



Social Mobility

Increasing opportunities through training and education



6 June 2018



On 6 June 2018, ACCA, PwC, European Movement International and the European Youth Forum jointly organised a conference, hosted by MEP Martina Dlabajova, MEP, called **Social mobility: Increasing opportunities through training and education**.



MEP Martina Dlabajova hosted the event and gave a welcoming speech. **Maggie McGhee**, Director Professional Insights, ACCA, moderated the panel that comprised of **Kasia Jurczak**, Member in charge of Skills and vocational training in Commissioner Thyssen Cabinet, **Anna Ludwinek**, Social policy Unit, Eurofound, **Anna Widegren**, Secretary General, European Youth Forum, **Stephen Hogan**, Head of Social Mobility, PwC, and **Bart Vandewaetere**, Head of Corporate Communications and Government Relations, Nestlé Zone Europe, Middle East & North Africa. Concluding remarks were delivered by MEP **Brando Benifei**, Vice-President, European Movement International and Chair of the EP's Youth Intergroup.



Main highlights:

MEP Martina Dlabajova

- More importance needs to be given to deeper cooperation between politics, business world and employers. Politicians must be honest and brave in admitting that they cannot identify all challenges companies are confronted with and thus to allow interested parties more input in the law-making process. The choices of today will set the course for Europe's prosperity and will affect the well-being of generations to come.
- Nobody should be tied up by their background, yet in reality, where you start often decides where you finish. Policy makers must listen and learn to cooperate towards the best possible outcome.
- It is crucial in every political debate to define the goal, vision and objectives. Priorities must be set in the right order. This is especially needed when we talk about social mobility, future skills, labour market and employment. What is actually the goal we want to achieve? Is it merely getting people a job which they will keep for life or do we want to raise a skilled workforce and young individuals that will be flexible and motivated enough to deal with the future challenges of the labour market?
- We need to think what the future labour market will bring us, how it will change the conditions and requirements, what kind of flexibility will be needed. We need to prepare the youth of today for the jobs of tomorrow. This is the task of policy makers to simplify the way and to follow the changes we are expecting for the future.
- Skills gaps and mismatches are still a very big issue. Many people often work in jobs that do not suit their talents, at the same time, 40% of European employers have difficulties finding people with the right skills.
- It is necessary to anticipate the skills mismatch by closer alignment with the needs of labour market. This can only be achieved together with educators, policy makers and companies. We need to always question whether we are giving young generations the right set of skills and whether the theoretical skills are combined with the practical ones.
- Incorporating entrepreneurial skills into national education programmes is a path to better employability which will allow social mobility.

- Most importantly, we must motivate young people to seek opportunities for themselves, to get better and to learn their whole life.
- Past generations had one job for their whole life. In the future the next generations will have around 6 different professions during their life.
- Parents are often leading the choices of their children. 95% of career decisions for children are taken by mothers. We should initiate a special campaign focussed on mothers.
- Soft skills are the hardest ones to get – maybe the definition should be changed.
- I set up a project of motivational traineeships called “Why not”, which started few years ago. It offers more than 12 high-level traineeships every year. Social mobility aspect is very important when choosing the trainee: when faced with 2 candidates of equal quality, I tend to select the one to whom I think it will most open up possibility and a chance to climb the “social ladder”.
- We should always focus on attitude, talent and motivation of young people.

