

WORKERS' ORGANIZATIONS ENGAGING IN SKILLS DEVELOPMENT



The objective of this policy brief is to highlight ILO support for the engagement of social partners - employers' and workers' organizations - in skills development strategies; to provide examples of existing trade union engagement at the national, sectoral and enterprise levels; and to propose priority areas for workers' organizations as they engage in skills development in the future.

Introduction

As the discussions within the International Labour Organization (ILO) on the Future of Work have shown, technological innovation, demographic trends, globalisation and climate change are all having an increasingly significant impact on the world of work. Together they will affect the composition of tasks and skills requirement for most jobs, generate new occupations, condition the skills needs of the young and an ageing workforce and transform the demand for and supply of skills. 'Given the constant and accelerating pace of change, skills development strategies will be obliged to ensure the continual renewal of skills over the life cycle' (ILO, 2018) a fact reflected in the unprecedented focus on skills development in the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)¹ and ongoing ILO discussions in the framework of the Future of Work² or normative work, including on apprenticeships.³

As part of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, the ILO has stressed the importance of quality education. It has committed to ensuring that all, boys and girls, complete free primary and secondary education and have access to pre-primary education and affordable technical, vocational and tertiary education. In addition, it has pledged to substantially increase the number of youths and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.⁴ The notion of a job for life is receding, and Guy Ryder, the ILO Director-General, has recently called for a new approach, - 'We need to replenish skills throughout a working career, and this calls for revisiting the models and concepts of lifelong learning to create the future we want'.⁵

This will necessitate the revision of schools-based education for employment and/or self-employment, and also of apprenticeships which combines on-the-job training and off-the-job learning, thus enabling learners from all walks of life to acquire the knowledge, skills and competencies required to carry out a specific occupation. It will also require a commitment to continuing vocational education and training which enables workers to improve or update their knowledge and skills and/or acquire new skills for career progression. While recognizing that education, training and lifelong learning are contributing factors to personal development, access to culture and active citizenship.

The ILO Director-General went on to say that *'tripartite social dialogue and involvement of social partners in governance arrangements have to make sure that policies are not only fair but are relevant and practical as well'*. In short, these developments in the world of work will exert a major influence over the lives of working men and women who will require the effective support of trade unions.

ILO support for the engagement of social partners - employers' and workers' organizations - in skills development strategies

The ILO has advocated for the involvement of social partners in the development of vocational guidance and training (Article 5 of ILO Convention No. 142 on Human Resources Development, 1975).⁶ Moreover, the ILO has spelt out in great detail the ways in which social partners - employers' and workers' organizations - can engage in formulating, applying and reviewing national human resources development, education training and lifelong learning policies (Box 1).



¹ Most specifically SDG 4 on Quality Education and SDG 8 on Decent Work and Economic Growth: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>; See also the ILO ACTRAV Trade Union Reference Manual on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: https://www.ilo.org/actrav/info/pubs/WCMS_553141/lang--en/index.htm

² <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/future-of-work/lang--en/index.htm>; https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--ed_norm/--relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_711674.pdf

³ <https://www.ilo.org/skills/areas/work-based-learning/lang--en/index.htm>

⁴ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/education/>

⁵ https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/how-the-ilo-works/ilo-director-general/statements-and-speeches/WCMS_644530/lang--en/index.htm

⁶ https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312287; see also C140 on Paid Educational Leave, which addresses paid educational leave for various training needs, including trade union education.

Box 1 - ILO Recommendation No. 195 on Human Resources Development, 2004 identifies various areas for the involvement of social partners and social dialogue⁷

- **National strategy:** defining a national strategy for education and training (Art. 5.a)
- **Different policy levels:** establish a guiding framework for training policies at national, regional, local, and sectoral and enterprise levels (Art. 5.a)
- **Alignment:** policies which are consistent with economic, fiscal and social policies (Art. 1)
- **Phases of skills' development:** formulating, applying and reviewing national human resources development, education, training and lifelong learning policies (Art. 1)
- **Inclusiveness:** education and training are a right for all and, in cooperation with the social partners, work towards ensuring access for all to lifelong learning (Art. 4.a); and improving access for all to enhance employability and to facilitate social inclusion (Art. 8.a and 10.b)
- **Identifying skills' needs:** promoting the ongoing identification of trends in the competencies needed by individuals, enterprises, the economy and society as a whole (Art. 9.a)
- **Public sector:** promoting the development of equitable training policies and opportunities for all public sector employees (Art. 9.k)
- **Skills' recognition:** promoting the development, implementation and financing of a transparent mechanism for the assessment, certification and recognition of skills, acquired formally or informally (Art. 11.1)
- **Diversity of training:** promoting diversity of training provision to meet the different needs of individuals and enterprises and to ensure high-quality standards (Art. 13 and Art. 14.b)
- **Roles and responsibilities:** identifying the roles and responsibilities of employment services, training providers and other relevant service providers with respect to vocational and career information and guidance (Art. 15.c); and taking into account the primary responsibility of government, as well as recognizing the role of the social partners in further training (Art. 6.1 and 9.b)

