



SMEs Toolkit for apprenticeship.

European Report



*Work Package 3: Supporting SMEs in
the value chain of the construction
ecosystem*

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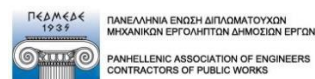
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Introduction

The present document is part of the WP3 (Supporting SMEs in the value chain of the construction ecosystem). The main aim of this work package is to provide support small and medium-sized enterprises to foster their participation in the different fields of the value chain, as they play a crucial role in the EU's economy.

To make it possible, the actions will be implemented with the support of the relevant public and private players -*high level working group* (WP2), that will ensure the achievement of the project goals, from a multidimensional and cross-cutting perspective. This support is key to strengthening and improving the position of SMEs in the construction ecosystem as a whole.

The general objectives are:

- ✗ To stimulate apprenticeships in SMEs and encourage their active participation in work-based learning.
- ✗ To expand SMEs vision of what innovation is and where it is needed for a just transition to a green and digital economy.
- ✗ To foster innovation, creativity and participation in different fields of VET.
- ✗ To seek out emerging opportunities for SMEs along the entire value chain.
- ✗ To identify and test innovative approaches to improve the effectiveness of policies and VET practices.

Objectives

The specific objectives of this task are:

- ✗ To define how the practices are managed in the companies in the project countries (in general and specifically in the construction companies);
- ✗ To inform SMEs about how companies connect with apprentices, the selection process, and the value apprentices bring to the company.

In addition to the desktop research conducted by the participating countries, field research played a crucial role. This involved conducting three interviews in each country, led by the sectoral representative. These interviews provided valuable insights into the perspectives of various stakeholders:

- ✗ Interview with an SME that hosts apprentices in order to understand the company's experience in hosting apprentices, including their benefits and challenges.
- ✗ Interview with an SME that does not host apprentices to explore the reasons why the company does not participate in apprenticeship programs.



- x Interview with a young apprentice in order to gather insights from the apprentice's perspective, including their experience, challenges faced, and the benefits they perceive from the program.

According to CEDEFOP¹, apprenticeship and other forms of work-based learning can be an opportunity for empowering young people and adults, boosting their long-term employability through quality education and training.

Apprenticeships programmes - Country-specific insights

National Framework – Spain

All vocational training cycles it was necessary to take the so-called Workplace-Training Module, a compulsory module that had to be passed to obtain the vocational training qualification and consisted of an internship phase in a real company environment

The duration is determined in the official curriculum of each training cycle:

Basic Vocational Training: 240 hours minimum (12% of the total duration of the training cycle).

Intermediate and Advanced Level: 400 hours. Generally implemented between March and June of the 2nd year

From September 2024 onwards, all vocational training will be dual since the first year of Intermediate and Higher Level training cycles, as well as in vocational training master's degrees that include internships, following the approval of the new Vocational Training Law. From September 2024, internships will no longer be an add-on at the end of the course but will be distributed throughout the programme and will be oriented towards specific learning outcomes

After the adoption of Organic Law 3/2022 on the Organisation and Integration of Vocational Training a new system of 5 levels of vocational training (A, B, C, D and E) is established, based on training progression and on obtaining an accreditation, a certification and a qualification. This system will allow students to plan their own training itinerary

¹ <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/apprenticeships-work-based-learning>

Apprenticeship is regulated by Legislative Decree no. 81/2015 and the following amendments, as well as by the Ministerial Decree of Depending on the modality (iVET, cVET/VET for employment, or training in alternance with work), the duration of the apprenticeship programmes will be different:

Regulated VET (iVET)

- ✘ Workplace-Training Module (which will disappear from September 2024): the duration is determined in the official curriculum of each training cycle. In general, for Basic Vocational Training, this module consists of a minimum of 240 hours (12% of the total duration of the training cycle); for Intermediate and Advanced Vocational Training, the module has a duration of 400 hours.
- ✘ Dual VET: it will start to be taught in a generalised way since next academic year (2024-2025). A minimum of 33% of the training hours will be carried out in companies, including Workplace Training. This percentage may be increased depending on the characteristics of each module and the participating company: the dual nature of the training will be carried out in two modalities, *general* and *intensive*, depending on the time during which the student is trained in the company and the learning outcomes assumed by the company:
 - ✓ In the *general* modality, the hours of training in the workplace will represent 20% of the hours in basic vocational training, while for the initial vocational training degrees (both intermediate and higher), it may vary between 25%-35% of the total hours of the qualification.
 - ✓ On the other hand, in the *intensive* model, companies will be more actively involved, covering 35-50% of the training time.