Maggie McGhee, Director Professional Insights, ACCA, who moderated the session

- A [recent study](#) from Eurofound has worryingly identified that EU citizens are increasingly concerned that young people have fewer opportunities for upward social mobility than their parents. For many people over the last generation, the world has become a more prosperous place. But today, with inequality rising, it seems that our economies are not focused enough on striving to deliver for everyone.
- We all saw that over the past few decades globalisation, digitalisation and automation have changed the way we work and live. It is thus vital to open up access to new opportunities that help build healthy and prosperous economies where people of all backgrounds are able to flourish. But for that, people need to be equipped with the right skills.
- The EU is addressing the issue from different fronts – the Skills Agenda for Europe, and the launch of the European Commission European Pillar of Social Rights, which address both the importance of access to training and addressing inequality.
- Social mobility is a lifelong journey, “Rome wasn’t built in a day”. And there are also societal and cultural obstacles, which are linked to the perception of accessing certain professions, a “limiting” factor, the belief that ‘this is not for me’. A very dangerous stigma, as it is likely that only those with prior knowledge,- or social capital - will appreciate the diversity of the professions and flexibility of access.
- A recent [ACCA report](#) includes recommendations on the importance of improving awareness of ‘stigmatized” professions, such as accountancy, as a career choice at younger levels. It suggests seeking to remove bias from the recruitment process. It also suggest to remove barriers by introducing flexible learning routes, and to focus on new skills, as well as lifelong learning, to keep the profession relevant. We live in a digital world, and the report also recommends using digital tools to counteract the legacy of closed professional networks.
- Professional accountancy has a key role to play in opening up access to opportunities, and in so doing, playing its part in building the healthy and prosperous economies, where people of all backgrounds are able to flourish I was mentioning previously.
- A professional accountancy qualification can provide individuals with financial acuity to contribute meaningfully to the business world or the public sector.
- But, as for other professions linked to financial sector, there is a need to make the profession better known as a career choice, especially among those who have not grown up among family and friends with professional qualifications or university degrees and those that live in areas that lack opportunities.
- In order to shift mentalities, we need everyone to be on board, collaboration between policy makers, stakeholders, teachers, businesses, employers - is critical.

Kasia Jurczak, Member in charge of Skills and vocational training in Commissioner Thyssen Cabinet

- It is important to address social mobility from all three aspects: social, economic and political. In the digital, globalised and aging Europe, we need all hands on deck. We need young people to understand that they have a future and that they have policy makers that are doing their best to offer opportunities for the future.
- The European Pillar of Social Rights was signed last year. This acts a compass for EU policies to European societies for the future of work. It is based on two main principles: 1. Lifelong learning, education and learning 2. Equalities.
- The [Social Scoreboard](#) is available to monitor the progress of countries. Income inequalities are going up, however education opportunities are increasing. Impact of parental background on the education outcome is diminishing.
- The Skills agenda is an important policy framework and the Europass is also a very important instrument in guiding people in presenting their skills.
- Access to information and networks is often a big issue for young people.
- The European Commission has proposed to double the funding for the Erasmus programme for the next financial framework. The funds will also be made available for people from more disadvantaged backgrounds.
- University education is very valuable, however vocational education and training is also a very important option, although many people don't see it as a good career choice, or what innovations it can bring. Commissioner Thyssen is promoting it as a valid career choice. A public campaign [VET Skills week](#) was initiated in order to achieve this objective. It will take place on 5-9 November this year in Vienna.
- The Commissioner also emphasised the [quality and effective apprenticeships framework](#) was developed to give guidance on what makes a good quality apprenticeship. The framework sets out 14 criteria in relation to working and learning conditions as well as to framework conditions. It provides a common understanding among Member States and it will support their efforts to reform and modernise apprenticeship systems that provide an excellent learning and career pathway. It should have a learning component, it should also be paid or compensated and it should be a useful learning experience.
- It is important to give an opportunity for those in VET to travel in a different country and have a learning opportunity abroad. This can be provided by ErasmusPro.
- Cooperation with business is essential.
- It is very important to see what paths people take after graduating schools. There is an action in the Skills Agenda on tracking which allows discovering what happens with graduates of universities or VET.
- The choice of a career is very important but it is crucial to support people in transition, especially from education to employment. We also need to invest in horizontal skills.
- Mobilisation and involvement of private sector actors is important but we also need structural reforms in member states, relying only on businesses is not enough. The European Commission will be launching the Apprenticeship Support Service in November. It will be a knowledge hub for member states.
- More focus needs to be put on learning validation. DG Employment is organising a [Validation Festival](#) on 14-15 June.
- The European Commission is also emphasising the importance of guidance.
- The Carers profession is often very undervalued and underpaid. One area where this problem could be addressed is through validation. Validation of formal and informal learning is becoming a more recognised issue.