⁷ https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:12100::NO:12100:P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312533

Box 1 - continued

- **Collective bargaining:** support initiatives by the social partners in the field of training in bipartite dialogue, including collective bargaining (Art. 9.c); and support social dialogue and collective bargaining on training at international, national, regional, local, and sectoral and enterprise levels as a basic principle for systems development, programme relevance, quality and cost-effectiveness (Art. 5.f)
- **Capacity building:** promoting national capacity building to reform and develop training policies and programmes (Art. 21.c); and provide support to the social partners to enable them to participate in social dialogue on training, in analysing trends in labour markets and human resources development, and to contribute to dynamic lifelong learning policies (Art. 5.1, 17 and 21.e)
- **Research:** Members should, in consultation with the social partners, support and facilitate research on human resources development and training (Art. 19)

Examples of the engagement of workers' organizations in skills development at the global level

Workers' organizations at the global level - the Labour 20 (L20)⁸ - have already taken up the challenge to advocate for improved skills development, with a series of statements to G20 meetings (Box 2).

Box 2 - L20 submission to the G20 meeting in 2018/2019

L20 called on the Labour and Employment Ministers to:

- ensure that opportunities such as job skill development, education, and lifelong training are **provided to all** (L20, 2019)⁹
- invest in **increased access** to quality public education and vocational training
- **include employers' and workers' representatives in the governance** of systems of skills development, apprenticeships and adult learning
- design and deliver measures that promote **access and opportunities for women** to training
- scale up industrial policy at the national, regional and sectoral levels with initiatives to **forecast skill demands** and **revise funding needs** accordingly
- establish systems of **recognition of prior learning** in the formal and informal economy (L20, 2018)¹⁰

⁸ Labour 20 - L20 represents the interests of workers at the G20 level. It unites trade unions from G20 countries and Global Unions and is convened by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC) to the OECD.

⁹ L20 Priorities for the G20 Summit – Osaka, Japan, 28-29 June 2019: <https://www.ituc-csi.org/l20-priorities-for-the-g20-summit>

¹⁰ L20 Statement to the G20 Labour and Employment Ministers' Meeting, Mendoza, Argentina, 6-7 September 2018 <https://www.g20.org/sites/default/files/media/l20declarationen.pdf>

Moreover, skills development is an area which supports and fosters social dialogue at the global level. Workers' organizations have also joined with the employers' associations - Business 20 (B20) - to deliver a common message on skills to the G20 Ministers' meetings. Already in 2013 they proposed a series of key principles on apprenticeships.¹¹ In 2018 they called on G20 governments to develop overall national strategies for lifelong learning aimed at transforming all aspects of human life (labour, social and personal), to actively promote and engage in retraining and to ensure that the key role social partners play as real actors in the labour market is fully taken into account when developing or modernising national training strategies (B20 - L20, 2018).

Why do workers' organizations engage in skills development?

Why do trade unions engage in skills development? As illustrated by the following two statements, trade unions from different parts of the world, with different contexts and traditions, consider themselves to be stakeholders in the skills development process.

COSATU is a stakeholder in the skills development process

Bhabhali Ka Maphikela Nhlapo, Education and Training Secretary, 'Congress of South African Trade Unions' (COSATU) - South Africa

We support a demand- or industry-led system which cannot proceed without the involvement of organised labour. We want to promote a skills revolution where many workers and unemployed young people will be involved in training. We jealously guard against the mainstreaming of adult education or the prioritisation of lower level skills. We value and guard the principles of equity, progression, articulation and mobility. We want a skills development system at the workplace linked to grading and pay. We need to work for the levy exclusion of the public sector and for increased investment in skills development in all enterprises. We need a system that mainstreams public providers - the most affordable and most accessible. We need to increase the profile and status of the apprenticeship system to make it equal in social esteem with higher education. This can only be done through trade union engagement.

COSATU is a stakeholder in the skills development process (continued)

The policies of skills development have a trade union footprint. We have a compulsory system of skills development, except in the public sector where there is a levy exemption. We have a levy system that also funds trade union capacity building in skills development. Along with employers' associations we manage the sectoral skills development bodies. We have the relevant training institutions that drive the system forward and respond to issues of accreditation. We have revived the public Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges so that they respond to the needs of industry. We can point to many case studies indicating that successful enterprises support skills training. We have a good system of planning, at enterprise and sectoral levels, that examines skills needs and ensures that training providers respond to these needs.

South African legislation operates on the basis of consultation, and not on collective bargaining, so trade unions need to organise better and recruit more members in the workplace to be the key voice in the system.

