

# EDUCATION, TRAINING AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN THE FITNESS AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY SECTOR

*Last update: August 2021*

## The skills challenges in the EU

Regarding skills, qualifications and employment in Europe, several pressing challenges have been identified by the European Commission<sup>1</sup>:

- **Structural unemployment:** after the great recession of the 2000s and early 2010s, the European labour market remains characterised by persistent high levels of unemployment in many areas, and especially among young people.
- **Skills mismatches:** too many people cannot find a job because they do not have the right skills, or they are working in jobs that do not match their talents.
- **Numerous job vacancies:** 40% of employers report that they cannot find people with the right skills to fill their vacancies.
- **The lack of anticipation and skills forecasting** which contributes to these job vacancies, but also higher risks of unemployment, poorer career prospects, etc.
- **The insufficient transparency of skills and qualifications**, hampering employability and labour market mobility.
- **The green and digital transitions**, which are reshaping the way we live, work, and interact and require a shift in skill sets.
- **Demographic change**, concretely impacting economic growth, pensions, labour markets, while also generating new

job opportunities in the silver and care economies.

- **Insufficient lifelong learning:** while flexibility and agility are essential on the labour market, only 4 in 10 adults take part in learning to upgrade their skills.
- Finally, the **COVID-19 pandemic**, which resulted in many job losses, made telework and distance learning a reality for millions of people, while highlighting big digital gaps over the continent.

## The European Skills Agenda

The European Skills Agenda for Sustainable Competitiveness, Social Fairness and Resilience, launched in July 2020, is the European Commission's answer to these challenges. This five-year plan is meant to "support individuals and businesses develop more and better skills". It links to the European Green Deal<sup>2</sup> by promoting **sustainable competitiveness** and to the European Pillar of Social Rights<sup>3</sup>, as it seeks to ensure **social fairness** (access to education, training and lifelong learning), and builds on the lessons learnt during the COVID-19 pandemic to build **resilience**.<sup>4</sup>

Consisting in 12 actions, it sets objectives for upskilling (improving existing skills) and reskilling (training in new skills), with the ambition to have 540 million training activities for adults by 2025, including 60 million for low-qualified adults, and 40 million for unemployed people. The number of adults with basic digital skills should increase to 230 million.

<sup>1</sup> Skills & qualifications- Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion, European Commission. Accessible: <https://bit.ly/3EK0gKx>

<sup>2</sup> A European Green Deal, European Commission. Accessible: <https://bit.ly/39AFwOU>

<sup>3</sup> European Pillar of Social Rights, European Commission. Accessible: <https://bit.ly/2ZkiUKe>

<sup>4</sup> European Skills Agenda- Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion, European Commission. Accessible: <https://bit.ly/3i6oVRv>

## Education, skills and training for the Fitness and Physical Activity Sector

Although the Fitness and Physical Activity Sector is a considerable employment sector with around 750,000 employees and annual revenues of €18.9 billion<sup>5</sup>, it faces a number of persistent challenges in the area of skills and qualifications, the most critical of which are vacancies and the lack of soft skills among its current workforce.

The findings of the 2020 survey of fitness employers, representing over 2,000 clubs across 22 different European countries, closely highlighted these challenges:

- Recruitment is now identified as a critical area for the sector with up to 115,000 current vacancies for fitness trainers across Europe.
- Only 19% of employers find it easy or very easy to recruit the trainers they need.
- The No1 skills area that employers look for when recruiting are personal/communication skills and customer service skills (92% and 88%).
- Technical and digital skills remain important (especially for group fitness instructors) but are in decline over the years.
- 64% of employers reported that they 'always' or 'nearly always' had to give additional training to their new recruits with 40% of employed saying that that current training and education 'never', or 'almost never' gave fitness trainers the skills that they were looking for when recruiting.
- There is a growing requirement (from 87% employers in this survey) for personal trainers to be able to work with more diverse populations (e.g., children, older adults, overweight, etc.).<sup>6</sup>

In a context of ageing societies, digital progress and increasingly diverse target groups, the Fitness and Physical Activity Sector will have to further invest in skills intelligence to better understand and anticipate the labour market dynamics and its associated challenges, as well as in the development of skills, education, and training to ensure that its workforce meets customers and service requirements.

Another EuropeActive [information paper](#) looks at the background work done by EuropeActive to promote the European Fitness and Physical Activity Sector in the sectoral skills policy context.

<sup>5</sup> European Health and Fitness Market Report 2021, Deloitte and EuropeActive. Accessible: <https://bit.ly/39CCCS>

*These are the latest 2021 figures, which reflect the state of the sector after the pandemic and several months of closing. The 2020 figures showed over 28 billion Euros of annual revenues.*

<sup>6</sup> 2020 Employer Skills Survey- results released!, EuropeActive. 24 May 2020. Accessible: <https://bit.ly/39ybjtB>