

EMPLOYMENT & SOCIAL AFFAIRS

POLICY PAPER 273
DECEMBER 2021

#CONTINUING
EDUCATION
#JACQUESDELORS
#SOCIALEUROPE
#BUILDING
EUROPE

■ SOFIA FERNANDES

Director of the Académie Notre Europe & Senior research fellow for Employment and social affairs, Jacques Delors Institute

■ KLERVI KERNEÏS

Research assistant for Employment and social affairs, Jacques Delors Institute

The authors of this paper would like to thank Jean-Michel Baer and Sébastien Maillard for their valuable comments.

CONTINUING EDUCATION, ACCORDING TO JACQUES DELORS, THE CATALYST OF A CHANGING SOCIETY



*Signing of the Social Contract of progress 1989-1992 by the European Commission and trade unions. 7 July 1989
© European Communities, 1989 / Source: European Commission – Audiovisual Service*

INTRODUCTION ■

For the last two years, EU leaders have been working to curb the adverse social and economic repercussions of the health crisis, particularly through the introduction of short-time work schemes to protect workers and jobs. The latest available figures suggest that we are on the road to recovery: the EU unemployment rate is at its lowest level since 2008¹ and the growth rate is set to exceed 4% in 2021 and 2022, according to the European Commission's forecasts.² However, beyond its short-term effects, the COVID-19 crisis will likely have a long-term impact on employment in the EU. The pandemic, and the European recovery strategy, are stepping up the digital and environmental transitions, alongside the swift and far-reaching changes already underway on the labour market. Some jobs will cease to exist, many will be significantly changed, while many others will be created. Ahead of this, there will be a growing need for people to retrain or upgrade their skills so that they can retain their job or find a new one, while meeting the new requirements of companies and the labour market. However, currently only 38% of European adults take part in training each year.³

1. Eurostat, [Labour force survey in the EU](#), Unemployment by sex and age, annual and monthly data.

2. European Commission (2021), [Summer 2021 Economic Forecast](#), 7 July.

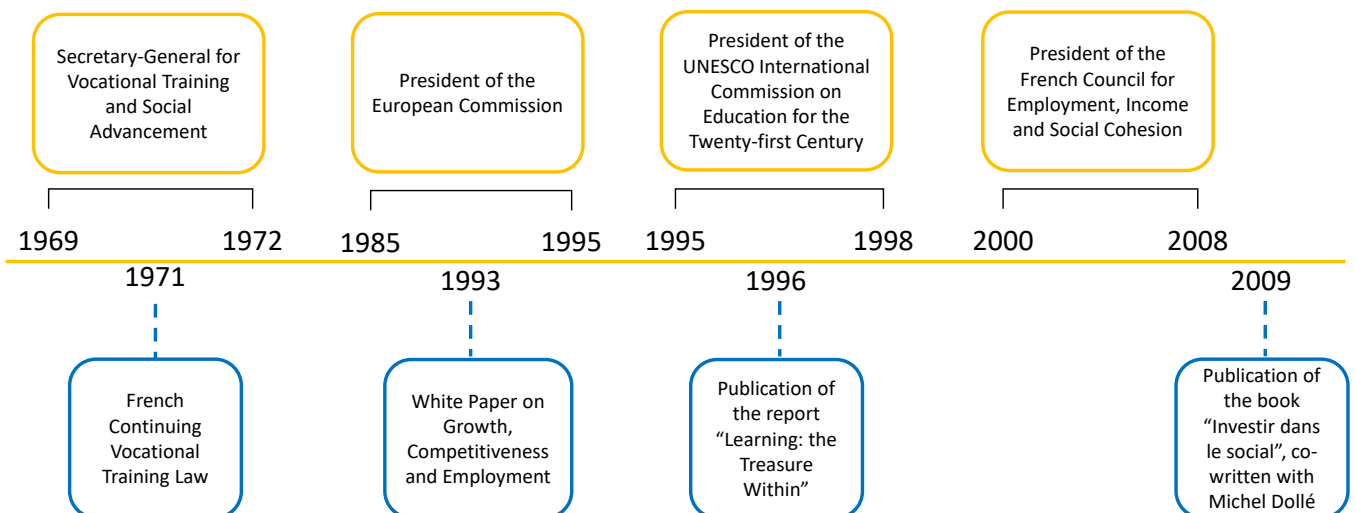
3. European Commission (2020), [European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience](#), 1 July.

Even though the pandemic has shone the spotlight on the skills challenge, this is far from being a new development. From the 1960s, Jacques Delors has called for the right to lifelong learning. Much more recently, on a European level, the very first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights proclaimed in 2017 sets out each person's right to "quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market".⁴

To mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Delors Law on vocational training in France, we will look back over Jacques Delors' actions and views concerning lifelong learning. This endeavour aims in particular to stimulate current debate and considerations regarding the skills challenge in Europe, while the Commission pursues the implementation of the European Skills Agenda, with upcoming proposals on individual learning accounts, micro-credentials and the development of digital skills.

This paper will firstly review Jacques Delors' career through the lens of his action in favour of lifelong learning. We will then identify the main motivations behind this commitment which, as we will see, remain just as relevant today. In section three we will pinpoint the major ideas which shaped, punctuated and structured his holistic vision of lifelong learning and will conclude by considering the role of the different continuing education stakeholders with a view to implementing these ideas.

