

European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience¹

Type of Document: European Commission Communication

Date of document/adoption: 1 July 2020

Policy document summary

The Skills Agenda (henceforth: “Agenda“) aims to deliver a paradigm shift on skills in the EU in order to strengthen sustainable competitiveness, ensure social fairness and build resilience. The Agenda introduces 12 actions that aim to improve the relevance of skills in the EU and ensure up- and reskilling of the European workforce while delivering enhanced agenda for the EU labour market.

Disclaimer

This brief overview is intended to summarize the essential points from the EU institutions' policy document that are relevant for research performing and innovation institutions, without providing the full extent of information available in the original document. The focus of the overview is put on initiatives regarding circulation of highly qualified staff, especially researchers, relevant to the European Research Area. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Commission.

The European Skills Agenda:

- calls for **collective action**, mobilising business, social partners and stakeholders, to commit to working together, in particular within the EU's industrial eco-systems
- defines a **clear strategy** to ensure that skills lead to **jobs**
- identifies the **financial means** to foster investment in skills
- helps people build their skills throughout life in an environment where lifelong learning is the norm
- sets ambitious **objectives for up- and reskilling** to be achieved **within the next 5 years**

The Agenda outlines the following **12 actions** designed to implement the abovelisted objectives:

Action 1: A Pact for Skills

The Pact for Skills is a pan-sectoral initiative primarily focusing on the sectors affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and economic crisis (health, construction, automotive and transport, tourism) and priority areas identified in the European Green Deal. It connects all relevant stakeholders as well as the pre-existing EU initiatives for cooperation. The Pact is envisioned to become the single-entry point for:

- **the Blueprint for Sectoral Cooperation on Skills** – aimed at defining sectoral skills intelligence, mapping key occupation needs, defining occupational profiles and rolling-out training programmes
- **the reinforced European Alliance for Apprenticeships**
- **the Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition**

In addition, the Pact shall:

- bring together public and private stakeholders concerned with up- and reskilling of workforce in Europe for the purpose of co-creating and signing of a Charter that will define key principles for up- and reskilling of workforce
- facilitate public-private cooperation, including setting up a large-scale partnerships such as SMEs who struggle with access to skills

¹ You can access the original document here: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1196

- facilitate access to information on EU funding instruments for skills by offering a single-entry point at EU level

Action 2: Strengthening skills intelligence

Action 2 introduces the comprehensive 'skills for job' approach that intends to promote the action related to identifying skills gaps and needs in order to enable development of targeted measures for up- and reskilling of the workforce. With a view to improve skills intelligence, the Commission pledged to:

- support the development of new skills intelligence by building on the work of the EU Agency Cedefop that piloted a big data analysis (the objective is to create a permanent online tool that will publish up-to date information available to stakeholders at regional and sectoral levels)
- centralise and disseminate skills intelligence through the Pact for Skills
- engage social partners in identification of training needs relevant for the labor market
- promote the use of skills intelligence among the public and private employment services
- assist individuals in the study, training and work choices by presenting skills intelligence information in Europass

Action 3: EU support for strategic national upskilling action

In order for the EU to support strategic national upskilling action, the Agenda calls for fostering of national skills strategies, the role of employment services and legal migration. **National Skills Strategies** are envisioned to engage all government sectors and policies (employment, education, research, industry and regional development) as well as social partners, civil society and education, training and labour market stakeholders. **Private and public employment services** are seen as essential for the development of national skills strategies as they are entitled to guide people towards up- and re-skilling that matches with labour market needs. The Agenda also calls for increasing investment in skills in third countries, attracting labour migrants from third countries and improving legal migratory pathways to the EU. In order to support strategic national upskilling action, the Commission pledged to:

- support Member States to develop **national skills strategies**, building on the existing work done with the OECD in 11 EU countries;
- collaborate with the **European Network of Public Employment Services** on preparation of peer learning events to identify skills needed by the labour market; the focus will also be put on improving the provision of guidance services, closing skills gap and exploring the opportunities for cross-border cooperation
- work on **enhancing the legal pathways to the EU** through proposing the **New Pact on Migration and Asylum** which includes inter alia relaunching of the negotiations on the Blue Card Directive to attract highly skilled workers as well as initiation of the talent partnerships with third countries;

Action 4: Proposal for a Council Recommendation on Vocational Education and Training for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience

The Agenda acknowledges that vocational education and training (VET) as a part of European cooperation framework for education and training and the European Education Area has been essential for delivering relevant skills. In order to make VET system future-proof, the Commission adopted proposal for a **Council Recommendation on Vocational Education and Training for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience**. The Council Recommendation proposes a reform of

the EU VET policy that prioritizes equipping the European workforce with green, digital and transversal skills, strives to ensure inclusiveness and equal opportunities and aims to establish VET as a global reference point for skills development. The Council Recommendation also introduces the **principles for implementation of the modernised vision of the EU VET policy** (such as a stronger focus on permeability with other educational sectors, increased learning mobility, inclusion of vulnerable groups, equal opportunities for women and men). It further calls for the VET systems to enhance the availability of work-based learning, mobility opportunities and the employability of vocational graduates. Moreover, the Council Recommendation introduces **actions** to be implemented **at the EU level** to support VET reform (such as enhancement of digital readiness of VET institutions, regional innovation and growth strategies).

