world of labour, and the possibility of adapting professional profiles promptly to new circumstances. Appropriate further training of teaching staff is also very important.

One thing is quite certain, though: creating a future-oriented vocational training system is not just a task for the governments, it can only succeed if the social partners are substantially involved. It is therefore only logical that eight projects of the European Centre for Workers' Questions (EZA) in the 2015 education and training year address the issue of effective vocational training as a task for workers' organisations. They are a mirror image of the debates currently going on about the issue of vocational training throughout Europe. The discussions are far from over because the changes required need time. It is not easy to incorporate new ideas in education systems that have often been in place for a very long time in such a way that sustainable positive effects are created.

The EZA's idea with this publication is to present new ideas and empirical experience from a worker's perspective for the further development of vocational training in Europe. The main reason why this was at all possible is that Helmut Skala coordinated the individual projects, supervised the content and methods, evaluated the results, and drew up this final report. I am particularly grateful to him.

I would also like to thank the EZA member organisations involved for having tackled this very important issue.

Feedback on this report and further ideas on the issue are most welcome. You can find our contact details on the back of this brochure.

I hope you enjoy reading it!

*Sigrid Schraml*  
*EZA Secretary-General*

“There is only one thing in the long run more expensive than education: no education.”

*John F. Kennedy*

## 2 Introduction

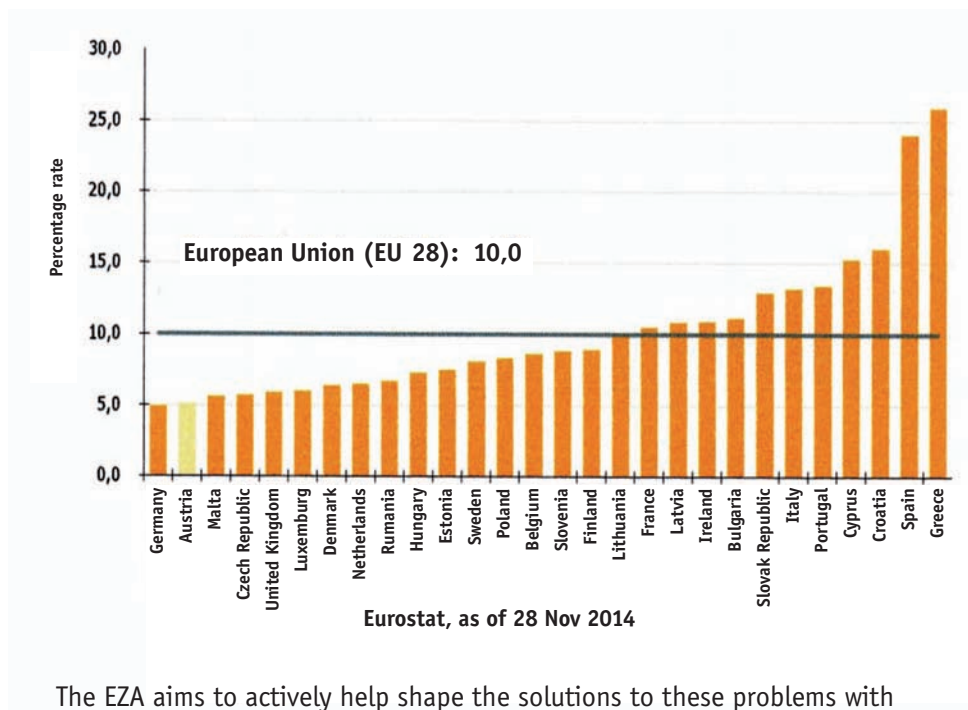
The European Centre for Workers' Questions (EZA) addressed the issue of **“Effective vocational training as an important task for workers' organisations”** in a series of coordinated projects.

The focus of the deliberations was on the key importance of high-quality vocational training, primarily as a factor in improving the attractiveness of Europe as a business location and for sustainable stability in the labour markets.

What is most worrying is the employment situation in Europe, which varies hugely from country to country, and the associated vastly differing unemployment figures, as shown by the Figure below.

The differences in unemployment illustrated and thus a division in Europe are unacceptable in the long run for social cohesion and social peace in the European Union. Discrepancies of up to 400% between the lowest and the highest figures are a crucial challenge for the politicians of the member states and for the European Union.