Why unions in Canada are actively involved in skills development programs

Mike Luff, National Representative, 'Canadian Labour Congress' (CNC) - Canada

Skills development is crucial to help workers obtain the qualifications they need to get jobs in high-demand fields, and construction unions, for example, operate state-of-the-art union training centres that deliver world-class apprenticeship programs connecting workers with good jobs in the construction sector.

Unions in Canada help workers upgrade their skills to advance in their careers and get jobs with higher pay, and in the hotel sector, for example, unions offer hands-on skills development so workers can climb potential job ladders.

Canadian unions recognize the need for workers to gain a broad set of essential skills that are portable. A broad set of skills helps workers adapt to the changing nature of work and gives them more leverage in the job market. Unions provide programs that help workers gain computer and digital skills, literacy and numeracy skills, communication skills, problem solving, critical thinking, leadership and teamwork skills.

¹¹ Key elements of quality apprenticeship – a joint understanding of the B20 and L20 https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/1306_b20-l20_paper_on_quality_apprenticeships.pdf

Why unions in Canada are actively involved in skills development programs (continued)

Unions in Canada understand the role of skills development in reducing social and economic inequality by building a more inclusive workforce that includes key groups who are traditionally under-represented. For example, many unions deliver skills development programs that are specifically aimed at recruiting Indigenous peoples, women, immigrants, and young workers facing barriers to participation in the job market.

Finally, skills development is an essential ingredient in human development. It is about helping workers develop their individual capacities and enhancing their ability to participate fully in the life of their families and communities. A society with an active and engaged citizenry, with the skills needed to participate fully in all aspects of life, is more vital, inclusive and democratic.

There are important potential benefits for trade unions to be involved in skills development, and they may be found along four dimensions - vis-à-vis the State, their own organizations, employers and their members (Box 3).

The ILO has already summed up the potential benefits for

Box 3 - Workers' organizations - four dimensions of engaging in skills development

Four important dimensions of engagement in skills development for workers' organizations are:

- influencing **State policy** on education and training
- integrating the learning agenda with **other trade union functions**
- focusing on the **institutionalisation of learning with employers**
- enhancing **membership** activity and representation (Rainbird & Stuart, 2011, quoted in ILO, 2017).

trade unions and workers' representatives of engaging in skills development of apprenticeships, in terms of achievements in productivity shared through better working conditions, reaching out to new members and an improved culture of vocational training and investment in quality apprenticeships (Box 4).

Box 4 - Potential benefits for trade unions and workers' representatives

1. Productivity gains and better working conditions

Workers may benefit collectively from the skills acquired by a new generation of trained workers. An increase in productivity may increase the bargaining power of workers' representatives in companies and sectors as well as in collective bargaining and wage negotiations at the national level.

2. New members

By providing relevant information, defending the rights of apprentices and workers and representing apprentices in negotiations, unions can inform apprentices about the mission and importance of their union and in this way attract new members.

3. Improved culture of vocational training and investment in quality apprenticeships

Successfully demonstrating the effects of training on productivity improves the learning culture of the enterprise and may result in an increase in investment in training. Quality apprenticeships are a proven mechanism for the cost-effective development of competencies provided by the presence of a VET institution and contribute to closer collaboration between the VET institution and the enterprise. By providing practical training through quality apprenticeships and harnessing the benefits of skills development, it is possible to increase the employers' commitment to learning (OIT/Cinterfor, 2017a).

Examples of trade union engagement at the national, sectoral and enterprise levels

Workers' organizations are engaged in a variety of different activities at national, sectoral and enterprise levels to support policy formation and implementation, by means of contributing to national strategies, negotiating collective agreements and participating in consultative bodies. In more specific terms they support skills development in the following ways:

- advising on **skills anticipation**
- advising on **training standards**, curricula, training programmes and assessment procedures
- **negotiating** pay rates, paid time off and entitlement for training
- supporting **links with local training providers**, including trade unions training centers
- supporting **recruitment** to training.¹²

¹² An extensive list of ways in which trade unions support skills development can be found in *Unions and Skills* (TUAC, 2016)

National level

Tri-partite training strategies and inter-sectoral collective agreements

Tri-partite training strategies and multi-sectoral collective agreements that contain skills issues are relatively rare, but powerful in the sense that they enable trade unions to play a direct role in training policy formulation. Notable European examples for the former would be the 'Alliance for Initial and Further Training 2015-2018' in Germany and the French national inter-sectoral agreement on vocational training in 2003, 2009 and 2013.¹³

The 'Alliance for Initial and Further Training 2015-2018' was signed by the German trade union confederation, five employers' associations and four Ministries of the Federal Government. This common strategy contained a series of measures to improve the transition of young people into the world of work and their chosen occupation. It aimed to improve the quality and attractiveness of the vocational training system; provide every young person interested in an apprenticeship position with a pathway to a vocational qualification; reduce the number of school leavers without a school leaving certificate or without the appropriate qualification to begin an apprenticeship; increase the number of apprenticeship positions and of companies training young people; and enhance advanced training to improve permeability between vocational training and academic education.¹⁴