1 ■ LIFELONG LEARNING, A CENTRAL THREAD OF JACQUES DELORS' ACTION



In his memoir, Jacques Delors viewed the 1960s as the beginning of his commitment to lifelong learning. Leveraging his experience within government bodies responsible for vocational training and welfare, he was already putting forward innovative ideas for

⁴. European Commission (2017), *European Pillar of Social Rights*, p. 11.

continuing education at this time. For example, he proposed the idea of a right to lifelong learning in an article in *L'Expansion*, published in 1967.⁵

Four years later, Jacques Delors, when Secretary-General for Vocational Training and Social Advancement under French Prime Minister Jacques Chaban-Delmas, saw his ideas translated into action with the Continuing Vocational Training Law that took his name (see Box 1).⁶ Motivated by the belief that an economy's efficacy and prosperity are based on the qualifications and skills of its workforce,⁷ Jacques Delors saw this law as a means to empower people to deal with changes, promote equal opportunities, improve economic efficacy and create a positive synergy with the education system⁸ –all with a view to launching the development of a more comprehensive lifelong learning policy.⁹

BOX 1 ■ The 1971 French Continuing Vocational Training Law¹⁰

Adopted following the national inter-sectoral agreement of 11 July 1970, the Law dated 16 July 1971, known as the “Delors Law”, set the course for the organisation of continuing vocational training in France as part of continuing education.

The Law targeted five main groups of people: young people leaving the school system with no training and/or appropriate qualifications, employees forced to retrain because they had to change job, profession or company, workers subject to the requirements of changes and who had to upgrade and/or perfect their skills, workers wishing to advance their careers through long-term training initiatives and all citizens looking for personal development and to improve their cultural level.

This Law brought about structural changes for continuing education in France in terms of governance and schemes, particularly by introducing mandatory funding by companies, joint management of collection and the objective of striking a balance between corporate requirements through the Training Plan and employee needs with the creation of the Individual Training Leave.

Jacques Delors gives a mixed assessment of this 1971 Law. He stressed that it did develop adult training –many workers were able to upgrade and perfect their skills– and introduced positive reflexes regarding companies’ investment in continuing education as a means of dealing with crises.¹¹ However, he regretted that the system did not succeed in combatting inequalities in access and that not all stakeholders played their part, not only companies and trade unions, but also the French Ministry of Education, which showed very little interest in the issue of adult education (see Section 4).¹²

5. He was at the time Head of Social and Cultural Affairs at the National Planning Board.

6. The groundwork for this Law was laid by the Debré Law on vocational training dated 3 December 1966.

7. Jacques Delors with Jean-Louis Arnaud (2004), *Mémoires*, Paris: Éditions Plon, p. 96 (in French).

8. Jacques Delors. (1991), “Formation permanente : Jacques Delors ouvre de nouvelles pistes”, Interview, *Le Monde*, 21 June (in French).

9. Jacques Delors (1999), *Interview on vocational training and the need to adapt to work realities through a cooperation between public authorities, companies and social partners*, Revue de la CFDT, 1 August (in French).

10. French Economic, Social and Environmental Council (CESE) (2011), *40 ans de formation professionnelle : bilan et perspectives*, Opinion, Official Journal of the French Republic, 20 December (in French).

11. Jacques Delors (2011), *Address by Mr Jacques Delors, Plenary session of the French Economic, Social and Environmental Council on vocational training*, 13 December (in French).

12. Jacques Delors (1999), *Interview*, Revue de la CFDT, Op. Cit. (in French).

From 1985, Jacques Delors pursued his commitment to lifelong learning on a European level. From the start of his presidency of the Commission, he stated the importance of education and training in an address to the European Parliament: "I wish to insist, in an attempt to rebuild confidence, on the importance of human resources for the knowledge and skills which they contribute. Our policies on education and training must help everyone to a better understanding of the way the world is going and enable everyone to make the best use of his talents and personal resources in the service of society".¹³

However, Delors' desire for action quickly came up against the Community's lack of powers in this area. Education and training remain for the most part a competence of Member States and the EU's action is limited to support for and coordination of national policies. In the Treaty of Rome, the Community's role in terms of "occupational and continuation training" is defined in articles 118 and 128 –with the latter concerning the intervention of the European Social Fund in this regard. More specifically, the Treaty provides for a close cooperation between Member States, promoted by the Commission, and the foundation by the Council of "general principles for implementing a common vocational training policy capable of contributing to the harmonious development both of the national economies and of the common market" (Article 128).¹⁴ On this basis, a Community action programme on vocational training was drafted in 1971,¹⁵ but be that as it may, when Jacques Delors became President of the Commission, Community action in this field was extremely limited.

Against this backdrop, Jacques Delors strove to make training a key element of the European political agenda during his ten years of tenure at the helm of the Commission. At the start of his term of office, he decided to submit these issues to social dialogue. During the first two meetings of the Val Duchesse process, which restarted European social dialogue, social partners agreed on the idea of designing a program to train workers in new disciplines related to globalisation and the emergence of new technologies.¹⁶ During a Congress of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) in 1988, he committed again to implementing lifelong learning,¹⁷ and in several addresses to the European Parliament so that "as part of social dialogue, employers' associations and trade unions study, with the Commission, the prospects of a European labour market and the role of continuing education in the life of companies and employees".¹⁸

Two years after the "Education and Training" group¹⁹ adopted the 1991 joint opinion on how to secure the greatest access to training,²⁰ Jacques Delors proposed again that "discussions between management and labour [...] raise the question of workers' access

¹³. Jacques Delors (1985), "Pourquoi un grand marché sans frontières intérieures", Speech to the European Parliament, 14 January. In: Jacques Delors (1992), *Le Nouveau Concert européen*, Paris: Éditions Odile Jacob (in French).

¹⁴. Treaty establishing the European Economic Community (1957).

¹⁵. Council (1971), *General guidelines for drawing up a Community action programme on vocational training*, N° C81/5, Official Journal of the European Communities, 12 August.