## International comparison of seasonally adjusted unemployment rates – October 2014



The EZA aims to actively help shape the solutions to these problems with concrete proposals. Unfortunately we still face a staggering, highly problematic unemployment rate, especially of young people, in many European countries. High-quality vocational training can be a very effective and preventive means against this alarming and insupportable state of affairs.

There was a kick-off conference on these issues in Berlin back in 2013 entitled “The contribution of the social partners to the design of successful vocational education schemes under the twin challenge of high youth unemployment and the need to develop sustainable employment relationships in Europe”, and it was continued in a working group which – meeting from 2013 to 2015 in Vienna, Thessaloniki and Toledo – came up with appropriate proposals under the heading “Vocational training as the focal point when dealing with workers’ organisations in view of fighting youth unemployment – reform requirements, debates, perspectives”.

It became evident that vocational training in conjunction with overcoming the continuing financial and economic crisis and the resultant high youth unemployment figures in many European countries must be radically overhauled.

The European Union and the OECD have also shown considerable interest in vocational training in recent years, and are trying to encourage it. It would be mistaken, though, to hope that a good vocational training system alone were capable of overcoming the current economic crisis in Europe. However, good vocational training enshrined in the general education systems can help overcome economic crises more quickly, and especially improve and ensure the future competitiveness of Europe in a globalised economy.

It does take some time for political measures to take effect, though, and so this calls for long-term, sustainable planning on the part of politicians. Unfortunately this is not the case with every policy-maker. In addition, what is also required from a holistic viewpoint is a European economic system that follows the model of the eco-social market economy and ensures that European values are conveyed.

In summary we may say that the development of approaches to vocational training in the member states of the EU has varied considerably, and there is an urgent need for improvement in several countries.

This is because in some countries vocational training is unfortunately still regarded as second-rate, firstly resulting in skills mismatches and secondly forcing over-qualified people into precarious employment.

That is why the measures urgently required from policy-makers must be taken swiftly and consistently in the interest of young people. More than anything, a long-term improvement necessitates joint action from the social partners.

It is precisely in this respect that there is important and broad scope for action by workers' organisations.



### 3 Work and the phenomenon of unemployment

Although the fall of the “Iron Curtain” and the collapse of “real socialism” in the Communist part of Europe in the 1990s heralded a fundamental change in the geopolitical situation, and now many millions of Europeans can live in freedom and democracy, this did not solve the social question. Instead there has been an extreme swing of the pendulum in economic policy.

For the present monopoly of the unbridled liberal market thinking of many a policy-maker in Europe means that the social question is unfortunately just as topical as it once was. Human work is viewed as one of several mere economic production factors. Yet work is more than just a cost factor, both in macroeconomics and in the microeconomic sphere of companies.

These are the opening words of Pope John Paul II’s encyclical “LABOREM EXERCENS”<sup>1</sup>:

*“THROUGH WORK man must earn his daily bread and contribute to the continual advance of science and technology and, above all, to elevating unceasingly the cultural and moral level of the society within which he lives in community with those who belong to the same family. And work means any activity by man, whether manual or intellectual, whatever its nature or circumstances; it means any human activity that can and must be recognized as work, in the midst of all the many activities of which man is capable and to which he is predisposed by his very nature, by virtue of humanity itself. Man is made to be in the visible universe an image and likeness of God himself, and he is placed in it in order to subdue the earth. From the beginning therefore he is called to*

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1 Castel Gandolfo, 14 September 1981

*work. Work is one of the characteristics that distinguish man from the rest of creatures, whose activity for sustaining their lives cannot be called work. Only man is capable of work, and only man works, at the same time by work occupying his existence on earth. Thus work bears a particular mark of man and of humanity, the mark of a person operating within a community of persons. And this mark decides its interior characteristics; in a sense it constitutes its very nature.”*