Anna Ludwinek, Social policy Unit, Eurofound

- Social mobility is getting a lot of attention and momentum at the European level. It is really enshrined in the foundation of European societies. Success in life should not depend on person's family background.
- Eurofound report and other research unfortunately confirm that in some countries social mobility is decreasing. Sweden comes up in many reports as a worrying story. Germany, Austria and some Central Eastern Europe are also not doing very well in terms of social mobility.
- Even in countries with high social mobility levels, such as France, Belgium or the Netherlands, there is still a very strong perception of current generations that their children will not be better off. Often perceptions are not real but they have real consequences.
- Education has been a great enabler and equaliser in the social mobility field. However we see that in many countries the role of education is diminishing.
- Another important trend is tracking or selection. We need to look into how it is organised so it does not disadvantage the poorer kids because they often get pushed into less attractive career paths.
- There is a trend of educational expansion and research shows that the middle class kids are benefiting the most from it. We need to see what could be done to also involve the working class.
- The prestige of education often matters to employers.
- The quality of education and teachers are really important. The regional dimension here is key. Often the place a person comes from determines their life chances and local schools in more disadvantaged areas are failing to attract good teachers.
- It is important to address the issue of parental guidance and influence. The glass floor phenomenon shows the trend of kids from less advantages backgrounds outperforming other kids the moment they enter schools. The school is the equaliser, yet it is very important to take parental influence into consideration and make sure that kids from disadvantaged backgrounds do not miss out on opportunities.
- Soft skills are especially important when people enter the labour market. People need invisible skills are needed to really succeed in the labour market, especially in the top professions.
- We need to raise awareness of internships because this information is often available for a very closed circle of people.
- Mentoring is tremendously important. It is not just about entering the labour market but also the progression in it.
- It is essential that policy makers address the gender and wealth issues. It is not only the income but also the wealth of families that can create advantage in life.
- There should also be more work done on indicators, objectives and measurement when it comes to social mobility.
- Eurofound will soon publish a study on link between perceptions and real social mobility, as well as important role of social services.

Anna Widegren, Secretary General, European Youth Forum

- To increase opportunities for all young people, investing on quality is key. Quality education and training must be free for all without hidden costs. It must be based on targeted measures and services tackling the specific needs and circumstances and addressing the rights of the most vulnerable young people.
- For education to be truly inclusive, a rights-based, learner-centred approach is key. Learners should take part in all stages of the education and training process to ensure fulfilment of their needs and the sustainability of learning outcomes.

- Recognition of different types of education is very important. VET is often seen as secondary education in many countries which is very harmful and we need to make sure that it is seen as equal education.
- Flexibility also needs to be ensured for people who want a transition from VET to academic universities.
- Recognition of non-formal education is incredibly important. Non-formal education and the involvement of youth organisations can help addressing the individual needs of young people and reaching out to those further away from society.
- Research has looked into what are the skills that people gain through non-formal education and what are the skills that employers are looking for. There is a clear match – these skills include leadership, team building, communication and organisation. If the mobility aspect is included in the non-formal education experience, people also learn intercultural competences.
- Recognising non-formal education can increase young people's confidence in their capabilities. Guidance is also incredibly important and it can be done through education systems or by involving different organisations such as student unions.
- Education should see mobility as a natural state of being and it should work towards ensuring that there are no obstacles for cross-border mobility.
- The commitment to increase the Erasmus budget is welcome but the European Youth Forum is calling for ten times the budget. We really need to reach out to the most vulnerable young people and much more investment is needed for that. Youth organisations have been really successful in reaching out to the most disadvantaged groups, therefore they need to be recognised as equal partners.
- We need to ensure that member states invest more in education and provide better guidance for people transitioning from education to workforce. Better training opportunities are needed, as well as cooperation between employers, education providers and decision makers.
- Investing in digital literacy and lifelong learning, especially among youth, as a result of increased digitalisation of the labour market is crucial. The assumption that young people are “digital natives” fails to reflect the fact that not all young people have equal access to technology, nor do all young people come from families that can afford them.
- Skills mismatch is constantly on the agenda and it is a massive issue. However, it is often presented as the main cause for the difficult position of young people in the labour market. This is a very limited approach, it goes beyond skills.
- We should also stop blaming young people for not being skilled enough. Instead we should look at our systems.
- Improving education and training is not enough if the quality isn't there. Quality education should be linked to quality training and quality jobs. Training is key in this process. We always ask young people to acquire new skills but training opportunities are not always available. Quality traineeships and apprenticeships are also often hard to find.
- The changing nature of work is an important issue in our current European social model. Around 44% of young people have non-standard contracts and are not socially protected nor are paying into tax systems.
- Caring responsibilities in many societies fall on young people. Ensuring that jobs and systems we have are flexible and provide the same opportunities is essential.
- European Youth Forum, together with various partners, recently released a study called [Youth Progress Index](#).