The French national inter-sectoral agreement on vocational training was signed by four trade union confederations and two employers' associations in 2013. It had a number of significant aims for the development of vocational education and training: to enhance the skills and qualifications of employees so as to support their own professional development and to boost the competitiveness of enterprises; to support professional sectors by developing the skills and qualifications of their employees; to maintain lifelong learning pathways by means of a personal training account; to increase the number of beneficiaries of individuals' time off for training; to improve career guidance; to finance vocational training; and to improve the governance of skills development. This agreement took on an enhanced significance, as it formed the basis for the subsequent 'Law on Vocational Training, Employment and Social Democratisation' which was adopted in March 2014. A new law dealing with vocational training in France - 'For the Freedom to Choose a Professional Future' – was introduced in 2018,¹⁵ and the role played by the 'Confédération française démocratique du travail' (CFDT) in its adoption is presented in the following comments.

Skills development and the new law - 'For the Freedom to Choose a Professional Future'

Yvan Ricordeau, National Secretary responsible for Education and Training, 'Confédération française démocratique du travail (CFDT)' - France

All workers must be able to update their skills regularly, especially those facing the digital revolution and ecological change. They also need to be able to enjoy the right to retraining. All job seekers must have the opportunity to have their skills recognised, as well as the opportunity to improve them or to acquire new ones. And so training for job seekers needs massive and constant investment.

The French government recently introduced a legislative proposal without any prior consultation with the social partners. The CFDT's response has been to defend the right to support members of society and collective frameworks so that the individual right to training is recognised, both at the enterprise and regional levels.

Following the CFDT's intervention, the government has agreed to set up 'Councils for Professional Development' which will advise all workers free of charge, whether already in employment or looking for employment. We are keeping a watchful eye on the implementation of this policy.

The CFDT has come forward with a new focus on a rights-based approach to professional development. By increasing pressure towards training and accreditation bodies we still have to make sure it is implemented.

The CFDT has also opened up a new space in collective bargaining frameworks, as regards the financial contribution required for employees' personal training accounts, so to reduce inequalities of access to skills development.

Other issues need to be addressed - for example, the collective dimension of professional skills, whose economic and social significance are often neglected by employers and the State.

¹³ <https://www.bmwi.de/DE/Themen/Ausbildung-und-Beruf/allianz-fuer-aus-und-weiterbildung.html>

¹⁴ At the time of writing discussions are underway to prepare another national strategy

¹⁵ https://travail-emploi.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/act_for_the_freedom_to_choose.pdf

Another compelling example would be the *'National Skills Accord'* in South Africa. Three trade union confederations signed a tri-partite agreement in 2011 with an employers' association and the Ministry of Higher Education and Training which committed all social partners to combine their *'efforts in order to strengthen skills development as a crucial pillar of the New Growth path'*. Stakeholders committed to train artisans and other scarce skills, contribute to the placement of further education graduates into workplace learning, improve the quality of skills planning and focus on the performance of the sectoral skills councils.¹⁶

National Consultative Bodies

National consultative bodies provide trade unions with a clear opportunity to regulate and directly support skills development.

In Asia, as an example, trade unions are represented in the Philippines on the *'Board of the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority'* (Box 5), in India on the tri-partite *'National Council for Vocational Training'* which advises the Ministry of Labour and Employment on the definition of standards for syllabi, methods of training and certification (Smith, 2014), and in Bangladesh on the *'National Skills Development Council'* whose role is to oversee and monitor all activities of public and private training providers related to skills training (ILO, 2017).

Box 5 - Trade union representation on national consultative bodies in the Philippines

In the Philippines there are six trade union representatives (out of a total of 22) on the *'Board of the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority'* which has a key role in TVET policy formulation and implementation. It is mandated by law *'to provide relevant, accessible, high quality and efficient technical education and skills development'* and is primarily responsible for the formulation of continuing technical education and skills development policies and programmes. As part of its quality assurance measures it has promoted the use of competency- and outcome-based Training Regulations which contain minimum standards for trainers and training material, and it has established a National Qualification Programme for TVET trainers-assessors. In addition, it approves the National Technical Education and Skills Development Plan and allocates resources for the different training programmes. It defines and approves TVET skills standards and assessments. Further, it establishes and administers a system of accreditation of both public and private TVET institutions (ILO, 2017).

In the African region, trade unions are represented on a number of different national consultative bodies. In Kenya the *'National Industrial Training Authority'* was established in 2011 to *'promote the highest standards in the quality and efficiency of industrial training in Kenya and ensure the supply of properly trained manpower at all levels in industry'*. Three trade union representatives are members of its Board - out of a total of 11. In Mozambique the *'National Authority for Vocational Education'*, which is, *inter alia*, charged with developing a national TVET sector strategy, has trade union representatives on its Board (The Commonwealth, 2016). In Senegal the most representative trade union confederations are members of the *'Board of the National Vocational Qualification Centre'*. As can be seen from Box 6, South Africa provides for extensive trade union involvement in skills development (ILO, 2017).