¹⁶. Jacques Delors with Jean-Louis Arnaud (2004), *Op. Cit.*, p. 311 (in French).

¹⁷. Jacques Delors with Jean-Louis Arnaud (2004), *Op. Cit.*, p. 314 (in French).

¹⁸. Jacques Delors (1989), *Statement on the broad lines of the Commission policy at the European Parliament*, 17 January.

¹⁹. The working group was established in 1989, with a view to pursuing the joint opinion of March 1987 on "training and motivation, and on information and consultation" – focusing mainly on the access to lifelong learning. Source: Jean Lapeyre (2017), *The European Social Dialogue, The History of a Social Innovation (1985-2003)*, European Trade Union Confederation.

²⁰. Claude Didry and Arnaud Mias (2005), *Le « Moment Delors » : les syndicats au cœur de l'Europe sociale*, Peterlang (in French).

to training throughout their working lives²¹ and even went as far as commending a forthcoming European framework agreement on the right to continuing education at the end of that year. Despite a high level of personal commitment –until his very last meeting with employer and trade union representatives in December 1994²²– this project was ultimately shelved. The need for a European dimension in this field was far from being unanimously recognised: the opposition between trade unions and employers was extremely strong, with UNICE, the representative body of European employers (currently BusinessEurope) clearly standing against the principle of a right to training,²³ not to mention both sides' attachment to national practices, with in particular differences in how training systems operate and are funded, which appeared to be simply too great an obstacle. Yet, as Jacques Delors reminds, he was not asking for a European law that would result in a strict harmonisation of workers' training rights, but rather a "stimulating environment, supported by an employer-trade union agreement that would have filled in the gaps in certain countries and improved the system in others".²⁴ It is specifically through exchange, dialogue and cooperation, and under no circumstances by replacing national practices or traditions, that Jacques Delors sees the Community's added value (see Section 2).

Despite the impetus he gave to Community action to promote lifelong learning, real progress in this field remained limited –as Jacques Delors himself acknowledged in his memoir. However, prior to the end of his term of office, he was able to articulate his vision in the Commission's White Paper for Growth, Competitiveness and Employment, which became a milestone in Delors' school of thought on European action, in favour of education and training in particular. According to Jacques Delors, education and training have a key role to play in shaping a new development model and to guarantee equal opportunities. He stated that this could be achieved by "developing, generalizing and systematizing lifelong learning and continuing training"²⁵ which he very rightly called *catalysts of a changing society*. The White Paper also proposes the organisation of a "European Year of Education", with a view to clarify and set the long-term requirements and goals for actions and policies rolled out in this field; an idea that Jacques Delors was able to back before his departure from the Commission²⁶ and which became a reality two years later, in 1996. In the year following his departure, his influence on these matters at a European level also resulted in the publication of another White Paper, devoted specifically to education and training in the EU, entitled "Teaching and Learning, Towards the Learning Society".²⁷

In the face of this French, then European heritage, it is not surprising that following his departure from Brussels, Jacques Delors pursued his commitment to lifelong learning within the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), where he was entrusted with the role of President of the International Commission on Education for

21. Jacques Delors (1993), *Address by President Jacques Delors to the European Parliament on the occasion of the investiture debate following appointment of the new Commission*, 10 February.

22. Jacques Delors with Jean-Louis Arnaud (2004), *Op. Cit.*, p. 314 (in French).

23. Jean Lapeyre (2017), *Op. Cit.*

24. Jacques Delors with Jean-Louis Arnaud (2004), *Op. Cit.*, p. 315 (in French).

25. European Commission (1993), "Growth, Competitiveness, Employment - The Challenges and Ways Forward into the 21st Century", White Paper.

26. Proposal of the Commission dated 29 September 1994. Source: Commission of the European Communities (1995), *Opinion of the Commission on the European Parliament's amendments to the Council's common position regarding the proposal for a European Parliament and Council Decision establishing 1996 as the "European Year of Lifelong Learning"*, 5 July.

27. European Commission (1995), *Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society*, White Paper on education and training.

the Twenty-first Century. This culminated in the 1996 report “Learning: the Treasure Within”. In this report, Jacques Delors proposed a deeply humanist view of education, which from the outset he called a “necessary utopia”. The report highlights the key role that education plays in personal and social development, against a backdrop of globalisation and increasing interdependence between peoples, in which education policies are often relegated to the lowest rung of priorities for economic and financial reasons. The focus of the publication is the concept of lifelong learning, which must be revised and extended, not only to enable people to adapt to changes in their professional lives, but also for their personal growth, and to continuously develop their knowledge, aptitudes and ability to exercise judgment and action based on mutual understanding and peaceful dialogue (see Section 3). UNESCO’s Delors report remains to this day one of the most influential documents for educational cooperation in the world.²⁸

The turn of the century was a homecoming for Jacques Delors, who continued to uphold his vision of lifelong learning in France. From 2000 to 2008, he chaired the French Council for Employment, Income and Social Cohesion (CERC),²⁹ thereby coordinating the drafting of various thematic reports, in which he focused specifically on the challenges concerning equal opportunities and continuing education.³⁰ In 2009, he published with Michel Dollé “Investir dans le social”, in which he also discussed continuing education as “a strategic investment for individual stakeholders (employers, employees) and for society as a whole”.³¹

Jacques Delors therefore acted consistently in favour of lifelong learning, at all levels, national, European and global, and within governments and institutions, as well as in non-government and independent bodies. The various reports and initiatives resulting from this action underpin Jacques Delors’ vision of education, starting with the reasons behind his commitment.

2 ■ WHY IS JACQUES DELORS SO COMMITTED TO LIFELONG LEARNING?