Action 5: Rolling out the European universities initiative and upskilling scientists

The Agenda specifies that in order **to roll out the European Universities**, the Commission, in close cooperation with the stakeholders and the Member States, will:

- engage in the **full rollout** of the European Universities initiative **under the Erasmus programme (2021—2027) and Horizon Europe**, including by removing obstacles to effective and deeper transnational cooperation between higher education institutions and deepening the cooperation with economic operators, in particular to foster the twin transition
- identify areas of support for Member State action, explore a concrete approach for a **“European degree”** and the feasibility of a **European University statute** (to tackle cross-border legal issues) and for a **European Recognition and Quality Assurance System**
- work together with the **European Institute for Innovation and Technology (EIT) and other European Research Area relevant initiatives** to bring together leading organisations from business, education and research, in particular through the **Knowledge and Innovation Communities** to develop innovative teaching and learning, train the next generation of innovators, and accompany the transition of higher education institutions to more entrepreneurial organisations
- bring academia and industry together by testing a **new Talents-On-Demand knowledge exchange** to meet companies’ research and innovation needs, complementing university-business collaboration

The Agenda specified that in order to **upskill scientists**, in close cooperation with stakeholders and the Member States, the Commission will:

- develop a **European Competence Framework for researchers** and support the development of a set of **core skills for researchers**
- define a **taxonomy of skills for researchers**, which will allow the **statistical monitoring of brain circulation** and agree with Member States on a set of **indicators** to allow monitoring and statistical analysis
- develop **open science and science management curricula** for researchers

Action 6: Skills to support the green and digital transitions

In order to support the acquisition of skills for the green transition, the Commission will:

- define a **taxonomy of skills for the green transition**, which will allow the statistical monitoring of the greening of professions

- agree with Member States a set of **indicators** to allow **monitoring and statistical analysis** of developments in green skills
- developing a **European competence framework on education for climate change, environmental issues, clean energy transition and sustainable development**, which will spell out the different levels of green competence
- the development of a **core green skills set** for the labour market to guide training across the economy with a view to creating a generation of climate, environment and health conscious professionals and green economic operators
- help to **integrate environmental and climate considerations** into school, higher education, vocational education and training, as well as professional training

In order to support the acquisition of digital skills, the Commission will:

- update the **digital Education Action Plan** and present a vision for improving digital literacy, skills and capacity at all levels of education and training and for all levels of digital skills
- implement the **Digital Europe programme**, which aims to build the strategic digital capacities of the EU, strengthening investments in supercomputing, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity and the development of advanced digital skills
- support **Digital Crash Courses for SMEs** and “**digital volunteers**” programme to upskill the current workforce in digital areas
- support **EU ICT-Jump-Start trainings** to provide short-term intensive training to tackle ICT skills shortages, with a focus on gender-balanced participation

Action 7: Increasing STEM graduates and fostering entrepreneurial and transversal skills

The Pact strives to promote action that will increase the number of graduates with high level skills in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects that are necessary for using new technologies and fostering innovation. On this basis, the Commission pledged to:

- **raise the attractiveness of STEM studies and careers**, with focused actions to attract girls and women, and by encouraging a cross-disciplinary and innovative teaching and learning approach in schools, VET and higher education
- introduce activities for teachers, helping **address the shortage of STEM teachers** in EU countries and regions
- **foster science education in research and innovation actions** such as through the development of key competence and assessment framework; dissemination of research results on science education in partnership with the European SchoolNet; and use of socially empowered portals bringing together schools from different European countries
- promote an **integrated framework and learning continuum** inter alia between secondary and higher education systems, education and business in partnership with business professionals, and further pursue open schooling and research-based methods, contests, and citizen science

In a similar vein, the Pact aims to foster entrepreneurial (including social entrepreneurship) and transversal skills (working together, critical thinking, creative problem solving).

