

# The Pact for Skills

## A Skills Partnership for the Agri-Food Ecosystem<sup>1</sup>

*To upskill and reskill the current workforce and make the agri-food ecosystem more attractive to young people, while providing a career and life-long learning perspective to both employers and workers*

### The initiative

The Pact for Skills<sup>2</sup> initiative brings together all types and sizes of stakeholders, including EU social partners, EU umbrella organisations, companies, vocational and education training providers and public authorities. Its objective is ensuring the highest quality possible of vocational education and training, and up- and reskilling of the European workforce in all the ecosystems of the EU Industrial Strategy, including the agri-food ecosystem.<sup>3</sup> This effort is undertaken with the aim of meeting the objectives of the twin green and digital transition, as well as attracting and retaining the workforce and improving working conditions.

### The ecosystem

The agriculture and food sectors<sup>4</sup>, brought together in the agri-food ecosystem, are the largest producing and manufacturing sectors in Europe. More than 11 million farms and 22.000 agri-food cooperatives in the EU create jobs for 22 million workers in rural areas, whilst 289.000 food processing companies provide jobs for a further 4.5 million people. Overall, the agri-food ecosystem is one of the largest employment sectors in Europe and has a significant impact on rural and urban communities. As an aggregated ecosystem it includes more than 99% of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)<sup>5</sup>.

### The challenges

The agri-food ecosystem is facing major challenges such as globalisation, climate change, urbanisation, changing consumer demands, generational renewal<sup>6</sup> and strong competition from EU third countries. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic and war in Ukraine have accelerated these challenges and created new ones, disrupting the dynamism of the agri-food value chain. Despite these challenges, there are also some opportunities for the ecosystem, through digitalisation and the transition towards a more circular and bio-based economy. A skilled and qualified workforce holds key value for successful farms and food companies.

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<sup>1</sup> This is an updated version of the partnership paper that was presented at the launch event in February 2022 (last update: July 2022).

<sup>2</sup> The ‘Pact for Skills’ is an action of the European Commission under the European Skills Agenda. It was launched on 10 November 2020: [Pact for Skills - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> In its updated version of the New Industrial Strategy (2021), the Commission has identified 14 industrial ‘ecosystems’, one of them being agri-food: [communication-new-industrial-strategy.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> The food sector also includes the drink sector.

<sup>5</sup> FoodDrinkEurope (2021), Data and Trends of the European Food and Drink Industry: [FoodDrinkEurope-Data-Trends-2021-digital.pdf](#)

<sup>6</sup> For example, only 5.6 % of EU farmers are under 35 years old (2017): [agri-farm-economics-brief-15\\_en.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

Equally, an attractive ecosystem underpinned by digital and sustainable practices for the young will be essential in the medium to long-term view. However, in addition to the above general challenges, the ecosystem also faces specific skills-related shortages. Workers in the agri-food ecosystem are often low skilled, ageing workers or third-country nationals, sometimes with lower qualification levels. The ecosystem is also dependant on mobile workers, such as cross-border or seasonal workers. The adequate STEM<sup>7</sup> skills and the attractiveness of rural areas to workers is also vital. There is an increasing need for high-skilled workers such as agronomists, machinery and contact material specialists, C-level employees<sup>8</sup>, sustainability experts, circular and biotech 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 other vocational schools and the skill requirements of the ecosystems that needs to be addressed, while also ensuring commitments from companies to support and train apprentices. In addition, it is crucial to consider the specificities of SMEs in the Pact for Skills, which often require training on soft skills (e.g. business management).

## 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 represents an opportunity **to upskill and reskill the current workforce and make the agri-food ecosystem more attractive to young people, while providing a career and life-long learning perspective to both employers and workers.**

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

This framework shall ensure that farms and food companies continue to adapt to the labour market. It aims to adjust to technical developments, develop human resources, secure employment, increase attractiveness, increase integration and retention of workers, and to develop competences, improve employability, and maintain internal and labour market opportunities. The training provided shall be of high quality, close to the needs of the companies and the workers. It will build on the longstanding VET activities on diverse levels: national, regional and company level. It shall take into account the different existing systems, particularly those driven, developed and implemented by social partners.