Professional Certificates

The duration of the practices in the workplace/company shall be determined by the tutor of the training centre and the company tutor. It will not be less than 50 hours or more than 250 hours (with some exceptions).

Training in alternance with work

In this modality, the duration will be a minimum of three months and a maximum of two years, and may take the form of a single contract or several contracts of shorter duration, always taking into account the two-year maximum. Only one training contract can be signed for each training cycle, but different training contracts may be signed with several companies during the same training cycle. The working day will be the sum of the effective working time in the company and the theoretical training time. These contracts will be considered as full-time contracts and will not exceed 65% of the maximum legal working day during the first year, or 85% during the second year.

Certification/accreditation

Regarding the certification/accreditation obtained, the adoption of Organic Law 3/2022, of 31 March, on the Organisation and Integration of Vocational Training, has specified the need to reinvent the Vocational Training model to respond to the needs of citizens throughout their working lives, as well as to those of the productive reality.

To date, there have been three types of VET Degrees: Basic Degree, Intermediate Degree and Higher Degree, that are distributed into Professional Families. The three types provide a Certification, corresponding to the type of Degree studied. The qualifications obtained have official status and the same academic and professional validity throughout the national territory.

After the adoption of Organic Law 3/2022 on the Organisation and Integration of Vocational Training a new system of 5 levels of vocational training (A, B, C, D and E) is established, based on training progression and on obtaining an accreditation, a certification and a qualification. This system will allow students to plan their own training itinerary:

Training Level A - Partial accreditation of skills or micro-credentials. Elementary training offer preferably aimed at workers who need to update their skills. Certification: partial accreditation of competence level 1, 2 or 3.

Training Level B - Certificate of Competence. Partial training offer, corresponding with a VET module included in the Modular Catalogue of Vocational Training, preferably aimed at workers who need to update their competences. It will always be associated with one or several professional competence standards. Certification: Certificate of Competence.

Training Level C - Professional Certificates. Partial cumulative training offer consisting of several professional modules with high significance in the labour market. There are three levels with a duration between 250 and 900 hours. Certification: Professional Certificate for Level 1, 2 or 3.

Training Level D - Training Cycles/Degrees, leading to the certification of Basic Technician (Basic Grade), Technician (Intermediate Grade), or Higher Technician (Higher Grade) degrees in VET.

Training Level E - Specialisation Courses. They complement the competences of people who already have a VET qualification or who fulfil the conditions for access to the courses. Certifications:

Specialist: after passing an intermediate VET specialisation course, the student will obtain the title of Specialist of the corresponding professional profile.

Master's Degree in Vocational Training: after passing a specialisation course in Advanced VET, the student will obtain a Master's Degree in Vocational Training in the corresponding professional profile.

In Italy there are three types of apprenticeship: Apprenticeship for the qualification and for the professional diploma, the secondary school diploma and the higher technical specialization certificate (1st level apprenticeship), Professionalizing apprenticeship (2nd level apprenticeship), higher education and research apprenticeship (3rd level apprenticeship)

The minimum duration of the contract is not less than 6 months, while the maximum duration depends on the type of Apprenticeship:

Apprenticeship for the qualification and for the professional diploma, the secondary school diploma and the higher technical specialization certificate (1st level apprenticeship)

It is an employment contract that allows you to obtain a professional qualification or a professional diploma by alternating work and study. The duration, which is determined by the qualification or diploma to be obtained, cannot exceed three years or four in the case of a four-year regional diploma. Young people from 15 to 25 years of age can be hired with this type of apprenticeship.

This contract cannot last more than 3 years (generally 3 years for the qualification and 4 years for the diploma). The duration can be extended up to one year, in writing and after updating the Individual Training Plan, in the event that the apprentice has obtained the qualification or professional diploma and intends to consolidate and acquire further technical-professional and specialist skills or in the event that, at the end of the training course, the apprentice has not obtained the qualification or professional diploma.

