

## **Portugal's WBL Potential Tied to Digital Innovation—But Awareness Remains a Barrier, EU Report Shows**

March 12, 2026 – Portugal’s work-based learning (WBL) system is increasingly recognized for its potential to bridge the skills gap and foster stronger connections between higher education and the labour market. However, a recent EU report highlights a critical barrier to its full impact: a lack of awareness surrounding available WBL policies and opportunities.

**The Work-Based Learning Champion (WBL Champion)** project’s comprehensive study across four EU countries – **Portugal, Malta, Ireland and Italy** – reveals that while Portugal has made significant strides in integrating WBL into its educational framework, awareness remains a persistent challenge. The report suggests that the effectiveness of national and EU policies, including Erasmus+ and Portugal 2020, is still limited by the low visibility of WBL opportunities, particularly among small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

### **Key Findings**

Portugal stands out for having the highest level of awareness, among the 4 countries studied, regarding WBL policies, with over 56% of respondents being familiar with the frameworks. In contrast, Ireland and Italy demonstrated significant gaps, with less than 40% of respondents familiar with these policies. Malta also reported similar challenges, with 46.7% of stakeholders indicating a lack of familiarity.

While many participants in Portugal view national policies as moderately effective, there is room for improvement. Over half of Portuguese respondents rated EU support as only “moderately supportive,” indicating that while EU frameworks provide some assistance, their implementation could be more impactful.

The report underscores the urgent need for digital innovation within WBL programs. With the rapid digital transformation of the labour market, WBL systems across all four countries must integrate digital tools to manage placements, track progress and provide real-time feedback. The lack of digital tools and the need for digital skills training were identified as major challenges.

Across all four countries, limited engagement from employers, especially SMEs, continues to hinder the scale of WBL opportunities. In Portugal, the study highlights that while employer participation is present, there is a clear gap in engagement, which undermines the effectiveness of work-based training placements.

## **Recommendations**

To address these gaps, the report proposes several key actions:

- **Awareness Campaigns:** Launching targeted campaigns to increase awareness of WBL opportunities among students, educators and employers, with particular focus on SMEs.
- **Digital Integration:** Investment in digital platforms to enhance the management of WBL placements, alongside digital literacy training for both students and educators.
- **Enhanced Collaboration:** Fostering stronger partnerships between educational institutions and businesses, ensuring that WBL opportunities are closely aligned with current labour market needs.

As the WBL Champion project moves forward, it will continue to work towards developing a structured framework that not only raises awareness but also enhances the overall quality and accessibility of WBL programs across Europe. By embracing digital transformation and increasing employer engagement, WBL can more effectively bridge the skills gap and drive long-term economic growth.

