New skills agenda for Europe

2017/2002(INI) - 10/06/2016 - Non-legislative basic document

PURPOSE: to present a new skills agenda for Europe to strengthen employability and competitiveness.

BACKGROUND: in a fast-changing global economy, skills will to a great extent determine competitiveness and the capacity to drive innovation.

Yet the situation in Europe calls for action in this area:

- **70 million Europeans** lack adequate reading and writing skills, and even more have poor numeracy and digital skills, putting them at risk of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion;
- **more than half of the 12 million long-term unemployed** are considered as low-skilled;
- many people work in jobs that **do not match their talents**; at the same time, 40% of European employers have difficulty finding people with the skills they need to grow and innovate;
- too few people have the **entrepreneurial mind-sets** and skills needed to set up their own business.

Tackling the skills challenges will require significant policy efforts and systemic reforms in education and training. It will require smart investments in human capital from both public and private sources, in line with the Stability and Growth Pact.

While competence for the content of teaching and the organisation of education and training systems lies with Member States, a **concerted effort at EU level** is required to achieve meaningful, sustainable results.

CONTENT: the **new skills agenda** presented by the Commission supports a shared commitment and works towards a common vision about the strategic importance of skills for sustaining jobs, growth and competitiveness. It seeks a shared commitment to reform in a number of areas where Union action brings most added value.

It is centred around three key work strands:

1. Improving the quality and relevance of skills formation: the Commission will:

- propose that a **Skills Guarantee** be established to provide: (i) a skills assessment, enabling low-qualified adults to identify their existing skills and their upskilling needs; (ii) a learning offer, responding to the specific needs of individuals and of local labour markets; (iii) opportunities to have their skills validated and recognised;
- launch a revision of the **Key Competences Framework** in 2017 in order to develop a shared understanding of key competences: the aim is to promote entrepreneurial and innovation-oriented mind-sets, including by encouraging practical entrepreneurial experiences;
- showcase vocational studies as a first class option by supporting opportunities for learners to undertake a work-based learning experience as part of their studies;
- launch the **Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition** to develop a large digital talent pool and ensure that individuals and the labour force in Europe are equipped with adequate digital skills.

2. Making skills and qualifications visible and comparable: the Commission intends to:

- present a proposal for the **revision of the European Qualifications Framework** to support transparency and the comparison of qualifications and contribute to their better use in the EU labour market;
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- launch a **Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals** to assist services in receiving and host countries to identify and document skills, qualifications and experience of newly-arrived third country nationals.

3. Improving skills intelligence and information for better career choices: the Commission will:

- propose a **revision of the Europass Framework** to set up an intuitive and seamless online service platform. It will provide web-based tools for documenting and sharing information on skills and qualifications, and free self-assessment tools;
- analyse the issue of **brain drain** and promote the sharing of best practice as regards effective ways of tackling the problem;
- launch a **Blueprint for Sectoral Cooperation on Skills**. It will help mobilise and coordinate key players, encourage private investment and promote more strategic use of relevant EU and national funding programmes. The Blueprint will be supported by existing EU funding and initially piloted in a demand driven process in 6 sectors, with preparatory work starting in 2016: automotive, maritime technology, space, defence, textile and tourism;
- propose as a first step in 2017 an **initiative on tertiary graduate tracking** to support Member States in improving information on how graduates progress on the labour market.

The Commission will also engage in a more in-depth dialogue with Member States on **how to best use the opportunities offered by existing funding programmes** to meet the Agenda' objectives.

The main instruments concerned are the European Social Fund (ESF), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF), the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), Horizon 2020 and Erasmus +.

The potential of the EIB and other financial organisations and products, including the European Fund for Strategic Investments, should also be used to the full to boost private-sector investment in skills development.