Jacques Delors gives two main reasons for developing lifelong learning as a model to reform our education and training systems: firstly, to ensure the European workforce is fit to face societal changes, and secondly, to reduce inequality within our societies through the guarantee of equal opportunities.

For Jacques Delors, developing lifelong learning is essential if we are to weather the transformations in our economies and societies. He believes that globalisation, technological developments and already the environmental challenge are clearly stepping up the changes to the nature and organisation of work. This vision could not be more topical, and has been

²⁸. The new UNESCO education report was published in 2021, after those penned by Edgar Faure in 1972 and Jacques Delors in 1996. See: UNESCO, International Commission on the Futures of Education (2021), [Reimagining our futures together: a new social contract for education](#).

²⁹. This body has since become the French Strategic Analysis Centre (CAS).

³⁰. See the reports on *Education and redistribution*, *Times of change: France 1993-2005*, *Child poverty in France*, *The school-to-work transition of young people without diplomas*, *Job security and Assisting the return to employment*, available on the [CERC website](#).

³¹. Jacques Delors and Michel Dollé (2009), *Investir dans le Social*, Paris: Editions Odile Jacob (in French).

adopted in particular by the current Commission presided by Ursula von der Leyen in its new European Skills Agenda. “We live in a time of transitions. [...] These transitions show the need for an unparalleled shift in skill sets to reap their full potential”.³² For Jacques Delors too, education systems must equip people not only to adapt to change, but to master it.³³ While he warned in particular against the risks of exclusion and insecurity for unqualified workers –who run the risk of losing their jobs due to automation and have no option but to retrain– Jacques Delors also insisted on the fact that all people will be affected by these changes and will have to adapt and upgrade their skills, for example by developing so-called soft skills that are increasingly in demand, or by improving their digital skills, which have now become vital. While it seems that this observation has not aged a bit –if we consider the lack of IT or specialists or the significant underdevelopment of skills required for environmental transition jobs– Jacques Delors predicted, looking further into the future, an upheaval of life sequences, or in other words of the traditional sequence made up of “time to study, time to work and time to enjoy retirement”. In this new model, each person will move from one job to another, will face periods of unemployment and will thus need to enjoy periods of lifelong learning.³⁴ Once again, the fragmentation of careers and the increasing number of status or job transitions indicate that Jacques Delors was right, whereas our social and education systems have not developed to take this into full consideration.

While this ability to withstand societal transitions and changes has remained a priority for Jacques Delors, lifelong learning is first and foremost a lever for equal opportunities in his view. This is still a priority for European citizens, who, according to the March 2021 Eurobarometer survey on social issues, view it as one of the most important elements for the EU’s economic and social development.³⁵ Since the start of his career, Jacques Delors has been a staunch advocate of equal opportunities, which he called “one of democracy’s most noble and yet most demanding promises”.³⁶ As demonstrated in his memoir, this is why he began to develop his commitment to continuing education³⁷: “I became interested in continuing education as soon as I understood that unequal opportunities persisted, despite progress in mass education, and that they were particularly acute when workers were without employment, or downgraded in their company, as they could not appeal, unless they could before, during and after, expand their skills and, in addition to their skills, their self-confidence.”³⁸ For Jacques Delors, lifelong learning is a means of restoring equal opportunities in the long-term, as it always keeps access to education open throughout one’s life, which is, in his words, more of a bumpy ride than plain sailing. It therefore requires not only a second chance, but a third and fourth, according to each person’s specific career path.³⁹ While the “homeschooling” required during the various lockdowns since March 2020 may well increase educational inequalities which were already rife prior to the pandemic,

³². European Commission (2020), Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, [European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience](#), 1 July.

³³. Jacques Delors (1989), Interview in the magazine *Entreprise & Carrières*, 12 September.

³⁴. Jacques Delors (2000), “Une révolution Culturelle : la redistribution des temps sociaux”, Address, Semaines Sociales de France “Travailler et vivre”, Paris, 19 November (in French).

³⁵. European Commission (2021), [Special Eurobarometer 509 on social issues](#), March.

³⁶. Jacques Delors “Foreword” in Sofia Fernandes and Klervi Kerneis (2020), [Towards an Individual Right to Adult Learning for All Europeans](#), Jacques Delors Institute & The Foundation for European Progressive Studies, December.

³⁷. Jacques Delors in Sofia Fernandes and Klervi Kerneis (2020), *Op. Cit.*

³⁸. Jacques Delors with Jean-Louis Arnaud (2004), *Op. Cit.*, p. 95 (in French).

³⁹. Jacques Delors in Sofia Fernandes and Klervi Kerneis (2020), *Op. Cit.*

the idea of developing a system enabling those whose education has been disrupted to go back to training regardless of their age or background appears to be more than relevant, and even urgent. To quote Jacques Delors, “the prospect of being able to go back to education or training would alter the general climate by assuring young people that their fate is not sealed forever between the ages of 14 and 20.”⁴⁰

While Jacques Delors has a firm belief in the key role of lifelong learning for the reasons we have just set out, naturally he does not view it in any way as a miracle cure for all of society’s problems. We must be aware of its limits and combine it with other measures of industrial, trade and research policy etc.,⁴¹ while being careful not to confuse social investment and welfare state, which are no substitutes for each other. In other words, while the aim of equal opportunities through lifelong learning is a means of promoting the development of individual skills, which enable a person to hold down a job, enjoy a certain income security and a predictable future, it under no circumstances eliminates economic and social risks, or our unequal situation in relation to them.⁴² This is why Jacques Delors insists on the need for education and training policies to always be paired with the State taking action to mitigate these risks.⁴³