Professionalizing apprenticeship (2nd level apprenticeship)

It is an employment contract for the achievement of a professional qualification for contractual purposes through transversal and professionalizing training. Young people between the ages of 18 and 29 can be hired with this type of apprenticeship (in the case of possession of a professional qualification the minimum age drops to 17 years), in all sectors of activity, private or public.

The duration of the professionalizing apprenticeship contract varies on the basis of what is provided for by inter-confederal agreements and by the category CCNL and cannot exceed 3 years or 5 years for professional profiles of the artisan identified by the CCNL.

For the purposes of their professional qualification or requalification, it is possible to hire in a professionalizing apprenticeship, without age limits, workers who are beneficiaries of mobility allowance or unemployment benefit. Following Law no. 234/2021, innovative of the aforementioned Legislative Decree no. 81/2015, starting from 1 January 2022, workers who are beneficiaries of the extraordinary wage integration treatment may also be hired



on a professional apprenticeship for the purposes of professional qualification or requalification, without age limits.

Higher education and research apprenticeship (3rd level apprenticeship)

It is an employment contract that allows you to obtain different levels of qualifications: high school diploma, high school professional diploma, bachelor's degree, master's degree and research doctorate. It can also be used for internships to access professional associations.

Young people between the ages of 18 and 29 can be hired with this type of apprenticeship (in the case of possession of a professional qualification the minimum age drops to 17 years), in all sectors of activity, private or public.

The duration of the apprenticeship contract for higher education and research varies based on the qualification that you intend to obtain (generally it is never less than the course of studies) and is regulated by the protocol signed between the employer and the training institution and by regional legislation (or in its absence according to the Ministerial Decree of 12 October 2015).

In all cases, it is possible to extend the apprenticeship period in the event of illness, occupational illness, injury, compulsory maternity/paternity leave or other cause of involuntary suspension of work, lasting more than thirty days.

The CCNL of the construction sector has regulated all the mentioned types of contracts.

The specific duration currently provided for by the CCNL is as following:

1st level apprenticeship: from 1 to 4 years based on the qualification to be obtained (2 years for an integrative course for admission to the state exam). In the event of transformation into a professionalizing apprenticeship, the maximum overall duration of the two apprenticeship periods is 5 years (of which at least 2 are professionalizing apprenticeships).

2nd level apprenticeship: 36 months (traditional processes/technical-administrative tasks) or 48 months (artistic processes/artisan profile).

3rd level apprenticeship: variable based on the qualification to be obtained, the protocol signed between the employer and the training institution, the regional regulation (or in its absence according to the Ministerial Decree of 12 October 2015).

- ✘ Vocational Education and Training (VET) includes all forms of education and training that provide individuals with the necessary qualifications to enter the labor market and work in specific professions. Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVET) is provided by Secondary Technical and Vocational Education, the Apprenticeship System (AS), initial training programs subsidized by the Human Resource Development Authority (HRDA), and public tertiary education institutions. Initial Vocational Education and Training begins at the upper secondary level, where students have the option of technical and vocational education. Thus, students in technical and vocational schools are usually between 15 and 18 years old. Secondary Initial Vocational Education and Training lasts three years and is offered in two tracks, the Theoretical Track and the Practical Track.
- ✘ The first year of study is common for all branches/specialties of each track, and students choose their specialty in the branch they will follow in the second and third year. Upon successful completion of the study programs, graduates of both tracks are awarded a technical and vocational education diploma, which is equivalent to that obtained from Public Secondary General Education Schools.
- ✘ This diploma allows graduates to continue their studies at higher education institutions or enter the labor market as technicians.
- ✘ The Theoretical Track includes only classroom-based courses and combines general education subjects with technological and laboratory subjects. The first and second years of the Practical Track include only classroom-based courses and combine general education subjects with technological and laboratory subjects.
- ✘ The third year combines classroom education with actual work, as final-year students are placed in a business one day a week where they follow a practical training program. The Apprenticeship System (AS) is another form of initial vocational education, which accepts students who have dropped out of regular education. Participants are students aged 14 to 18.
- ✘ The program lasts two years and combines general education and vocational training, which takes place in Technical Schools for two days a week and practical training in the industry, where apprentices are paid for their work, for three days a week.

Duration and Certifications

- ✘ Vocational Education and Training programs usually last 1-3 years, depending on the level and specialty.