Stephen Hogan, Head of Social Mobility, PwC

- People's background unfortunately still determines their career path. Education can make a real difference by opening doors to different opportunities. Social mobility is

about people being able to go as far as their talent and determination will take them. People should not be held back because they went to a certain type of school, because their parents had a certain job or didn't work at all.

- Social mobility has never been discussed as much as it is now. PwC works in social mobility as a global employer and global business. Around 100000 people apply for jobs at PwC in the UK each year. PwC has long standing recruitment programmes and recent debates on social mobility are making the company do things a bit differently. A social mobility team has been set up because PwC can do more as a large employer. The team developed a 5 year social mobility strategy. It has four distinct elements to it and the first one is around recruitment. It is important to provide a number of ways to get into the organisation. PwC is actively working to help people from different backgrounds to get into the organisation, especially for those who think that people working at PwC are not like them. It is essential to demystify what the workplace at PwC actually looks like.
- Internships play a great role in social mobility as big organisations have a duty to provide fair internship experiences.
- The second part of the strategy is around development and progression in the workplace – it is not just about getting in, it is also about getting on. It is important for the organisation to have a good data about employees. PwC want to have information not only about new employees but also the ones that have been working at the organisation for a while.
- Interaction between employees and sharing their education and work experiences might be alienating and can make a person feel like they are different in their circle. For that reason diversity initiatives are very important in order to raise awareness that we cannot judge people by the way they look.
- PwC has long standing community and volunteering programmes. It tries to focus on skills based volunteering. It is important to have these programmes in different geographical areas than London where there are more opportunities in order to reach less advantaged communities with greater needs.
- PwC works a lot with around 50 schools in a holistic way and acts as a bridge between the world of education and the world of work. Young people are often overloaded with information and it is not always great. Teachers and parents also need information.
- PwC also support a lot of social enterprises because this is the way to reach a larger group of people. PwC Social Entrepreneurs Club supports 250 social enterprises across the UK and gives them a range of mentoring, training and mental support.
- Advocacy is another area where PwC is very active. It is about telling the story internally and externally why social mobility is so important in our society.
- It is vital to have a strong leadership in social mobility but it has not been well understood. It is therefore important to educate people about it.
- Social mobility is not just about young people.
- It is not necessary to be a large organisation like PwC to make a difference. Every organisation of every size can make a difference in their individual interactions. It is about treating people fairly, respectfully and let them progress in their education and career path.
- In order to make a difference, organisations need to be open and go to different places to employ people. It is important to show to people that there are so many things they can do in their career. Companies need to demonstrate how the workplace really looks like because many people don't have the contact of reference to get the information about the job from.
- It is necessary to recognise that people have a life outside work and it is especially important to acknowledge people that have caring responsibilities. Work for these people

needs to be a flexible place where they are able to balance their work and caring responsibilities.

Bart Vandewaetere, Head of Corporate Communications and Government Relations, Nestlé Zone Europe, Middle East & North Africa