Box 6 - Trade union representation on national consultative bodies in South Africa

Trade unions are represented on the *'National Skills Authority'* which advises the Ministry of Labour on skills issues; the *'Human Resource Development Council of South Africa'* – *'a national, multi-tiered and multi-stakeholder advisory body'* which aims to stimulate employability and a culture of training and lifelong learning at individual, organizational and national levels, and which is supported by a technical working group chaired by the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the largest South African trade union confederation; the *'South African Qualifications Authority'* which oversees the development and implementation of the *'National Qualifications Framework and the Quality Council on Trades and Occupations'*, which is responsible for overseeing the design, implementation, assessment and certification of occupational qualifications (ILO, 2017).

¹⁶ <http://www.economic.gov.za/communications/publications/national-skills-accord>

In Latin America, trade unions are represented on the board of directors of national vocational training institutions, such as: 'National Employment and Vocational Training Institute' in the Dominican Republic, the 'National Learning Institute' in Costa Rica, the 'National Vocational Training Institute for Human Development' in Panama, the 'National Training Service' in Colombia and the 'Technical Institute for Training and Productivity' in Guatemala. They are also involved in public bodies that are responsible for national skills standardisation and certification systems and national qualification frameworks, such as is the 'Occupational Competency Standardisation and Certification Council' in Mexico and ChileValora in Chile. (OIT/Cinterfor, 2017b). In addition, in the Caribbean trade unions are represented on national consultative bodies of the 'Registered Apprenticeship Board' in Jamaica and the 'National Training Agencies/Councils' in Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, St Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago. There are also trade union representation on national consultative bodies supporting skills development in many European countries - for example, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg and the Netherlands (ETUC/Unionlearn, 2016).



Sectoral level

At the sectoral level trade unions are involved in skills development by means of negotiating collective agreements, participating in industry sector skills bodies and in the direct provision of technical vocational education and training.

Collective agreements

In Europe there are numerous examples of sectoral agreements that have been signed by trade unions and employers' associations. In the chemical sector in Italy trade unions and employers' associations have negotiated general agreements for the entire sector, and the latest 2018 agreement includes issues such as the funding of VET, continuing VET, certification and the identification of training representatives and a series of different issues for sub-sectors: glass; tires, cables and plastic materials; ceramics; textiles and clothing; footwear; leather; and tannery (CISL, 2018).

In Germany trade unions have negotiated collective agreements in many different sectors, thus providing practical support for continuing technical vocational education and training, as pointed out by Elke Hannack, the Vice President of the *Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund*.

The Importance of Continuing Technical Vocational Education and Training

Elke Hannack, Vice President, 'Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund' - Germany

We are going through a period of fundamental change - in terms of work, the economy and society. Digitalisation on the one hand and climate change on the other are driving a profound technological change in entire industries, and this will lead to massive restructuring of production processes and employment. The 'Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (DGB)', our trade union confederation, has around 6 million members and is committed to supporting the participation of all members of society in obtaining good quality employment and their own personal development. Learning at the workplace needs clear structures. The DGB demands guaranteed time off for learning, secure funding, better advice and counselling and transparency.

The Importance of Continuing Technical Vocational Education and Training (continued)

Continuing TVET does not happen automatically, and we in the trade unions have striven to negotiate collective agreements on training in many different sectors. These agreements deal with issues such as analyzing individual training needs and making plans for continuing training, supporting systematic personnel development and setting up continuing training structures in companies. Participation in continuing training depends to a large extent on whether employees can obtain advice and counselling, whether it leads on to improved career prospects, whether time for learning is an integrated part of the work processes, whether there is paid time off for learning purposes. It is therefore essential for companies to create a new understanding of training and competence development and support and coordinate work organization, continuing training and personnel development. And that is why the DGB is calling for increased company expenditure in continued training.

Trade unions in Latin America have also been engaged in negotiating collective bargaining agreements that include provisions for technical vocational education and training. In Argentina there are agreements in the following sectors: oil; construction; plastics; bakery; health; and dry cleaning. In Uruguay there are agreements in the following sectors: general industries; refrigeration, fishing; textiles; leather, garments and footwear; wood, cellulose and paper; chemical and pharmaceutical; metalworking and engineering; construction; retail; hospitality; transport and storage; and agriculture.¹⁷

Industry Sector Skills Bodies

At the sectoral level trade unions are represented on bodies in a variety of different countries, for example: Argentina, Bangladesh, Brazil, Cambodia, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Ghana, India, Italy, Jordan, the Philippines, Senegal, South Africa, Sweden and Uruguay.

In Denmark sectoral trade committees - *'the backbone of the VET system'* - are made up of an equal number of representatives of trade unions and employers' associations and are responsible for approximately 100 training programmes. Their core responsibilities are extensive (Box 7).