Furthermore, while, as seen in the previous section, Member States remain ultimately responsible for training policies, European action for education nevertheless has a real added value according to Jacques Delors. The reasons that he put forward at the time for the rationale behind such action are still valid today. Economically speaking, the “Europe of skills” that he wished to create would be necessary to make the EU more competitive in the global economy,⁴⁴ and for the success of the single market –with the free movement of persons and the labour market requiring a mutual recognition of diplomas and qualifications⁴⁵– while there are still too many obstacles impeding this today, ranging from skills shortages in companies or barriers to the free movement of people. At the same time, on a social level, Jacques Delors saw education and training as a strategic investment to bolster social cohesion within the EU, as they contribute to limiting unemployment and more generally help to reduce discrepancies between the regions of Europe.⁴⁶ He recommended the use of European funds such as the European Social Fund to achieve this. Lastly, beyond its social and economic benefits, the EU’s actions in this field are viewed as intrinsically positive as they enable Member States to “keep [their] national system and to develop it, all the while leveraging the experiences of other countries”.⁴⁷ There was, therefore, no question of imposing a uniform European education system, but rather to foster reflection, experience sharing and the promotion of innovative practices in order to remedy the failings of our current training systems in terms of coverage, inclusiveness, quality, alignment with labour market needs and financing.⁴⁸

⁴⁰. Jacques Delors et al (1996), *Learning: the Treasure Within – Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century*, Paris: UNESCO Publishing.

⁴¹. European Commission (1993), *Op. Cit.*

⁴². Jacques Delors and Michel Dollé (2009), *Op. Cit. (in French)*.

⁴³. *Ibid.* Jacques Delors in Sofia Fernandes and Klervi Kerneis (2020), *Op. Cit.*

⁴⁴. Jacques Delors (1988), Address given in Münster, at an informal meeting of education ministers, on the contribution that education policy could make to completing the single market by 1992, 25-26 February.

⁴⁵. *Ibid.*

⁴⁶. *Ibid.*

⁴⁷. Jacques Delors with Jean-Louis Arnaud (2004), *Op. Cit.*, p. 315 *(in French)*.

⁴⁸. Sofia Fernandes and Klervi Kerneis (2020), *Op. Cit.*

While the reasons behind Jacques Delors' commitment to lifelong learning and European action in this field are clear, which ideas on lifelong learning did he push forward?

3 ■ PROMOTING A RIGHT TO LIFELONG LEARNING: JACQUES DELORS' IDEAS

First of all, we must remember what Jacques Delors specifically means by lifelong learning. It does not simply involve adding up initial education and continuing education, or merely stepping up adult learning, but concerns the creation of a new education system "that operates more naturally in space and time".⁴⁹ In terms of time, this means that the system does away with the break between basic education and continuing education,⁵⁰ thereby enabling everyone, be they 6, 40 or 60 years of age, to learn. In other words, lifelong learning must enable the back and forth between education in its broadest sense and life, naturally including work life. In terms of space, this means that this new system must be part of a central institutional framework while ensuring full participation of all stakeholders (companies, trade unions, associations, research and training centres, the national education system, etc.) and calling on all types of education including formal, non-formal and informal education. Jacques Delors' approach therefore stands in opposition to any "specialisation of spaces, such as knowledge restricted to schools, skills limited to companies, soft skills in the private sphere and interpersonal skills in the public arena".⁵¹ Concretely, this was reflected by Jacques Delors' drive to promote work-study programmes and to develop partnerships between universities, public authorities and companies.

Not only did Jacques Delors wish to break down the barriers between education systems, but also within education itself. To achieve this, he proposed in the 1996 UNESCO report⁵² a holistic vision of education based on four pillars:

1. Learning to know is defined by the acquisition of knowledge, but also by the desire and ability to learn throughout one's life: "To learn to know also entails giving people the thirst for learning. It is restoring education's place in society, like a fish to water. How can we otherwise imagine that those who were put off by schooling or who experienced failure could want to go back to school or university later on?";⁵³
2. Learning to do entails knowing how to apply this knowledge and these methods and requires the acquisition not only of a professional qualification but, more broadly, the skills which enable a person to work in a team and deal with changes in their work situation.

⁴⁹. Jacques Delors (1988), "L'Éducation au cœur du projet européen", Address at the symposium "Etudiants, universités, entreprises: l'Europe de demain" Sorbonne – Paris, 2 March (in French).

⁵⁰. UNESCO International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century (1993), First session: report by the President of the Commission, Mr Jacques Delors, Paris, 2-4 March.

⁵¹. Jacques Delors (1997), "L'Éducation tout au long de la vie", Address, Institut Catholique de Paris, Paris, 19 November (in French).

⁵². Jacques Delors et al (1996), "*Learning: the Treasure Within – Report to UNESCO*", *Op. Cit.*

⁵³. Jacques Delors (2000), "Une révolution Culturelle : la redistribution des temps sociaux", *Op. Cit.* (in French).

