

## EuroSkills: Spearheading the fight against the challenge facing Europe

Just 300 hours from now, the starting signal will be given for the first vocational skills championships to be hosted by Austria. EuroSkills, which is being held in Austria for the first time from 22 to 26 September, is more than just an international showcase for outstanding performance by over 400 skilled workers. The European Skills Championships, with the competition venue at the Schwarzl Freizeit Zentrum lakeside leisure and event centre, is one of the key initiatives against the shortage of skilled workers, which has been a challenge facing Europe for quite some time. EuroSkills is combating this trend by enhancing the status of vocational education and training – and turning skilled workers into heroes.

It is the European showcase for highly qualified, skilled workers. At EuroSkills, the European Skills Championships, the top European skilled workers will demonstrate their expertise. In 48 competitions covering a wide range of skills and trades – from industrial control and floristry, to restaurant service and web development – the participants will compete for the title of European Champion in their respective fields. “There’s a unique enthusiasm and excitement about this event that is hard to resist,” says Josef Herk, Supervisory Chairman of EuroSkills 2021. “The fabulous achievements of the Young Professionals leave us with an indescribable joy and sense of drama, like a combination of the spectacular Hahnenkamm downhill ski race and an ACDC rock concert,” emphasises Herk. The event also goes some way to addressing the urgent need to enhance the status of vocational education: “At EuroSkills, we prepare an international stage for Young Professionals and turn skilled workers into heroes,” says Herk. “The event supports our companies through targeted measures to make skills and trades more attractive, thereby ensuring that highly trained, skilled workers will still be available in the future.”

### The equivalent of Munich lost every year

The shortage of skilled workers is indeed not only an Austrian phenomenon, but has become a challenge that affects the whole of Europe. From France to Germany and Belgium, from Italy and Liechtenstein to Portugal, “skilled workers are coveted as never before,” emphasises Dita Traidis, president of WorldSkills Europe. “This is also a result of the demographic change, which is set to pose a major challenges for the whole of Europe in the years to come as the ‘baby boomer’ generation reaches retirement age. And, with the birth rate having fallen significantly, the number of skilled workers is also dropping just as fast. The result is a gap that can only be closed by highly qualified, skilled workers,” she continues.

### “The future belongs to Young Professionals”

According to UN figures, even as soon as 2030, the working population in the European Union is expected to have decreased by up to seven percent, i.e. approx. 13.5 million people. This equivalent to a city the size of Munich – each and every year. “This is one of the reasons why the future belongs to Young Professionals all over Europe,” says Stefan Praschl, Board Member of WorldSkills Europe. “Highly trained, skilled workers are the backbone of society and the economy. At EuroSkills, we can now offer them the stage they

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deserve for their achievements – starting less than 300 hours from now. We are greatly looking forward to hosting the European Skills Championships, at long last,” says Francis Hourant.

### Preparations under way

The final preparations at the premises of the Schwarzl Freizeit Zentrum lakeside leisure and event centre are currently in progress. The construction of the “Skills Village” continues, with eleven out of the twelve huge, temporary structures already complete. Plumbing systems and power units have already been installed and the internet is up and running. In the tented halls, special floors are being laid and the lighting is being installed. The first machines and products needed for the competitions will be arriving next week. These include the machines for the carpenters and joiners, as well as wheel loaders, excavators and trucks to be used for the Heavy Vehicle Technology and Heavy Truck Maintenance skill categories. The CNC systems, which have been specially produced for EuroSkills and weigh several tons, will follow a few days later. The heavyweight equipment, vehicles and components will be accommodated in the Davis Cup hall, where the foundations have a greater load capacity.

Smaller components and tools, such as wallplugs and screws, spoons and whisks, or gardening shears will be taken from the three well stocked logistics warehouses in Graz to the Schwarzl centre by mid-September. Everything needs to be ready by 20 September, when the final acceptance checks of the European Championships competition areas will be carried out by the Competition Committee. Guillaume Suteau, Chairman of the Committee, is arriving on 17 September. He said: “We need to settle in and familiarise ourselves quickly with the premises, which we have only seen on videos so far. We will need to inspect everything that has been prepared. But above all, we will need to find out what still needs to be done and might cause a headache later, when the competitions start.” The other committee members – one from each participating country – are responsible for ensuring compliance with the rules and will chair the judging panels during the competitions.

### Member countries are fully prepared

The organisation is highly professional – not just at EuroSkills level, but also in the 19 participating member countries (plus the three guest nations Thailand, UAE and Albania): “All WorldSkills Europe member countries are doing a great job of supporting the development of the young competitors,” says Francis Hourant, on behalf of the WorldSkills Europe member countries. “Countries such as France, Germany and Switzerland as well as many other nations are holding team-building camps and other events, so that competitors from all areas can meet and take part in activities that help them to share experiences, build new contacts and develop skills. The level of organisation in all the member countries is superb, and no country is leaving anything to chance. EuroSkills is a showdown of the very best – and that includes organisation.”

### Support from sponsors

This professionalism is appreciated by the great many sponsors, such as ‘Diamond Sponsor’ Energie Steiermark (Austrian Energy provider): “As a Styrian flagship company, we regard it as our duty, rather than simply a voluntary undertaking, to invest in young, talented people. That’s why we are delighted to be partnering EuroSkills 2021 and thereby preparing a stage for our future skilled workers. We are convinced that EuroSkills 2021 in Graz will help show vocational skills and qualifications in the best possible light, as a key factor for business success,” emphasises company spokesman Urs Harnik-Lauris.

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### Covid precautions

Anyone wishing to come along to the event venue and cheer on the national and international competitors must pre-register at [tickets.euroskills2021.com](https://tickets.euroskills2021.com). There are three time slots available for registration on each competition day. This means that visitors can access the site from 8:30 to 11:30 am, 11:30 am to 2:30 pm, and/or 2:30 to 5:30 pm. Anyone accessing the site must comply with the Covid regulations currently in place, with evidence of vaccination or recovery, or a negative Covid test. It is possible to register for any or all of the time slots. For each time slot, a maximum of 3,500 visitors will be allowed access to the 70,000 square metres of premises at the Schwarzl Freizeit Zentrum lakeside leisure and event centre. This will allow over 20 square metres per visitor at all times. The currently valid Covid regulations apply in addition.

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