

What skills will Europeans need in the years to come? First EU forecast of skill needs is published

Cedefop, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, presents its first forecast of skill needs up to the year 2015. The study "Future skill needs in Europe: medium-term forecast" concludes that demand for skills and qualifications is being driven upwards in most occupations, including in so-called elementary jobs, by the continuing rise of the service sector and sweeping technological and organisational changes.

The forecast by Cedefop, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, covers the period up to 2015. It shows that the long transition of European economies away from the primary and manufacturing sectors and towards the service sector is not yet complete. The new Member States in particular are still going through the process. But the transition is gradual: the traditional sectors still employ significant numbers of people and will continue to do so in the medium term. This is the case in all alternative scenarios explored by the forecasting exercise (from 'optimistic' to 'pessimistic').

Ján Figel, European Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth, said: "The world economy is constantly changing, and so are the skills that people will need for the job market. But the question people ask is, which skills will they need? Well, I am pleased that today we have a study that gives us a clearer idea of where skills deficits are likely to occur in the years to come. With this information, young and old alike can assess their learning objectives, which will help them decide their training and learning needs."

By 2015, the primary sector is expected to employ 10 million workers across Europe — down from 12 million in 2006 (15 million in 1996) — while manufacturing will employ 34,5 million — down from 35 million over the same period (38 million in 1996).

But services are where the real growth is. The economy as a whole will generate more than 13 million new jobs by 2015 — despite the loss of well over 2 million jobs in the primary sector and half a million in manufacturing. Transport and distribution, including tourism, will create 3.5 million additional jobs, while business and various services offer the best employment prospects in the medium term, generating 9 million new jobs by 2015. Another 3 million additional jobs will be created in education, health and social work.

Even more significant in its impact than the continuing shift to the service sector is the growing requirement of skills and qualifications at all levels. The demand for high skills has not yet peaked. Today, 80 out of 210 million European workers are in highly-skilled, non-manual jobs and this high proportion is expected to rise further.

Between 2006 and 2015, Europe will gain 12.5 million additional jobs at the highest qualification level and 9.5 million at the medium level (especially vocational qualifications). But jobs for workers with low qualifications will decline by 8.5 million. Even jobs for unskilled manual workers are demanding more qualifications, while skilled manual workers will increasingly need medium-level qualifications.

This has serious implications for employment. A shrinking population implies a continuing need to replace workers, even in declining sectors and occupations. But with skill requirements increasing dramatically, the new workers will need higher qualifications to perform “the same job”.

The forecasting exercise is based on a projection of current trends. To cover new developments in skills and occupations, Cedefop, with the contribution of Skillsnet — its international network of researchers and policy makers for the early identification of skill needs — also looks into particular fields in detail. So far Cedefop has studied tourism, nanotechnology, agri-food and wood and will soon launch reports on the health and environment sectors. In addition, it will be working on the basis of surveys to identify employers’ expectations of skill needs.

The study covers 25 member states of the European Union (Bulgaria and Romania are not covered), plus Norway and Switzerland.

Cedefop

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (known as 'Cedefop' after its French acronym), is an agency of the European Union based in Thessaloniki, Greece. It supports European policy-making in the field of vocational education and training.

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