

## **Public Consultation on ESF support to Education and Training**

RREUSE (Reuse and Recycling European Union Social Enterprises) represents over twenty-six social enterprises of European relation and one member from the U.S.A. RREUSE's vision is a Europe that supports the role of social enterprise in the transition to a circular economy, prioritising activities in re-use and repair. Actions under the European Green Deal, Circular Economy Action Plan 2.0 and future Action Plan for the Social Economy must ensure a job-rich, just and inclusive circular transition focused on the wellbeing of all individuals.

RREUSE welcomes the opportunity to evaluate support to education and training by the European Social Fund (ESF) from the period of 2014 to 2018. In order to further capitalise future ESF+ investments in education, lessons and observations from the past are found below (particular focus on vocational education and training). Across the wider RREUSE membership, there is much work being done to highlight the potential of circular jobs and 'green skills' as well as interest in formalising qualifications linked to circular skills (for less well known skills). The desire to recognise informal skills and properly integrate them into further education programmes noteworthy.

According to the European Commission, only 1 adult in 10 engages in training in any given month. Additionally, half of the current workforce will need to update their skills within the next five years.<sup>1</sup>

Common beliefs across the RREUSE membership include:

- The need for further support (via finances or training) to ensure social enterprise are best placed to connect with traditional and/or higher level educational bodies. Shared events and initiatives such as EU Vocational Skills week, with named collaborations are appreciated. A joined up approach to the education system is necessary, to highlight and act on research gaps, skill shortages, job vacancies and trends of employment.
- Difficulty in attracting young persons to VET overall (certain Member States more than others), which can lead to recruitment issues as well as difficulties sourcing specialised trainers (to train staff of social enterprises).
- Challenges associated with a changing (decreasing) duration of support for work placement programmes. For example, in Finland, state-funded training programmes lasting from 6 months to 1 year include a slight increase in unemployment benefit, provide little incentive for trainees to complete programmes (marginally higher than regular unemployment benefits). Initiatives supported by ESF which invest in training (or time for individuals in education) should be reflected through real financial incentives or recognised certification for future employability. RREUSE wishes to highlight the potential for VET to be more flexible,

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission, (2020) Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions (Available [here](#)).



appropriate jobs training and upskilling with an outcome of retaining staff for adequate periods of time. This would be more beneficial for individuals and for social enterprise/employers alike.

- For quality management and certification- despite professionalisation and quality management and training, there are generally weak systems attached with certification for social enterprise staff. Such skills have been assessed in a more informal or 'in house way' if national qualifications have not adapted to the demands of a growing circular economy.
- A continuous need for additional resources in mapping and an action plan for addressing skill shortages. Members have identified that certain professionals (craft skills based for example) are not being replaced by the upcoming generations. The circular economy is not taking away from existing jobs rather adding to prospects, which needs further attention, academic and campaign (popular culture) support.
- Digital skills and digital inclusion (including further trainings) are seen as an important area for social enterprises in previous EU initiatives. Members however, mentioned that ESF has not previously contributed enough in this area.

Following a 2019 event 'Jobs and Skills for a Circular Economy' as part of CRNI (Community Resources Network Ireland), the all-island body for community repair, reuse and recycling organisations, lessons learned include:

- Existing educational institutions (also third level, for example) need to appraise courses for circular economy opportunities.
- The national network identified a need to address the current mismatch of skills and look at tech, STEM and data as part of the overall picture. Research presented showing that skill shortages in Europe will become an increasing issue.
- With increased awareness and support for the circular economy, new skills and jobs will be required across all skill levels, to ensure growth in rural and urban communities.

With regards to inclusion of all citizens, including those who are distanced from the labour market through opportunity or circumstance, HR managers and staff across the RREUSE network have expressed the need for training that specifically targets inclusion in the workplace (for example, additional and affordable lifelong learning for staff is necessary to upkeep and respect EU laws for workplace inclusion and best practices). In line with an inclusive workplace core belief, Social Enterprises will accept suitably qualified persons (electricians etc) from outside the EU/ own Member State. This also requires some knowledge of qualification systems from a HR perspective. In order to facilitate an inclusive workplace, additional measures for adequate training should be considered. RREUSE also suggest that target groups be included in the design of programmes. User involvement should be highly regarded for all skill upgrades, (not only digitalisation).

RREUSE is pleased to see indications that the 'Skills Agenda for Europe' proposals for VET include adapting national education and training systems. Regarding the topic of digitalisation in this skills



agenda, RREUSE stresses the importance to make target-specific offers and access routes, to involve users and promote digital inclusion. This will achieve a more inclusive, higher quality workforce and ensure development throughout individual's careers. The continued work to modernise VET is well supported by the network's actions.

For more information please contact Elaine Hanlon, EU Social Affairs Policy Officer – [elaine.hanlon@rreuse.org](mailto:elaine.hanlon@rreuse.org), [www.rreuse.org](http://www.rreuse.org)

*RREUSE is an independent non-profit organisation representing social enterprises active in the field of re-use, repair and recycling, with 26 members across 25 countries in Europe and the USA.*

*Our main vision is for Europe to support the role of social enterprise in a circular economy, providing meaningful work opportunities to thousands of vulnerable members of our community through innovative economic, social and environmentally beneficial activities.*

*RREUSE's primary mission is to help tackle poverty, social exclusion and a throwaway culture by promoting policies, best practices and partnerships that support the professionalism and development of social enterprises working in environmental services with high potential for local and inclusive job creation, notably re-use and repair.*