- X Trainees receive both theoretical education and practical training in the workplace, leading to recognized certifications and qualification

National Framework – Greece

There are different types of apprenticeships in Greece. The following are the main types of apprenticeships:

Vocational Apprenticeship Schools (EPAS) –supported by the Public Employment Service (DYPA)

The Public Employment Service (DYPA) operates all over the country, there are 50 EPAS Apprenticeships, which follow the dual education system. A person is entitled to enroll in EPAS Apprenticeships provided he/she holds at least a high school diploma or equivalent qualification

The Vocational Training School or SEK is a Vocational Education School that does not belong to compulsory education. The purpose of the Vocational Training School is to provide initial vocational training services.

A person can follow:

a daily SEK provided he/she has a high school diploma and is under 20 years old.

an evening SEK provided he/she has a high school diploma and is over 20 years old and is an employee.

Institutes of Vocational Training – (IEK)

This type of apprenticeship is not compulsory. IEK Graduates have the opportunity to follow an optional six-month internship in companies and institutions of the public or private sector. The internship, with a total duration of 960 hours, can be carried out after the completion of the first two semesters of studies and can be either continuous or partial.

Common rules for companies that implement apprenticeship programs.

The maximum number of apprentices depends on the number of employees, as shown in the annual staff statement. Particularly:

1. Sole proprietorships, without any employees, may accept one (1) apprentice.

2. Businesses employing 1-10 people can offer Apprenticeship positions corresponding to 25% (1-2 people) of dependent workers. For businesses that employ 1-5 people, the result of the quota is rounded down, while for employers that employ 6-10 people, the results of the quota are rounded up.

3. Businesses employing 10 or more workers may accept apprentices corresponding to 17% of dependent workers with a maximum of 40 people in each case, if the number resulting from the quota is greater.

4. Businesses employing more than 250 workers may accept apprentices corresponding to 17% of dependent workers per branch with a maximum of 40 people in each case, if the number resulting from the quota is greater.

Legal entities under public law, which do not have branches, can accept apprentices corresponding to 17% of employees.

Business obligations:

An Apprenticeship Contract is concluded between the apprentice and the employer and is co-signed by the director of the relevant educational structure. It defines the terms of implementation of the learning program in the workplace, duration depending on the type of apprenticeship program. The contract is drawn up in three (3) copies and one is received by the apprentice, the employer and the educational structure.


Apprenticeship employers must have the appropriate equipment for workplace training, meet the necessary health and safety conditions and provide all necessary personal protective equipment during training. They must also appoint a responsible trainer for the trainees and inform them about the activities and areas of work.

For more information about the national apprenticeship programmes, you can visit:

<https://pact4youth.fundacionlaboral.org/result/smes-toolkit-for-apprenticeships/>

Specific skills or qualities they prioritize during the selection process

This section is essential for SMEs, as it provides clear guidance on the key skills to prioritize during the selection process, ensuring a focused and effective training experience. When selecting apprentices' companies look for specific skills and attributes. As derived from interviews with companies and desktop research many companies give priority to specific technical skills (hard skills) and personal qualities (soft skills) such as:

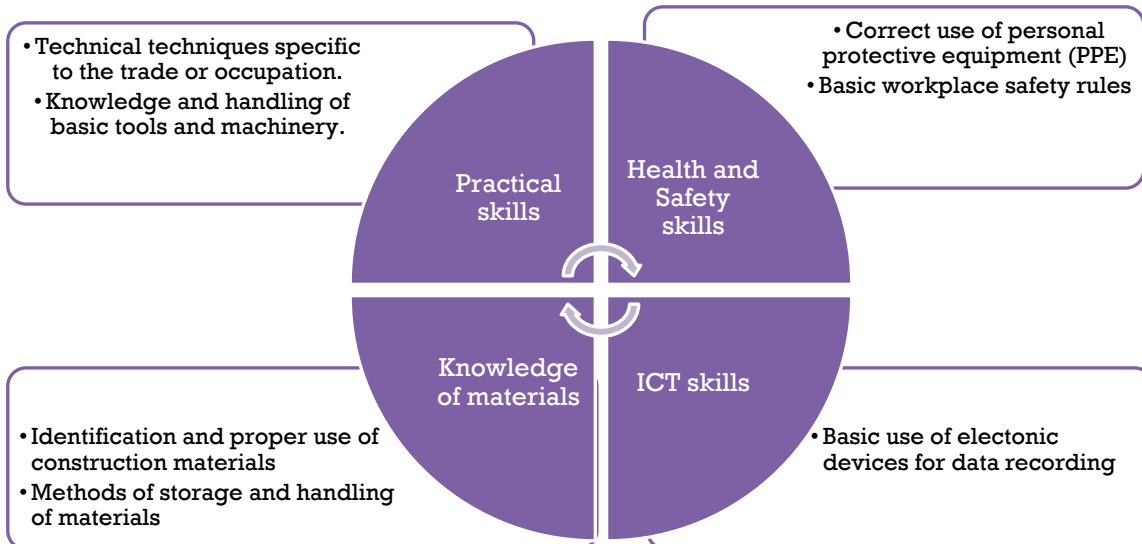
-  Previous experience and education: Technical skills in the construction industry, such as safety knowledge, and use of tools and machinery.