Box 7 - Core responsibilities of Trade Committees in Denmark

National trade committees have the following responsibilities:

- performing a central role in the creation and renewal of VET courses and formulating learning objectives and final examination standards based around the key competences that are deemed to be required in the labour market
- deciding the regulatory framework for individual courses within the legislative framework. They decide which trade is to provide the core of the training, the duration of the programme, and the ratio between college-based teaching and practical work in an enterprise
- approving enterprises as qualified training establishments and rule on conflicts which may develop between apprentices and the enterprise providing practical training
- functioning as gatekeepers to the trade, as they are responsible for issuing journeyman's certificates in terms of content, assessment and the actual holding of examinations (Andersen & Kruse, 2016).

In South Africa trade unions are represented on 21 *'Sector Education and Training Advisory Boards'* (SETABs - formerly known as SETAs - *'Sector Education and Training Authorities'*). SETABs develop and carry out *'Sector Skills Plans'*. In addition, they approve workplace skills plans and training reports; establish learning programmes (and related materials); register agreements and administer sectoral funds based on enterprise levies to support training provision. They are also responsible for identifying work placements and improving information about placement opportunities (ILO, 2017).

In Asia, there are a number of examples. In the Philippines there are consultative *'Industry Tri-partite Councils'* in six sectors (clothing and textiles, construction, automotive assembly, banking, and hotel, restaurants and sugar). In Bangladesh there are *'Industry Skills Councils'* (ISCs) in sectors, such as leather, construction, ready-made garments and agri-food, with trade union representation, and, as can be seen from the following statement, the *'Tannery Workers Union'* is engaged in supporting skills development in the leather industry (ILO, 2017).

¹⁷ <http://www.oitcinterfor.org/base-de-datos-convenios-colectivos-fp>

Trade unions and skills development in the Bangladeshi leather industry

Abul Kalam Azad, President, *'Tannery Workers Union'* - Bangladesh

The leather industry is one of the biggest sectors in Bangladesh, currently employing about 200,000 workers, and with the potential to employ hundreds of thousands more in the near future. However only a small minority of workers (about 5%) have received any training at all.

Workers in the industry are aware of their lack of skills, but unwilling to admit this to their managers, as it could jeopardise their chances of being employed and/or remaining in employment. Workers feel safer sharing their concerns regarding skills needs with the Tannery Workers Union which plays an important role in the overall skills development programme. In the union we realise that skills development training for workers and supervisors is essential to improve productivity and the quality of the product, and we make a significant contribution in assessing the training needs of the workers and monitoring the successful implementation of training programmes.

Our union is also represented on the *'Board of the Centre of Excellence for Leather Skill Bangladesh Limited'* which is an initiative of the *'Industry Skill Council'*. In this capacity we provide continuous support for demand-driven skills development in the sector and support implementation of the program.

Effective trade unions in the product manufacturing sub-sectors cannot be expected until efficient trade unions are developed there, and we are also engaged in catering for this need. We are also contributing towards the formulation of needs-based training programmes involving workers at the enterprise level.

Provision of technical vocational education and training

In Argentina, for example, the *'Confederación General del Trabajo'* (CGT) has committed to a broad-based programme of provision of technical vocation and training. Its Metalworkers Union has coordinated a network of 24 TVET centres with the aim of establishing a national quality standard for training and retraining which covers curriculum design, the development of training materials, training trainer activities, minimum infrastructure and equipment requirements, and this initiative has led to the award of International Organization for Standardization (ISO) recognition (Gandara, 2018). In another case, the Construction Workers Union has set up a *'National Plan for the Qualification of Workers in the Construction Industry'* which, as can be seen from the following comments, is believed to have significantly improved the skills of workers in the sector.

Vocational Training in the Argentinian Construction Industry

Gustavo Gándara, Executive Director, *Fundación UO-CRA - Unión Obrera de la Construcción de la República Argentina'* - Argentina

Trade unions in Argentina contributed to the establishment of a series of institutions and actions that would provide a collective response to the needs of workers and their families, regardless of their employment status. The development of a *'Training and Certification System (SiFoC)'* has been defined jointly and then reinforced in sectoral councils, within the framework of the *'National Council for Employment, Productivity'*.

Trade unions design and manage training projects and skills accreditation, and this approach makes it possible to combine an educational proposal with integrated training that combines the technical, employment and social dimensions of work.

Following the establishment of sectoral policies, the tripartite sectoral councils, which include representatives from the State, employers' organizations and trade unions, meet regularly, with the aim of adopting employment policy decisions in the sector, carrying out studies on labour market developments and defining the skills that workers need.

Within the framework of this council, the *'National Training Programme for Workers in the Construction Industry (PNCT)'* - has been developed. In the last ten years it has achieved important results:

- 54,741 workers - trained and certified in health and safety and environment training
- 339,107 workers - trained and certified through initial and continuing training
- 109,221 workers - skills certified.