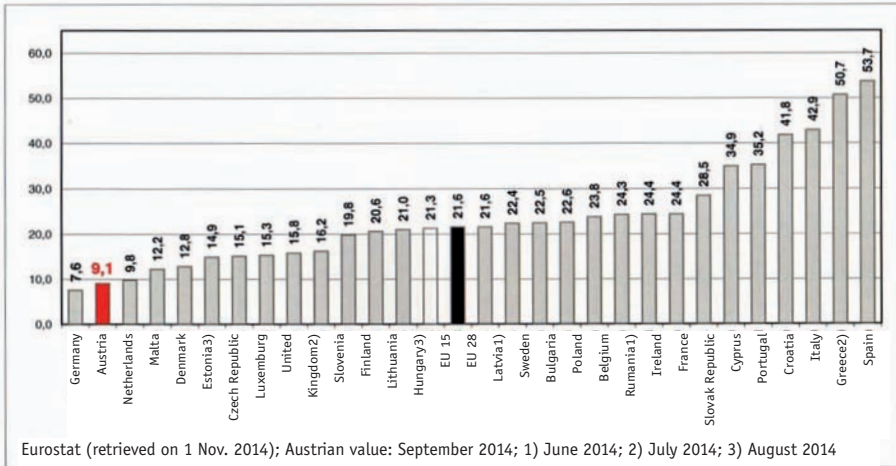
The current high unemployment rate in many parts of Europe is not only an unsolved economic problem; it is also an extremely difficult socio-political challenge. The drastic youth unemployment figures in many European regions are already giving rise to talk of a “lost generation”.

The encyclical focuses particularly on the problems of unemployment in its multifaceted form.

*“It is particularly painful when it especially affects young people, who after appropriate cultural, technical and professional preparation fail to find work, and see their sincere wish to work and their readiness to take on their own responsibility for the economic and social development of the community sadly frustrated.”*

Unfortunately, youth unemployment in Europe paints as dramatic a picture as the total unemployment figures. However, the Figure below does indeed point up effective ways of seeking solutions.

## European comparison of youth unemployment rates, September 2014



It shows that all the countries with the lowest figures have had traditionally strong vocational training systems. However, those countries that do not have such a strong vocational training segment are severely disadvantaged. And the policy advocated by the OECD<sup>2</sup> pursued by several countries, especially of banking on a high quota of academics, results in high unemployment rates, particularly of young people, most of them with high-quality university degrees. Although these are high-level qualifications they are not in demand in the labour market (e.g. in Poland, Spain, Portugal).

The conclusion to be drawn is that effective vocational training, its promotion and specific career guidance are efficient means for preventing youth unemployment and therefore merit the special attention of workers' organisations.

So it is the EZA's task and duty to focus intensively on these issues and not only point up facts but also come up with possible solutions and submit appropriate proposals for solutions to policy-makers.

2 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris

## 4 Remit

It cannot be denied that economies with a large potential of human capital tend to have larger productivity growth rates than those with less human capital potential. The better qualified the labour force is, the easier it is for scientific and technological change to be implemented, and the more positive social and economic development can be.

It must therefore be a priority for workers' organisations to champion an improvement in educational level and vocational skills.

So the remit of these coordinated projects was to:

1. Ascertain the current state of the labour market situation, focusing on young people in conjunction with the respective education systems.
2. Draw comparisons between the various education architectures whilst considering the respective cultural traditions.
3. Point up sources of error and success factors.
4. Come up with concrete proposals for improvement and formulate demands underpinned by reasoning.
5. Illustrate already discernible progress from reforms, insofar as this is possible within short observation periods for educational measures.
6. Encourage policy-makers in the individual countries and the European Union to make vocational training in particular a priority and to provide the requisite resources.

## 5 The structure of the coordinated projects

When the programme for the individual seminars was designed, the aim was for the regionally very different situations to be presented by expert input in such a structured way that they were comparable. This involved inviting experts from public bodies, the parliaments, labour market institutions, education and science. Those responsible for European and national policy in the individual countries were given the opportunity to contribute their standpoints.

The opinions of the social partners, which had high-ranking representatives of their organisations at the seminars, were of particular importance. The expertise of independent foundations was also incorporated.

There was wide scope in the seminars for discussion to enable corresponding conclusions to be drawn.

In some cases, though, theme-based visits to educational institutions and companies were organised to give a rightful place to the real world of work. We are most grateful to the organisers listed below for this multifaceted organisation of the individual seminars.