- ✗ Problem solving skills: Ability to solve problems and make quick decisions in complex situations.
- ✗ Reliability and punctuality: Important qualities for work on a construction site.
- ✗ Interpersonal skills: Ability to work in a team and communicate effectively with colleagues and supervisors, interest and motivation, positive attitude.
- ✗ Adaptability and rapid learning: Willingness to learn new techniques and adapt to changes in the job.
- ✗ Other skills like driving license are sometimes compulsory for jobs related to construction.

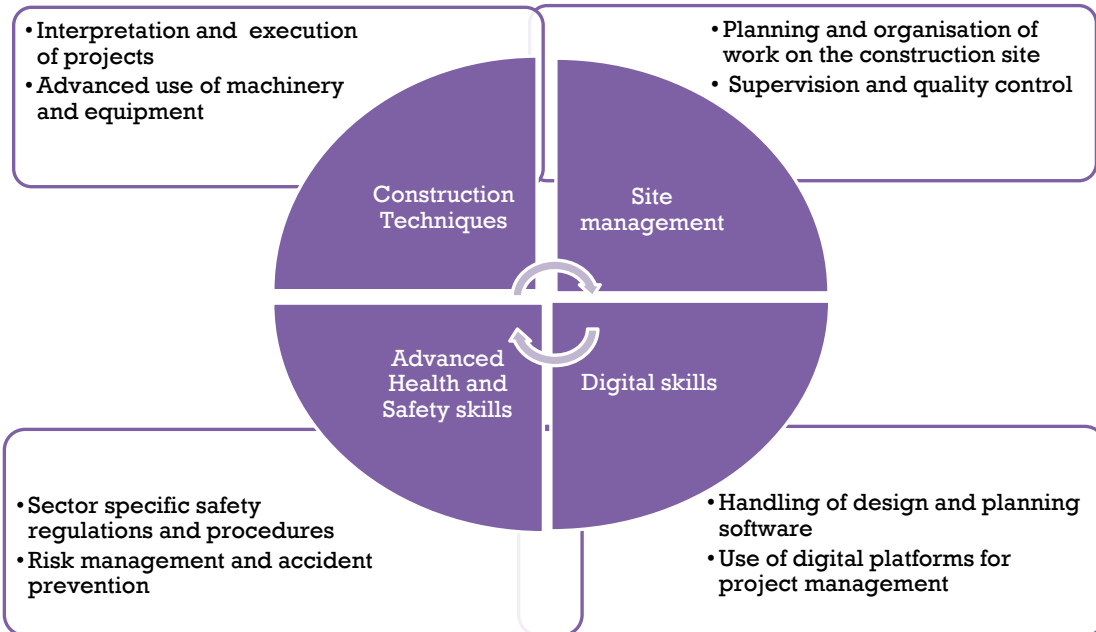
Training Needs Arising from Employees/Managers

- ✗ Based on feedback from employees, managers in the construction sector, and supporting desktop research, the following training needs have been identified. These are organized into three qualification levels—practical, intermediate, and higher—ensuring tailored skill development for various roles and expertise. Additionally, areas of high demand within the sector are highlighted.