The construction industry provides further examples in other parts of the world. In the Philippines, for example, the 'Association of Construction and Informal Workers' has established skills training centres offering courses in carpentry, painting, masonry, plumbing, shielded metal arc welding and electrical installation maintenance. In Bangladesh four trade unions have cooperated with the ILO to deliver skills training in the construction sector (ILO, 2017).

Enterprise level

Trade unions in some countries are involved in the implementation of skills development initiatives at the enterprise level, by means of works councils of different types, company agreements and/or the activities of union representatives, and more specifically trade union delegates with responsibilities for skills development.

Works Councils

Works councils provide a forum which can be used by trade union representatives to develop workers' skills at the enterprise level. In Austria, for example, the law provides the works council with extensive rights in terms of Continuing Vocational Education and Training (CVET), notably the right to information on planned training programmes and participation in the planning and implementation of in-company training and retraining measures (Unionlearn, 2013). In Germany trade unions also have an opportunity to become involved in skills development via the works councils, which are responsible for the promotion of vocational training, the establishment of training facilities and programmes and the implementation of vocational training (Articles 96-98 of the Works Constitution Act).¹⁸

In Italy trade unions are represented on works councils for VET which are foreseen in the national agreement signed within the metalworking sector, and on that basis carry out a series of activities at the enterprise level, as can be seen in Box 8.



Box 8 - Activities carried out by works councils for TVET in the Italian Metalworking Industry

- **Monitoring** the number of continuing VET initiatives carried out during the previous calendar year, the types of initiatives, the number of training days and the total number of employees involved
- **Improving access** to training by evaluating the feasibility of training projects for workers not involved in previously organised VET initiatives
- Contributing to **disseminating amongst workers**, in agreement with the enterprise, information about CVET training initiatives offered locally
- Examining the **specific training needs of workers** in line with technological developments within the enterprise
- **Reporting** training needs and the numbers of potentially interested workers, as well as any other useful information, to the competent local committees at the enterprise level (CISL, 2018).

¹⁸ http://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch_betrvg/

Collective agreements

Trade unions in certain countries have been able to negotiate agreements covering skills development, either in the form of company agreements or learning agreements.

A detailed study in Germany has identified examples of skills development in a total of 504 company agreements, covering 46 different sectors of the economy. The authors concluded that company agreements were comprehensive and that skills development was increasingly seen as a complement to other workplace issues (Busse & Heidemann, 2012).

In terms of specific enterprises, there are examples from Latin America - the agreement in Brazil between the ABC Metal Workers Trade Union and the multinational Mercedes-Benz, which includes vocational training clauses for workers in the factory of São Bernardo do Campo, in the state of São Paulo (Barretto Ghione, 2015). Another example from Latin America is the agreement, signed in Costa Rica by a subsidiary of Chiquita Brands International, and the union, '*Trabajadores de la Compañía Bananera Atlántica Limitada*', to provide training for workers in technical subjects such as: refrigerating systems trouble-shooting; use of personal protection equipment; welding and electronics; workplace safety, and general education such as computer skills and English language (Brumat, 2012, quoted in ILO, 2017).



Union Learning Representatives

In the United Kingdom, there is no statutory right to bargain on training, no obligation on the part of employers to provide training, nor any significant tradition of works councils. However, the '*Employment Act 2002*' provides an opportunity for trade unions to play a key role, via '*Union Learning Representatives (ULRs)*', in helping workers into training opportunities (Box 9).

Box 9 - The role of Union Learning Representatives (ULR)

A '*Union Learning Representative (ULR)*' is a member of an independent trade union, recognised by their employer, and elected by their union in the workplace. The ULR role involves promoting the value of learning, supporting learners, arranging learning/training and supporting workplace learning centres to embed learning in the workplace.

What are the main functions of a ULR?

- Analysing learning or training needs
- Arranging and supporting learning and training
- Consulting the employer about carrying out such activities
- Preparing to carry out the above activities.

What are the rights of a ULR?

Union learning representatives are entitled to reasonable paid time off for training and for carrying out their duties as set out above. Union members are entitled to unpaid time off to consult their learning representative, as long as they belong to a bargaining unit for which the union is recognised.¹⁸

¹⁸ <https://www.unionlearn.org.uk/union-learning-reps-ulrs>

Every year ULRs support around a quarter of a million workers in terms of access to skills development, greatly improving their employment and chances of career progression, as explained by Kevin Rowan, the 'Head of Organization, Services and Skills' at the 'Trades Union Congress (TUC)'.

Continuing Vocational Education and Training - The Contribution made by Union Learning Representatives (ULRs)

Kevin Rowan, 'Head of Organization, Services and Skills, Trades Union Congress (TUC)' - United Kingdom

Accessing opportunities to develop and learn new skills is an integral part of what makes employment 'good', workers and trade unions clearly recognise this. They also understand that an effective skills system is a necessary function for a decent economy. It is natural that trade unions are enthusiastic social partners in policy design and operational implementation of skills development, as key stakeholders and as part of their role in representing workers.