The coordinated project seminars:

1. “The situation of young workers on the labour market”, 18 to 19 April 2015 in Gdansk/Poland, organised by Europejski Dom Spotkań - Fundacja Nowy Staw.
2. “Vocational education: A contribution to the labour market within the framework of European social dialogue”, 7 to 10 May 2015 in Amarante/Portugal, organised by FIDESTRA (Associação para a Formação, Investigação e Desenvolvimento Social dos Trabalhadores).

3. "Challenges of the dual system in vocational education", 28 to 30 May 2015 in Nasutow/Poland, organised by Europejski Dom Spotkań - Fundacja Nowy Staw.
4. "Social partners and the implementation of the Youth Guarantee", 3 to 4 July 2015 in Malaga/Spain, organised by CEAT (Centro Español para Asuntos de los Trabajadores).
5. "Structural changes in the labour market: A challenge for educational systems and young people", 6 to 7 November 2015 in Otočec/Slovenia, organised by ZD NSi (Združenje delavcev Nove Slovenije).
6. The dual system in vocational training: How to make it work for CE Europe and which role workers' organisations can play here?", 11 to 13 February 2016 in Pärnu/Estonia, organised by ETÖK (Eesti Tööküsimuste Keskus).

## 6 Conclusions

1. The policy-makers on a national and European level must be convinced that for education policy to have a sustainable effect it must be of a medium and long-term nature. Education policy measures require thinking in and for generations. It is counterproductive when after elections governments invariably pass new laws without waiting to see and evaluating longer-term impacts.
2. Legislation must create scope for a vocational training culture developing in a subsidiary way and to be ensured in a reliable social dialogue.
3. It is also essential that policy-makers provide the resources required for high-quality vocational training.
4. With private educational institutions a fundamental difference has to be made between non-profit and profit-oriented organisations, with education and training not being simply degraded to a mere “commodity”.
5. The diversity of the differing regional conditions must be used as a valuable resource and not undermined by a policy of harmonisation.
6. The “dual-track vocational system” successfully operated in Germany, Austria and Switzerland that has developed over generations is certainly a good example, but not a model that can and should be transferred lock, stock and barrel to other countries without considering their history and general political conditions.
7. Implementing the EU’s ambitious vocational training measures for combating youth unemployment calls for gearing to corporate and company practice in order to meet market requirements.

8. In doing so, the focus must not be just on the young people's employability as workers but also on their innovativeness, to enable them to also participate as entrepreneurs. This must not, however, be in the form of precarious bogus self-employment.
9. The economic momentum forces constant changes in professional qualifications, but they must not culminate predominantly in a general academisation of educational qualifications.
10. Another focus must also be on combating the stigmatisation of vocational training as second-rate that is unfortunately still found in many countries. Vocational training and professional skills must be viewed on an equal footing with general education and training. The countries where this is not the case are confronted with a large number of unemployed young people with university degrees, and at the same time with a lack of innovatively trained skilled workers for technological and business practice.
11. More company visits should also be organised for teachers working in vocational training or preparing for professional life to increase practical relevance and familiarise them with the mechanisms of business and technical company management. Many teachers have only limited up-to-date knowledge of how modern companies work.
12. More and more practical projects should be organised for greater familiarity and understanding between vocational schools and companies in order to intensify collaboration. Such joint ventures are valuable factors in ensuring that the apprentices have the knowledge, abilities and skills required in the labour market.
13. The social and personal skills of pupils in vocational schools must also be honed in the real world, e.g. during work experience in a company.



14. In accordance with the principle that an educational qualification should not be the end of the line but instead open up further opportunities, the permeability of the education and training architecture is very important. This also strengthens the positive image of vocational training.
15. The recruiting of teachers in vocational training and of trainers in companies is of great importance. Their basic and further training should, as far as possible, be organised along the lines of multi-skilling. That means training them firstly as specialists in their professional field and secondly as educationalists. This will make them employable both in schools and in their field in company practice, thus creating a meaningful exchange between these two spheres of activity.
16. Young people in Europe must be guaranteed professional career guidance and ongoing advice during their vocational training.
17. Particular attention in this must be given to young people starting off as NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training) and to young people with a migration background. More than anything this is important with regard to the current refugee situation.
18. Last but not least, we workers' representatives must never lose sight of the fact that education and training is much more than just imparting and conveying knowledge, ability and skills. It must also impart values. That is why business ethics must also be given broad scope in every form of vocational training.