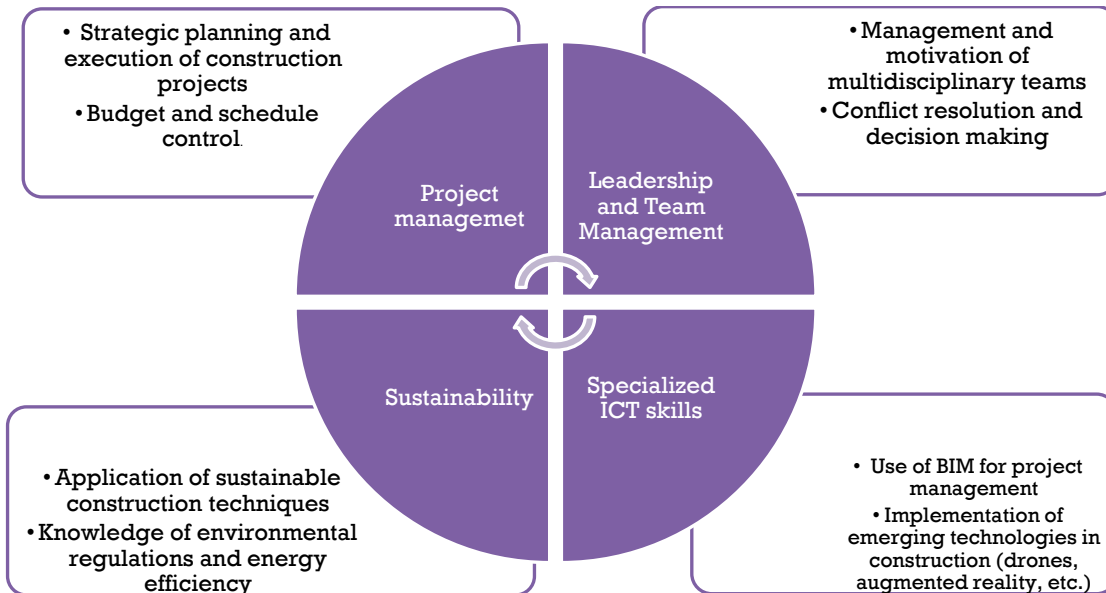
Basic Level



Intermediate Level



Higher Level



Across the construction sector, the greatest demand exists in the following areas:

- Supporting engineers on construction sites.
- Managing procedures for construction licenses.
- Proficient use of Computer-Aided Design (CAD) software.
- Monitoring and following up on construction activities.
- Designing, calculating, and overseeing renewable energy plant construction.

Benefits for hosting apprentices

It is important to highlight the benefits that companies can gain by hosting apprenticeships. Based on insights gathered from interviews conducted in the participating countries, the following advantages have been identified:

- ✗ Apprentices bring fresh knowledge and ideas, enhancing the technical expertise and skills of the team
- ✗ Increased Productivity
- ✗ The participation in education and training programs enhances the company's social image
- ✗ Reduced labour costs and tax reliefs
- ✗ Diversity in the workforce
- ✗ Sustainability and long-term growth of the company as it encourages and motivates young workers to train and feel an integral part of the organization that invests in economic and time terms in their training and professional growth
- ✗ Motivate older workers by providing new challenges
- ✗ Greater creativity, productivity and adaptability

As indicated by companies regarding their decision to host apprentices:

Cypriot company - The contribution of apprentices improves the performance and efficiency of work processes.



Spanish company - By training young people from the outset, it allows you “to mould” the person and teach them, so that you create a pool of talent aligned with the company's values and needs. You generate potential future hires.

Italian company - Huge advantage for the company to test young talent in the field

Greek company - An important benefit by hosting apprentices is that you can address skill shortages by training apprentices in our own company

Recommendation to listen the following Podcast for SME hosting apprentices :

<https://podcasts.apple.com/ca/podcast/the-essential-apprentice/id1560214190?i=1000592856988>

Motivations derived from interviews in the participating countries:

- ✘ One of the main motivations is to help young people and give them an opportunity to learn a trade and a profession with professional opportunities for the future.
- ✘ Other motivation is to evaluate these young people and their talent during the period of practice, and thus assess whether they meet the requirements to finally join the company, responding to the need for profiles in the profession.
- ✘ The need to identify and integrate promising young professionals into company. By hiring apprentices, they offer young people the opportunity to gain practical experience and be trained in the unique processes and operations of our company. This ensures that future employees will already be familiar with our environment and will not require a long adjustment period.