Trade unions, through the work of Union Learning Representatives (ULRs), demonstrate an unmatched effectiveness in encouraging, enabling and supporting workers to gain new skills, from key, functional skills to professional career development.

Every year in the UK ULRs support around a quarter of a million workers to access skills development, greatly improving their employment and chances of career progression, as well as improving productivity where they work. Many union learners gain their first qualifications, gain promotions and pay rises as a result of union support and secure transferable skills.

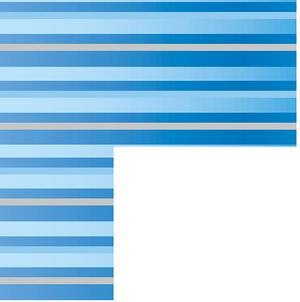
Through learning agreements unions are also able to lever additional skills investment from employers and create genuine lifelong learning environment that enables workers to continue to learn and develop their skills with union support.

Barriers to trade union engagement

In most if not all cases workers' organizations have embraced engagement to one extent or another in skills development, however, commitment has often fluctuated, in the light of other demands placed upon them, and trade union engagement has been uneven.

For some trade union organizations other issues have a higher priority. In the Philippines, for example, some trade unions consider skills development to be the responsibility of the employers, and, as in other countries, they have prioritized core functions such as the promotion of union organization, collective bargaining, the protection of workers' rights and job security. In Morocco, for example, trade unions are more interested in industrial relations questions in general - freedom of association, social dialogue and social protection, rather than TVET and skills development. In South Africa, despite the fact that trade unions were the key driving force in shaping the education and training landscape, education and training was no longer central to unions' agenda by the mid to late 2000s, nor highlighted by unions in the collective bargaining processes, as the key issues were wages and working conditions. In addition, a key weakness at the sectoral level is that skills development arrangements remain separate from collective bargaining councils (ILO, 2017).

Some workers' organizations, for example in Denmark and Germany, are well supported by external centres of expertise - trade committees and the 'Federal Institute for Vocational Training' respectively. However, this is not the norm, and the vast majority of workers' organizations do not have access to this quantity and quality of expertise. In Morocco, for example, trade unions do not have specialists in TVET, training methodology, needs analysis and skills development. In the Philippines, and more specifically the 'Board of the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA)', government representatives have full-time technical support from their respective agencies, and employers have their own human resources departments, but 'the depth and quality of union participation in policy making bodies like TESDA could have been enhanced if the workers' representatives had full-time technical staff support' (ILO, 2017).



Priority areas

In order to support their engagement in skills development, and in line with R195, workers' organizations should consider the following priority areas:

Influencing State policy on education and training

- Lobbying government to introduce legislation or policy which provides for **clear stream-lined policies and structures for the engagement of workers' organizations in skills development**, whether in terms of collective bargaining, or participation in national or sectoral or enterprise consultative bodies
- Lobbying government to introduce legislation which **enables workers' representatives to play a determining role in skills development** and to have reasonable paid time off for analysing learning or training needs; providing information and advice about learning or training matters; arranging and supporting learning and training; consulting the employer about carrying out such activities; and preparing to carry out these activities
- Lobbying government to introduce legislation which **enables workers to participate in skills development**, notably a right to training and paid time off to take up training opportunities
- Lobbying government to ensure that **sufficient funding** is made available to set up good quality skills development activities
- Supporting the introduction of measures to enable the **recognition of non-formal and informal learning** to facilitate enhanced labour market mobility
- Supporting the reinforcement of measures to ensure **inclusive access to training for under-represented groups**
- Contributing to the **collection of data** on skills training so that stakeholders are in a position to monitor skills development and estimate the impact of their skills strategies.

Integrating the learning agenda with other union functions

- **Committing** at the highest level within workers' organizations to a **comprehensive skills development policy** and to developing a multi-level strategy to accompany it
- Ensuring that workers' organizations avoid fragmentation and provide a **united front** on the question of skills development
- Ensuring that skills development is integrated into **other trade union priorities**
- **Building capacity** within their own organizations so that trade union officers are qualified and able to defend trade union and workers' interests within multi-sectoral and sectoral tri-partite bodies dealing with skills development issues and, where possible, negotiate collective bargaining agreements.

Focusing on the institutionalisation of learning with employers

- Seeking out **alliances with employers' associations and employers**, to engage in a process of social dialogue at the national, sectoral and enterprise level, so that skills development becomes an integral part of collective bargaining
- Ensuring that **young people, particularly apprentices**, have access to quality training and good working conditions and are not used as cheap labour to displace existing workers.

Enhancing membership activity and representation

- Building capacity within their own organizations so that trade union representatives are qualified and able to **defend trade union and workers' interests at the workplace**, to communicate information about skills development activities to their members and/or workers, to provide them with guidance and counselling and to motivate them to take up skills development opportunities.

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