## 7 Outlook

Of course, the series of seminars ranged beyond a mere diagnosis of deficiencies and comparisons of the labour market situation of young people in Europe. It also drew appropriate conclusions and came up with concrete proposals.

The principal demand on politicians is for them to complete a paradigm shift, away from pursuing short-term and thus rapidly presentable successes and towards long-term, forward-looking and totally new vocational sectors that will be in demand in the future labour market. For instance, particular attention should be given to what are termed “green” jobs, of especial importance in an eco-social market economy. Another focus of attention must be the emerging fundamental shift in professional fields due to the rapidly advancing digitisation and robotics, not just in the production sector but also in the service industry.

Moreover, the world of work is exposed to an increasingly rapid general pressure to change caused by technical and scientific innovations continually affecting both the world of work and vocational training. The upshot will be completely new forms of work and professional fields, which must be critically analysed and viewed from the viewpoint of workers’ organisations.

Another key aspect is pan-European quality assurance of vocational training, as it is the basis for comparative instruments, such as the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), EUROPASS<sup>3</sup> and others, and consequently also the basis for the mutual recognition of diplomas and rights to exercise professions.

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<sup>3</sup> The EUROPASS CV is a template standardised throughout Europe in 27 languages. It makes education and training, professional experience and skills internationally understandable.

This recognition can make a crucial contribution to positive mobility in the European labour market, and would also be a key element in European integration precisely at a time when the centrifugal forces are making themselves increasingly felt.

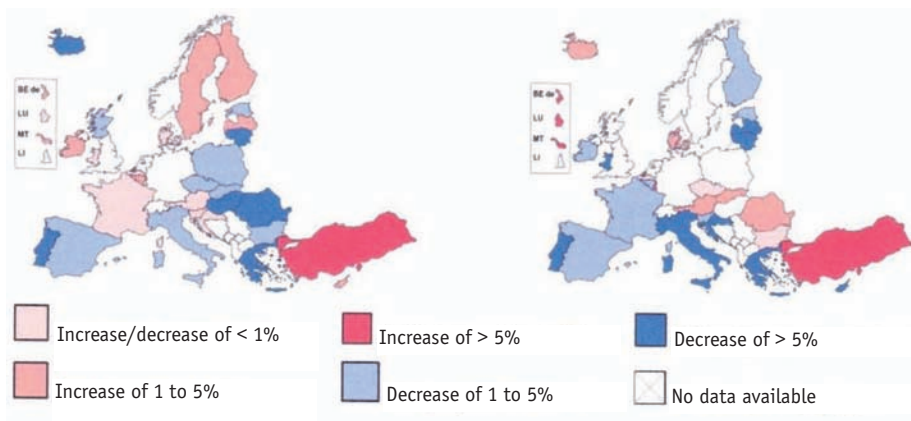
Of equal importance is the discussion of the recruitment, basic and further training of teachers in vocational training and of company trainers. This applies in no small measure to the current migration movement with many young people who must be integrated by means of education and training.

Unfortunately the statistics in the Figure below show that, far from increasing, investments in education and training in Europe are stagnating.

**Figure 1: Change in state education budgets at all levels of education<sup>4</sup>, 2010 to 2012**

Year 2011 compared to 2010

Year 2012 compared to 2011



Source: Eurydice; European Commission press release – Education budgets under pressure in Member States.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The statistics in this Figure are given in “constant prices” that make allowance for the differing rates of inflation.

Hence the main thing to do in future is to motivate policy-makers on a European level and in the individual countries to start an effective education and training campaign. What this calls for, though, is a strategy prepared to invest in education and training and not to use this of all sectors to consolidate budgets.

Future focuses should also include scrutinising the effectiveness and efficiency of European and national funding measures. A purely formal monitoring of funds in terms of their use in line with what they are earmarked for and their compliance with budget guidelines is too little. Instead, there should be a concrete and fact-specific examination of how such funding has a positive impact on the employment situation – especially that of young people – in practice. Increasing consideration must also be given to long-term aspects.

The results of this ongoing scrutiny should form the basis for making decisions on the allocation of resources.

Likewise the reform measures already being implemented in some countries, many of which are proving suitable and successful, should be evaluated accordingly in a further series of seminars, and positive approaches strengthened by further proposals.