3. Learning to live together is the culture of peace, “a guarantee for the future, as it involves developing an understanding of others, encouraging active participation in society”.⁵⁴ This is acquired through the teaching of history and religion in particular.
4. Learning to be, according to Delors, is reflected in “the full development of each individual’s creative potential in all its diversity and all its complexity”.⁵⁵ Beyond the development of cross-cutting skills, the central idea of this pillar is equal opportunities: “Learning to be is [...] not neglecting any of the untapped talents of each student. [...] Education must help every person to grow aware of their strengths and weaknesses. It is by being more aware of our strengths and weaknesses that we all as individuals can better handle unforeseen professional situations or changes in one’s life”.⁵⁶

FIGURE 2 ■ The four pillars of education



Another key element of Jacques Delors’ vision of lifelong learning is quality. While training systems face increasing pressure, particularly with the growth in training needs (initial and continuing), ensuring that this greater demand is supported by an improvement of the performance and quality of these systems is a major challenge and must be a focus of national and European action.⁵⁷ First of all, this quest for quality requires a high level of cooperation between Member States, the diversity of traditions and education systems of which represents a great source of value. At the same time, this justifies the need for a European action to overcome some barriers, such as ensuring the compatibility of national systems through the mutual recognition of qualifications.⁵⁸ Along the same lines, this means promoting training programmes that lead to qualifications so that the knowledge and skills acquired during training, and in particular non-formal learning experiences, may be fully recognised. This provides people with a bridge between different types of education.⁵⁹ Furthermore, Jacques Delors saw new technologies, and IT in particular, as a means of “contributing to enhancing the quality and diversity of basic education and training by introducing modular or interactive elements”⁶⁰ –even if they should be used judiciously. Yet above all, the improvement of education quality comes mainly from teachers, who themselves face major economic, technological and demographic shifts and who therefore need to be supported, particularly through lifelong learning.⁶¹ Lastly, training quality can be improved by considering the content of training courses. Jacques Delors wanted training to cover the four intrinsic pillars that we set out earlier, regardless of where the training is conducted –in line with the idea of breaking down spaces as discussed above. For companies, this means for example that the training courses offered to employees must go beyond training related to their current position or geared towards meeting their short-term needs to boost

⁵⁴. Jacques Delors (2000), “Une révolution Culturelle : la redistribution des temps sociaux”, *Op. Cit.* (in French).

⁵⁵. Jacques Delors (1997), “L’Éducation tout au long de la vie”, *Op. Cit.* (in French).

⁵⁶. Jacques Delors (2000), “Une révolution Culturelle : la redistribution des temps sociaux”, *Op. Cit.* (in French).

⁵⁷. Jacques Delors (1988), “La Contribution de la politique d’éducation à la réalisation du marché unique d’ici 1992”, *Op. Cit.* (in French).

⁵⁸. European Commission (1993), *Op. Cit.*

⁵⁹. Jacques Delors et al (1996), “*Learning: the Treasure Within – Report to UNESCO*”, *Op. Cit.*

⁶⁰. Jacques Delors (1988), “La Contribution de la politique d’éducation à la réalisation du marché unique d’ici 1992”, *Op. Cit.* (in French).

⁶¹. *Ibid.*

productivity and competitiveness.⁶² For schools and universities, the curriculum and course content must be adapted to the economy's needs. The idea is not to divert schools from their public service role, but rather to strike a balance between helping pupils to develop their personality while also preparing them for professional life⁶³ by having a positive impact on their employability.⁶⁴ This is an important point made in the 1993 White Paper: "Cooperation between universities and the business world is another essential way of transmitting knowledge, a vector for innovation and a way of increasing productivity in developing and potentially job-creating sectors".⁶⁵ Yet this system requires skills needs to be anticipated correctly and in good time⁶⁶ in order to minimize the gap between required and available skills.⁶⁷ However, still today, we can see that universities are not particularly involved in the process of anticipating skills and of matching training content with current and future local needs, whereas through the training they offer, they could contribute to developing their region or employment area.⁶⁸ More generally, there is too little coordination between all relevant stakeholders –companies, trade unions, public authorities, training bodies– in this process.

Lastly, in the Commission's White Paper and in his report to UNESCO, Jacques Delors proposed a more radical idea to break down education barriers: "training credits". This would be a study-time entitlement received by each young person at the end of their compulsory education, entitling them to a certain number of training years –a sort of capital of time available, supported by the appropriate funds. This credit would be spent in a flexible way throughout their working lives in order to obtain new knowledge and to update their skills,⁶⁹ according to their educational experience and their own choices. For Jacques Delors, "the idea is not to break with the obsession of long-term studies, but if some people prefer to start their working lives earlier, if their school experiences encourage them to do so, they must be able to find the subsequent means to develop, train and educate themselves further. They must have priority."⁷⁰ In other words, the training credit enables young people to choose a path, without signing away their future,⁷¹ given that the capital could be set aside to benefit from continuing education during their adult lives.⁷² For Jacques Delors, these systems should be developed in all Member States in accordance with their national cultures, whether for existing training rights or the incorporation of the right to training in collective agreements, etc.⁷³ Similarly, Jacques Delors sees individual training entitlement systems as a good means for each person to collect and transfer training rights, but stresses the need to make them more inclusive, with priority for low-skilled workers and those in short-term employment or in insecure jobs. This is why Jacques Delors thought it also necessary to focus some public spending on targeted programmes aimed at these individuals, for

⁶². Jacques Delors (1989), Interview in the magazine *Entreprise & Carrières*, *Op. Cit.* (in French).

⁶³. Jacques Delors (1997), "L'Éducation tout au long de la vie", *Op. Cit.* (in French).

⁶⁴. Jacques Delors (1994), "L'Éducation tout au long de la vie, un projet de société", Address to mark the 20th anniversary of Sciences Po Formation, 3 November (in French).

⁶⁵. European Commission (1993), *Op. Cit.*

⁶⁶. *Ibid.*

⁶⁷. *Ibid.*

⁶⁸. Sofia Fernandes and Klervi Kerneis (2020), *Op. Cit.*

⁶⁹. European Commission (1993), *Op. Cit.*

⁷⁰. Jacques Delors (2000), "Une révolution Culturelle : la redistribution des temps sociaux", *Op. Cit.* (in French).