The partnership will develop a roadmap towards this ambition. For support, it will use resources from concluded Erasmus+ projects such as FooD-STA<sup>9</sup> and ASKFOOD<sup>10</sup>, from active projects such as the Erasmus+ projects FIELDS<sup>11</sup> and I-RESTART<sup>12</sup>, and current

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<sup>7</sup> Science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

<sup>8</sup> 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).

<sup>9</sup> This project established an independent “EuFooD-STA Center” as an organisational frame for international and sustainable collaborations between industry and academia in the food sector: [European FooD-STA](#)

<sup>10</sup> An alliance for skills and knowledge to widen food sector-related open innovation, optimization and development: [ASKFOOD](#)

<sup>11</sup> FIELDS addresses the current and future skills needs for sustainability, digitalization, and the bio-economy in agriculture: [Erasmus Fields](#)

<sup>12</sup> I-RESTART focuses on inclusive reskilling and upskilling towards a competitive agrifood and veterinary sector (website not yet available)

initiatives such as EIT-Food activities. It will also benefit from support services provided by the European Commission. It will aim to use the social dialogue framework to develop and implement the strategy at all levels. The purpose 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.

## Commitments

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 and I-RESTART project); and share experiences, best practices, and policy recommendations;
- Utilise and build upon jointly achieved outcomes and tools through past and ongoing relevant European projects<sup>13</sup>;
- Make education and training a recurrent issue in the working plans of the Sectoral Social Dialogue Committees (SSDCs);
- Support equal opportunities and gender equality when addressing any type of sector attractiveness policies;
- Increase emphasis of vocational education and training on sustainable development/climate change, circular bio-economy and digitalisation;
- Develop tools and modules as close to the needs of the companies and the workforce as possible, with the support of sectoral social partners;
- Assess the outcomes of the trainings to better stimulate and target new ones and improve quality of the system as a joint exercise of all stakeholders involved;
- Provide financial or non-financial contributions (depending on the nature of the entities) to the trainings provided under the aforementioned framework, connected to the established support schemes for individual projects in the respective regions or Member States.

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<sup>13</sup> Such as already developed in social dialogue joint projects ('[Good practices and tools from the food and drink Industry](#)', '[New professions and career paths in the food and drink industry](#)') or '[AgriTrain](#)' and '[AgriSkills](#)'.

## Implementation

The following will be implemented by:

- Developing partnerships between education and training organisations, business operators, and business support organisations, to overcome the skills gap;
- Continuing the efforts of social partners at different levels in this respect and developing new partnerships, bodies, dialogue, agreements, or targeted actions with social partners;
- 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 SMEs, for a better alignment of their specific skills needs;
- Aligning and communicating amongst the employers, employer associations, workers and trade unions (social dialogue) and the education and training organisations.

## Goals

With the above commitments and implementing actions, the partnership aims to ensure that the agri-food ecosystem delivers:

- Sectoral cooperation for up- and reskilling actions and monitoring;
- Inclusion in the Pact of relevant public authorities/bodies;
- Systematic EU-wide recognition of skills and knowledge;
- EU-wide mutually accepted definitions of skills and job roles;
- Competences categorised by targeted occupational profiles;
- Developed skills needs, pathways and training for the sectors with the help of Commission Support Services and agencies, employer organizations and trade unions;
- High-level quality of training, based on e.g. European guidelines on quality assurance.

## Monitoring and Key Performance Indicators

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- and reskilling actions in the remit of the partnership;
- Coverage of data available to the partnership to further monitor the evolution of their commitments;
- Number of collective agreements/interprofessional projects signed including provisions on education and training;
- Presentation at each SSDC meeting of at least one national/regional example jointly by the social partners and the other concerned stakeholders;
- Increase in number of apprenticeships;
- 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;
- Training certification/credentials/microcredentials.

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

The implementation aims to begin in 2022.

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:



EU social partners:



National federations and associations:





Irish Cooperative Organisation Society



Confederação Nacional das Cooperativas Agrícolas  
e do Crédito Agrícola de Portugal, CCR.



MTK



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