

Tripartite Social Summit: the EU is sleepwalking into a skills crisis

Participating in Tuesday's Tripartite Social Summit, EUROCHAMBRES President, Christoph Leitl, highlighted the scale and urgency of the skills crisis facing the EU. Addressing Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz and Presidents Jean-Claude Juncker and Donald Tusk, he underlined that this pan-European problem requires pan-European solutions and called for a Skills Summit to define an action programme.

84% of entrepreneurs participating in the European Parliament of Enterprises (EPE) on 10 October replied 'yes' when asked if it is harder today to find staff with the right skills than 5 years ago. The same question was asked at the 2010 and 2016 editions of the EPE and the percentage of 'yes' votes has increased each time.

EUROCHAMBRES' President, Christoph Leitl, commented: *"This reveals an extremely worrying trend. Europe's competitiveness is largely built on human capital. This is not a viable model if businesses cannot find staff with the skills that match their needs."*

President Leitl expressed concern at the lack of recent high-level political engagement on skills. *"We are sleep-walking into a highly damaging socio-economic crisis by failing to address growing skills mismatches across much of the EU."* He called for an EU Skills Summit, backed up by an action programme of short, medium and long-term measures. *"A few years ago, EU leaders met several times for Jobs Summits, but this never gained much momentum. Chambers now call for a one-off Skills Summit with stakeholders to define and agree on an EU Skills Action Plan. Decisive and swift delivery must then follow."*

EUROCHAMBRES recommends various specific measures for such an EU Skills Action Plan:

- Short-term: facilitate the integration of migrants and refugees into the European workforce, specifically by establishing an Integration Grant for SMEs.
- Medium term: develop an interoperable skills forecasting approach across the EU, improve the provision of work-based learning systems and increase the mobility of apprentices.
- Long term: ensure more responsive education systems that reflect emerging socio-economic trends and a stronger involvement of the business community in education and training.

Commenting specifically on the idea of an Integration Grant for SMEs, President Leitl explained: *"SMEs are the main source of the EU's growth and job creation, so it makes sense to support them in the complex and resource-intensive process of integrating migrants in their workforce. We are convinced that the benefits of such a scheme, not just in terms of integration but also in addressing growing skills shortages, would significantly outweigh the costs."*

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