⁷¹. Jacques Delors et al (1996), "Learning: the Treasure Within – Report to UNESCO", *Op. Cit.*

⁷². *Ibid.*

⁷³. European Commission (1993), *Op. Cit.*

example through the introduction of a statutory entitlement to training leave or State-funded training,⁷⁴ and measures aiming at increasing flexibility in working conditions and the sharing of working time.⁷⁵ Training leaves have the benefit of funding long-term training for professional retraining or major skills upgrades. According to Jacques Delors, this must be developed through agreements between the various parties concerned.⁷⁶

Beyond the avenues for action proposed by Jacques Delors to develop lifelong learning, he attached great value to the mobilisation of various stakeholders in order to make such ideals a reality.

4 ■ MOBILISING THE DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS, A PRE-CONDITION OF MAKING LIFELONG LEARNING A REALITY

Jacques Delors advocated for an “open education system that acts as a fully-fledged partner of economic and social stakeholders”.⁷⁷ In his view, trade unions, employer federations, educational institutions or bodies, companies and associations are intermediaries (he also uses the term *mediators*) with a key role within society at the crossroads between power and public opinion. Not only do they represent society in its entirety and complexity, but they also help to drive change and invent the society of the future.⁷⁸ For Jacques Delors, enhanced cooperation with a greater sense of commitment and responsibility between all these partners would contribute actively to bridging the current gaps in continuing education systems.⁷⁹

First of all, we must underscore the role of trade unions. When it comes to the definition of continuing education policies, their role is historical, as much in most Member States as on a European level. In France, the 1971 Delors Law was ground-breaking not only in content but also in form, as it referred to the national inter-sectoral agreement of 11 July 1970 on vocational training and development, the negotiation of which was laid down in the Grenelle Agreements of 1968.⁸⁰ In a 1994 conference on lifelong learning, Jacques Delors showed that this interplay between collective agreements and legislative initiatives fostered a drive to develop a constant field between employers and unions in France, with more than twenty texts signed in twenty years and, more generally, brought about the “flexibility that was absolutely needed to meet the various realities of business and industrial relations”.⁸¹ However, for Jacques Delors, “trade unions did not meet his expectations in terms of their role and influence in the system”.⁸² In particular, he regretted that their role in social dialogue

⁷⁴. Jacques Delors and Michel Dollé (2009), *Op. Cit.* (in French).

⁷⁵. European Commission (1993), *Op. Cit.*

⁷⁶. *Ibid.*

⁷⁷. Jacques Delors (1988), “L’Éducation au cœur du projet européen”, *Op. Cit.* (in French).

⁷⁸. Jacques Delors (1999), *Interview, Revue de la CFDT, Op. Cit.* (in French).

⁷⁹. Jacques Delors (1994), “L’Europe de la formation”, Address at the national “Jeunes-industrie” conference of the French Union of Metallurgical and Mining Industries, 16 March (in French).

⁸⁰. French Economic, Social and Environmental Council (CESE) (2011), *40 ans de formation professionnelle : bilan et perspectives, Opinion, Official Journal of the French Republic*, 20 December (in French).

⁸¹. Jacques Delors (1994), “L’Éducation tout au long de la vie, un projet de société”, *Op. Cit.* (in French).

⁸². Jacques Delors (1999), *Interview, Revue de la CFDT, Op. Cit.* (in French).

regarding company training is often just a procedure, an institutional routine, rather than a genuine negotiation of the content of training provided to employees.⁸³ To this day, trade unions must ensure that training proposed to workers does not only satisfy the short-term requirements of companies, but also the longer-term needs of employees –for example to be able to retrain to join emerging sectors or more generally to develop skills that will be useful in the future,⁸⁴ and in their area.⁸⁵ Broadly speaking, trade unions must oversee the application of the right to training,⁸⁶ and must be key points of contact for employees wishing to retrain or upgrade their skills.

Next, companies also have a key role when it comes to continuing education. Firstly, in light of the practice of shifting the cost and responsibility for continuing education from companies to public authorities,⁸⁷ Jacques Delors advocates greater company involvement in education and/or vocational training systems. Companies tend to underestimate the importance of the human factor in their success and development,⁸⁸ and some therefore have a “selfish human resources policy” instead of contributing fully to the costs related to the functioning of the labour market.⁸⁹ In addition to this need to invest in “human capital”, companies must play their part in identifying the needs of the labour market taking into account local and cyclical circumstances. The challenge is therefore not only to incorporate continuing education into corporate strategic plans –thereby promoting skills development in the workplace– but also to encourage cooperation between businesses, education and training systems and public authorities.⁹⁰ This could be particularly useful for the training of SME workers – who benefit from less training opportunities– via local partnerships for continuing education and retraining with local and regional authorities. Furthermore, Jacques Delors emphasises the role of companies in bridging inequalities in access to continuing education based on the initial level of education or social and professional category, and to really embody the idea of a second chance within the company,⁹¹ rather than focusing on their short-term profitability and blocking structural adaptation efforts.

On a European level, while we have already covered how Jacques Delors relaunched European social dialogue with the Val Duchesse agreements as well as outlined his drive to see European social partners achieve a framework agreement on the right to continuing education, a plan that was ultimately shelved, the fact is that training remains a key issue in the dialogue between European social partners, in particular through joint opinions in this field (such as effective access to training in January 1991)⁹² or in their work programme. The 2019-2021 programme highlighted skilled workers as one of the main assets of the European social and economic model, particularly in terms of the swift changes on the labour market, and set out joint actions for the lifelong development of skills.⁹³ More recently, at the

83. *Ibid.*

84. Sofia Fernandes and Klervi Kerneis (2020), *Op. Cit.*

85. Jacques Delors (1989), Interview in the magazine *Entreprise & Carrières*, *Op. Cit.* (in French).

86. Jacques Delors. (1991), “Formation permanente : Jacques Delors ouvre de nouvelles pistes”, *Op. Cit.* (in French).

87. Jacques Delors (1985), Address at the “Liaisons sociales” conference, Vincennes, 23 October (in French).

88. Jacques Delors. (1991), “Formation permanente : Jacques Delors ouvre de nouvelles pistes”, *Op. Cit.* (in French).

89. Jacques Delors (1999), *Interview, Revue de la CFTI*, *Op. Cit.* (in French).

90. European Commission (1993), *Op. Cit.*

91. Jacques Delors (1994), “L’Éducation tout au long de la vie, un projet de société”, *Op. Cit.* (in French).

92. Jacques Delors (1991), Address at the anniversary lunch of the Delors Law on vocational training, Matignon, 14 April (in French).