In order to foster entrepreneurial skills, the Commission pledged to launch a **European Action on Entrepreneurial Skills** that will focus the action on:

- providing support to aspiring entrepreneurs, notably young women entrepreneurs by leveraging and connecting existing entrepreneurial networks
-

- support in funding programmes for entrepreneurial skills activities, European mobility for entrepreneurs and systematic use of the European Entrepreneurship Competence Framework (EntreComp)
- promotion of entrepreneurship skills at all levels of education and training

In order to foster transversal skills, the Commission pledged to:

- provide a strategic framework for the recognition of transversal skills to support validation practitioners in Europe
- develop resources to support validation of transversal skills by employers and employment services (it will explore the EU-wide online courses and related micro-credentials for validation practitioners, and establish a network of validation pioneer organisations that can share best practices)

Action 8: Skills for Life

The Agenda calls for the Commission and its Member States to:

- build **comprehensive, quality and inclusive adult learning systems**, which reach out to all, including seniors and in particular those most in need of access to learning, including through distance and online learning
- work on new priorities for the **European Agenda for Adult Learning** to complement the renewed European cooperation framework in education and training and to support the achievement of United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals
- prioritise non-formal, life-wide learning, intergenerational, intercultural and community learning

Action 9: Initiative on Individual Learning Accounts

Based on the Agenda, the Commission will:

- assess how a possible **European initiative on individual learning accounts** can help close existing gaps in the access to training for working age adults and empower them to successfully manage labour market transitions
- assess which enabling services and other factors could support **individual learning accounts**²

Action 10: A European approach to micro-credentials

The Agenda defines microcredentials as documented statements that acknowledge a person's learning outcomes, which are related to small volumes of learning and that for the user are made visible in a certificate, badge or endorsement (issued in a digital or paper format).

Based on the Agenda, the Commission will propose a new initiative to support the quality, transparency and take-up of micro-credentials across the EU. On this basis, the Commission will:

² Individual learning accounts give everyone access to quality guidance; empower people to get training they need irrespective of the employment status; allow everyone to choose what, when and how they learn while making the learning validated; and allow everyone to accumulate and carry their training entitlements with them when they change jobs.

- develop, together with all relevant stakeholders (public or private education and training providers, social partners, chambers of commerce, employers) **European standards** which address **minimum requirements** for quality and transparency
- explore the **inclusion of micro-credentials in qualifications frameworks**, in dialogue with national qualification authorities
- make it easier for individuals to store and showcase to employers acquired micro-credentials through **Europass** and its **Digital Credentials**

Action 11: New Europass Platform

The launch of the Agenda was accompanied with the launch of the new Europass Platform that has been developed as the EU's online tool that will:

- guide users to assess and describe their skills and communicate their qualifications and experience to training providers and employers, so they can take the next step in training or work
- suggest to Europass users relevant jobs (via EURES and Euraxess jobs portals) and learning opportunities
- make use of skills intelligence to provide tailored information on skills trends and needs to users when planning a change of career or moving to another country;
- enable education and training institutions to issue digital diplomas and certificates to learners in a European-wide digital format of 'Europass Digital Credentials', encouraging easier recognition
- support a "fast track" to recognition, reducing administrative burden and decreasing fraud by supporting automatic authentication of qualifications by employers and training providers; and
- support legally residing migrants to showcase their skills and qualifications and facilitate their recognition through better information (the EU 'Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals' currently used in reception centres and by organisations guiding and supporting the integration of asylum seekers and refugees will be linked to the new Europass)

Action 12: Improving the enabling framework to unlock Member States' and private investments in skills

Based on the Agenda, in order to incentivize investment in skills, the Commission will:

- pursue the question of how **fiscal frameworks** can contribute to building more resilient societies, supporting reforms and investment in human capital and skills as part of the ongoing public debate initiated by the Commission's review of economic governance and with a view to the recovery, while safeguarding fiscal sustainability
- work on **statistics on public and private investment** in adult skills together with national statistical offices, including by developing 'satellite accounts' to improve transparency of reporting on skills in national accounts and budgets
- assess **innovative financing mechanisms** that can trigger additional investments in skills

Setting ambitious skills objectives

With the Agenda, the Commission set the following **objectives of the EU skills policy**:

- By 2025, 120 million adults in the EU should participate in learning every year. This corresponds to 50% of the adult population and around 540 million training activities for this group over the five-year period.

- By 2025, 14 million adults with low qualifications in the EU should participate in learning every year. This corresponds to 30% of this group and around 60 million training activities for this group over the five-year period
- By 2025, 2 million jobseekers or one in five should have a recent learning experience. This corresponds to around 40 million learning activities for this group over the five-year period.
- By 2025, 230 million adults should have at least basic digital skills, which covers 70% of the adult population in the EU.

Mobilisation of public and private investments in skills

Based on the Agenda, in order to invest in skills, the EU Member States will be able to access funding from:

- REACT-EU (financed by the Next Generation EU)
- European Social Fund
- Recovery and Resilience Facility
- European Social Fund Plus
- Horizon Europe
- Erasmus +
- Digital Europe Programme
- European Regional Development Fund
- Just Transition Fund
- European Globalization Adjustment Fund
- Modernization Fund