Barriers for SMEs on hosting apprenticeships

Based on interviews from SMEs hosting and not hosting apprenticeships and from desktop research the following barriers have been identified :

- ✘ A mechanism of diagnosis of the current needs of SMEs doesn't exist.
- ✘ Lack of one stop shop to facilitate the demand of apprentices.
- ✘ Most of SMEs don't have an experienced human resource department to support apprenticeship.

- ✗ Co-funded Vocational training Programs implemented by SMEs Unions isn't permitted to focus to the needs of the construction sector due to legal barriers.
- ✗ Limited resources to invest in training and development.
- ✗ Lack of adequate equipment for hands-on training.
- ✗ Difficulty in dedicating experienced staff to training and mentoring

Some challenges that have been faced :

- Identification of candidates with the skills needed : The search for profiles that really want to find a place in the labour market and that are not just a mere formality to cover internships/practices
- The adaption of organisational culture to include young people and achieve an effective communication effectively between different generations.
- Reluctance by company staff to dedicate time to training young people, due to lack of time and rhythm on site and adaptation to work processes and motivation of young people.
- Restructuring operations and resources: The adaptation of the company's work processes and resources to integrate apprentices.
- Competition from other sectors: SMEs in the construction industry often face competition from other industries in the local area, which may offer higher wages, better working conditions, and more flexible work hours. Additionally, employees in other sectors may have the advantage of working indoors or in environments that avoid the physical demands and challenges.

Young expectations

The SMEs part was really crucial in order to promote apprenticeships but in order to help SMEs host the apprenticeships is crucial to understand also the motivations and expectations of young people in the sector.

Motivations related to apprenticeship

Young apprentices were primarily motivated by the opportunity:

- ✗ Learning as many skills as possible and becoming autonomous in their role



- ✗ Explore the construction sector
- ✗ Establish a real working relationship with a company

Challenges faced during the apprenticeship

Apprentices encountered several challenges, including:

- ✗ Adapting to the practical demands of a professional environment for the first time.
- ✗ Managing workloads and completing assigned projects efficiently and on time.
- ✗ Navigating dilemmas such as when to make independent decisions versus seeking guidance.
- ✗ Overcoming preconceived notions about apprentices, proving their value to colleagues.
- ✗ Becoming part of a pre-existing company's culture and its way of working, especially in case of experienced teams.
- ✗ Working outdoors, especially in adverse weather conditions.

Practical tools/ actions for the participation of apprentices that can be implemented by SMEs

SMEs can benefit from apprentices' participation in the company's daily activities; however, to enhance their engagement and development, some effective strategies may be implemented. These can help SMEs generate a positive environment for apprentices, leading to mutual growth and success. SMEs can implement various tools and actions to engage apprentices:

- ✗ Provision of comprehensive counselling/guidance sessions including company culture, job roles, expectations, and essential policies.
- ✗ Mentorship actions, through pairing apprentices with experienced employees who can guide them and provide ongoing support.
- ✗ Development of clear, structured training plans that outline the skills that the apprentices need to learn and the timeline for learning them.
- ✗ Job Rotation, by allowing apprentices to switch through different departments to gain a broad understanding of the company.

- ✗ Project-Based Learning, by assigning apprentices to real projects where they can apply their skills and contribute significantly.
- ✗ Use digital tools, apprentices can use e-learning platforms from the accredited training body to participate more easily in apprenticeship programs.
- ✗ Creating a learning environment by providing a safe and supportive work environment.
- ✗ Flexible schedules: Ability to adjust work hours to match educational commitments.
- ✗ A targeted selection procedure
- ✗ Using shadowing and on-the-job training as a training method

Key conclusions

This document provides valuable guidance for SMEs, drawing on national findings from the participating countries (Spain, Italy, Greece and Cyprus). It aims to inform and engage SMEs with apprenticeships and work-based learning through real-world examples derived from interviews with companies that host apprenticeships, as well as insights from companies that do not and the perspectives of young people. Furthermore, it offers specific actions and tools designed to support and promote SMEs in facilitating and benefiting from apprenticeship programs.

Useful tools about benefits of apprenticeship for SMEs, apprenticeship procedure, collaboration agreement, recruitment methods for SMEs, SMEs' barriers for apprenticeship you can find here:

<https://pact4youth.fundacionlaboral.org/result/smes-toolkit-for-apprenticeships/>