93. European Social Dialogue (2019), *Work Programme 2019-2021*, February.

Porto Social Summit (May 2021), social partners pledged⁹⁴ to mobilise and join efforts to achieve the target of 60% of European adults participating annually in training by 2030, and to ensure that at least 80% of the European population have basic digital skills. These proposals should not simply remain good intentions. As we have seen, despite major personal investment to achieve a right to continuing education for all EU workers in the 1990s,⁹⁵ through social dialogue, Jacques Delors' efforts were unsuccessful. In an interview given in 1999, he stated: "I think that the time has come, even though I personally failed on this matter, to convince social partners on a European level to define a right to continuing education for all European workers".⁹⁶ More than twenty years on from this statement, we believe that it is imperative that the recent commitments made, however strong they are on a symbolic level, are converted into an actual right for all European citizens.

Lastly, Jacques Delors also focused on universities which, generally speaking, are not sufficiently involved in continuing education. On this subject, he discussed the difficulties he encountered in France to mobilise the Ministry of Education –as an institution, not teachers themselves⁹⁷– with regard to the implementation of the 1971 Law. For Jacques Delors, this lack of interest in getting involved in adult learning represented two missed opportunities: "the first would have afforded teachers a better understanding of how the world was changing, while the second would have paved the way for a lifelong education system".⁹⁸ While he speaks at length about his experience in France, Jacques Delors knows first-hand that there are communication issues between the ministries of Education and Labour and social partners in all European Member States.⁹⁹ On a European level, he advocates close cooperation between higher education institutions, vocational training centres and public and private partners on national and regional levels (businesses, social partners, public employment services)¹⁰⁰ with a view to meeting the growing needs for training –in particular by using structural funds for this purpose.¹⁰¹ Yet Jacques Delors' main goal is to make universities a "major forum for lifelong learning"¹⁰² by opening their doors to adults who either wish to resume their studies, adapt or develop their knowledge or simply satisfy their taste for learning in all areas of cultural life¹⁰³ –for example starting with training opportunities for instructors or teaching staff.¹⁰⁴

For Jacques Delors, the right to lifelong learning can therefore only be achieved through the mobilisation of all stakeholders, based on a real awareness of their responsibilities in this area and improved dialogue.

⁹⁴. Porto Social Commitment (2021).

⁹⁵. Jacques Delors (1999), *Interview, Revue de la CFDT, Op. Cit.* (in French).

⁹⁶. *Ibid.*

⁹⁷. Jacques Delors (1994), "L'Éducation tout au long de la vie, un projet de société", *Op. Cit.* (in French).

⁹⁸. Jacques Delors (1999), *Interview, Revue de la CFDT, Op. Cit.* (in French).

⁹⁹. *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰. European Commission (1993), *Op. Cit.*

¹⁰¹. Jacques Delors (1993), Address at the Chemnitz Congress "Transformation par la qualification", 27 March.

¹⁰². Jacques Delors et al (1996), "Learning: the Treasure Within – Report to UNESCO", *Op. Cit.*

¹⁰³. *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴. European Commission (1993), *Op. Cit.*

CONCLUSION ■

Delors' vision of lifelong learning reflects his deeper view of the centrality of what is often called "human capital" as well as of inequalities within our societies. The actions that he has undertaken in this field have not always matched his initial ambitions; for France, due to the difficulty of mobilising stakeholders beyond the roles conventionally assigned to them, and on a European level, due to the EU's limited powers in education and training and the divergence of interests mistakenly seen as irreconcilable.

Nevertheless, Jacques Delors has always seen second-, third-, fourth-chance education as a means of contributing to the creation of a "win-win-win" system: beneficial to more competitive companies as their employees will have the "right" skills and a greater capacity for innovation, beneficial to citizens seeking greater control, security and equality in their career paths, regardless of their age or history, and beneficial for society as a whole, subsequently able to meet the collective challenges of globalisation, the digital and environmental transitions and the reduction of inequality.

While some of these ideas are now over fifty years old, they are still as relevant today. Admittedly, EU leaders have become aware of the increased need for continuing education to meet the changes in our societies, with the Commission proposing many initiatives in this field, in particular the European Skills Agenda, as well as through the Porto Declaration and the Social Commitment adopted during the May 2021 Social Summit. In this Commitment, the representatives of the European institutions, social partners and European civil society undertook to invest in skills, lifelong learning and training to meet the needs of the economy and of society, to achieve the target of 60% of adults participating in training annually.¹⁰⁵

However, the resources to roll out a far-reaching reform of our training systems, that bridges the gap between initial schooling and continuing education as conceived by Jacques Delors, are far from sufficient. The EU's future initiatives on individual learning accounts, micro-credentials and digital skills may, of course, continue to encourage States to ramp up their efforts on lifelong learning. Yet as we have discussed in this paper, it is stakeholder mobilisation that will make these ideas and ideals a reality. Lifelong learning remains, for now, to quote Jacques Delors, a *utopia in the making*.¹⁰⁶ ■