- [Nestlé needs YOUth](#) initiative was started in Europe in order to address the unemployment issue in the EU. Nestlé wanted to do its part in solving this problem and it has realised in the process that it makes sense for the company to get engaged in this kind of work. It is about creating a pool of talents with good skills that can be later on recruited.
- Nestlé is also taking part in European Alliance for Apprenticeships. Today Nestlé provides apprenticeships in over 20 countries in Europe and abroad.
- Nestlé has more than 100 factories in different areas, which allows reaching more people from different backgrounds.
- As part of the programme, Nestlé is focussing on readiness for work by mentoring young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and helping them to choose different directions than they would normally choose.
- It is important to work together with different partners, such as or banks or retailers. Nestlé has established the Alliance for YOUth which focusses on apprenticeships by creating over 200000 opportunities.
- It has also recently initiated, together with JA Europe, a pillar on entrepreneurship which helps people obtaining the [entrepreneurial skills pass](#).
- Another important aspect is social mobility through labour mobility and cross border labour mobility and Nestlé is actively working in this area. The most difficult group to reach was the apprentices. Nestlé has is collaboration on a programme with CSR Europe and has support from the Erasmus+ and other companies in its Alliance for YOUth work. Nestlé is learning together with its partners how to make moving apprentices cross border successfully which is a very difficult task. The biggest challenge is to engage schools in facilitation of this process.
- Together with Endres+Hauser (company creating analytical schools), Nestlé creates apprenticeship opportunities. This project has achieved a great success. Apprentices are able to train in both companies and get familiar with different sides of both businesses. This is a perfect example of developing a formula that benefits bot, businesses and apprentices.
- It is important to have the right framework for apprenticeships. Some great collective work has been done but the system is just not ready at the moment. It is vital to create more awareness for young people about apprenticeship opportunities. There are many opportunities to grow but we have to do it all together. From the business perspective, it makes sense to work on the higher education level.

MEP Brando Benifei, Vice-President, European Movement International and Chair of the EP's Youth Intergroup

- Too often there is a tendency of addressing the topic of skills, education, VET, with a blanket approach, without fully taking into account the profound differences and implications that exist not only in different socio-economic and geographical realities, but in the necessary policy response to it. The Eurofound paper brilliantly addresses the social mobility issue and makes a very clear call to understand the complex phenomenon of social mobility in its multifaceted dimension.
- Just like unemployment cannot be reduced to matter of skills mismatch, social mobility cannot be understood as a static or flat phenomenon, and its occupational, horizontal, vertical as well as inter and intra generational dimension needs to be fully acknowledged. It has implications on several policy fields, from education to

employment, from welfare policies to macro-economic considerations. It therefore necessitates a continuous effort in the development of new and more effective quality indicators.

- Younger generations are often automatically seen as “digital natives”, however the reality is more complex. Too often young generations use technology without fully understanding it.
- The loss of jobs connected to the transformation of the production chains can and will probably be bigger than we think; therefore we risk not only occupational losses but also the erosion of our social fabric because of marginalisation and growing inequalities.
- Digitalisation should always be considered as an enabling tool rather than a goal and a solid regulatory framework and a solid educational planning is vital to manage the transition to competitive digital economies in an inclusive manner. The collateral effects of leaving vulnerable individuals behind are already evident: where people feel abandoned and not equipped for the modernisation, they tend to marginalise from the society.
- We are approaching the end of this parliamentary legislature, which started in the middle of the dramatic economic and financial crisis and sees the EU economy slowly getting out of it, leaving serious scars behind, especially as far as the cohesiveness of society is concerned.
- Europe is faced with serious demographic challenges, which affect the sustainability of the social security systems and pensions; puts older people at least of social exclusion while also jeopardising future pensions for people in precarious or atypical employment. We have been facing a crisis on the management of migration, which will have long-term consequences if not addressed rationally and responsibly. We are in a time of profound change due to technological development, automation, digitalisation, and their influence on work-relations and in the skills required to perform new tasks, new jobs.
- The EU has the chance today to prove capable of having a modern, up-to-date vision to tackle all this on two main fronts: a serious advancement on the agenda outlined in the European Pillar of Social Rights; and shaping a resilient and future-oriented multiannual budget. In the intersection of these two, is anchored the new European Social Fund +, which will bear on its shoulders the responsibility of delivering tangible results and benefits for European citizens. It will not just be a matter of money, but much of the ambition will be determined by the rules on the functioning of the ESF programmes, which will be decided by the co-legislator in its Regulation and in the modification of Common Provisions Regulation, which establishes the framework for action for a number of EU shared management Funds.
- Commissioner Thyssen, when presenting the new ESF +, said that Europe must put the money where its mouth is, and that the new ESF will be a more flexible and simplified fund are focused for investing in people, to make sure they have the right skills, to make sure they have modern social protection adapted to new forms of work, and to show solidarity with those who need it most.