



**European
Movement**
International

Policy Position Tackling Youth Unemployment and the Skills Gap

The focus on educational attainment at the EU level has borne fruit; 10 million more people finished higher education in 2014 than in 2010. There was also an increase in the number of people participating in adult learning from 9.3% in 2010 to 10.7% in 2015¹. Furthermore, there has been a decrease in the number of students dropping out of school from 6 million in 2010 to 4.5 million in 2014.²

Despite this important step forward, today's changing labour market has created a gap between the skills that employees possess and the abilities that employers are looking for. 40% of EU employers have issues finding people with the skills they need while a large number of people are working in jobs that do not match their aptitudes.³ Poor quality apprenticeships and youth unemployment are an ongoing issue in many EU countries. Out of 4.5 million students who do an internship in Europe, 59% are unpaid and 30% have no learning content.⁴ Although the youth unemployment rate in the EU has decreased - from 20% in September 2015 to 18.2% September 2016 - there is still much work to be done.⁵

The skills gap is one of the main issues affecting the whole of the EU, which

is why the European Commission launched the **New Skills Agenda for Europe**. Through ten specific measures, it aims to improve the quality of skills formation, make skills and qualifications more visible and comparable and improve skills information for better career choices. This is not the only EU initiative to fight youth unemployment and the skills gap. Other programmes include the EU Youth Strategy, Youth Guarantee, Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps. The EU is aware of the issue and is acting accordingly, but the current myriad of initiatives needs more clarity.

Communicating EU initiatives clearly

Given the number of EU initiatives on youth, the **EU Youth Portal** should modernise and communicate more clearly on all EU programmes related to the matter. Since the EU is not only focusing on youth, it would also be useful if another portal or website were created to list all of the programmes related to skills, education and unemployment with concrete information on how EU citizens can make use of the programmes.

Addressing different levels of skill development

One of the most important challenges is the fact that every Member State is at a different point in the development of skills, making it challenging to produce a package of recommen-



dations that can be used throughout the EU. National authorities have to implement the initiatives of the European Commission, as the EU only has the competence to support, coordinate or supplement the actions of the Member States on education, vocational training and youth. Bearing in mind this limitation, it is possible that the improvement of the **Key Competences Framework** and the **European Qualifications Framework** could help Member States to adopt a more uniform approach towards skills development by creating a shared understanding of competences and qualifications yet still allowing them to tailor programmes to country-specific needs. This measure could also increase mobility.

Linking education to the labour market

Learners should be enabled to identify their existing skills and upskilling needs. This approach requires improved training programmes for teachers, allowing them to adapt their curricula to the individual needs of learners. Educational programmes should also become more

¹ Eurostat, Lifelong learning statistics, June 2016.

² European Commission Communication, A New Skills Agenda for Europe, June 2016.

³ Idem

⁴ International Interns' Day, <http://www.internsday.org/>

⁵ Eurostat, Euro area unemployment at 10.0%, September 2016.

flexible to enable learning providers to define their own methodologies.

Learning providers need to improve their understanding of what the labour market demands and adapt their educational programmes accordingly. Education should not only focus on cognitive and transversal skills, but also on civic education aimed at fostering responsible citizens. **The European Pact for Youth**, is an important initiative in this re-



spect. One of its objectives is to offer more quality apprenticeships and entry level jobs through partnerships with education and training providers, as well as Youth Guarantee Providers. Digital skills formation should also be part of the education package to prepare future employees for the increasingly important digital world. The **Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition**, which invites Member States to bring digital skills and competences to all levels of education and training, could play an important role in this regard.

Additionally, young people and adults should be encouraged to take part in work-based learning which would enable them to acquire skills that are not available in traditional education. In this respect **Vocational Education and Training (VET)** is an excellent opportunity for work-based learning experiences, especially in countries where it has not yet been well established. VET offers a dual objective: contributing to employability and economic growth while responding to broader societal challenges such as promoting social cohesion.⁶ For VET to be effective, it needs:

Focus: VET programmes should concentrate those not in education, employment or training and should further develop entrepreneurial skills while avoiding that VET becomes a means to popularise cheap labour or unpaid work.

Better promotion: Even if VET results have been very positive, the possibilities that the training brings remain unknown to a number of citizens and are sometimes perceived as less attractive than formal educational programmes. To combat this trend, greater efforts have to be undertaken to promote the programme and raise awareness of its benefits.

⁶ The Bruges Communiqué on enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training for the period 2011-2020, December 2010.

Modernisation and quality: Working to modernise VET training could also increase its popularity and change people's perception. The focus should be placed on improving the quality and recognition of VET, as well as its relevance in the labour market. VET should also be further integrated into European and national qualifications frameworks.

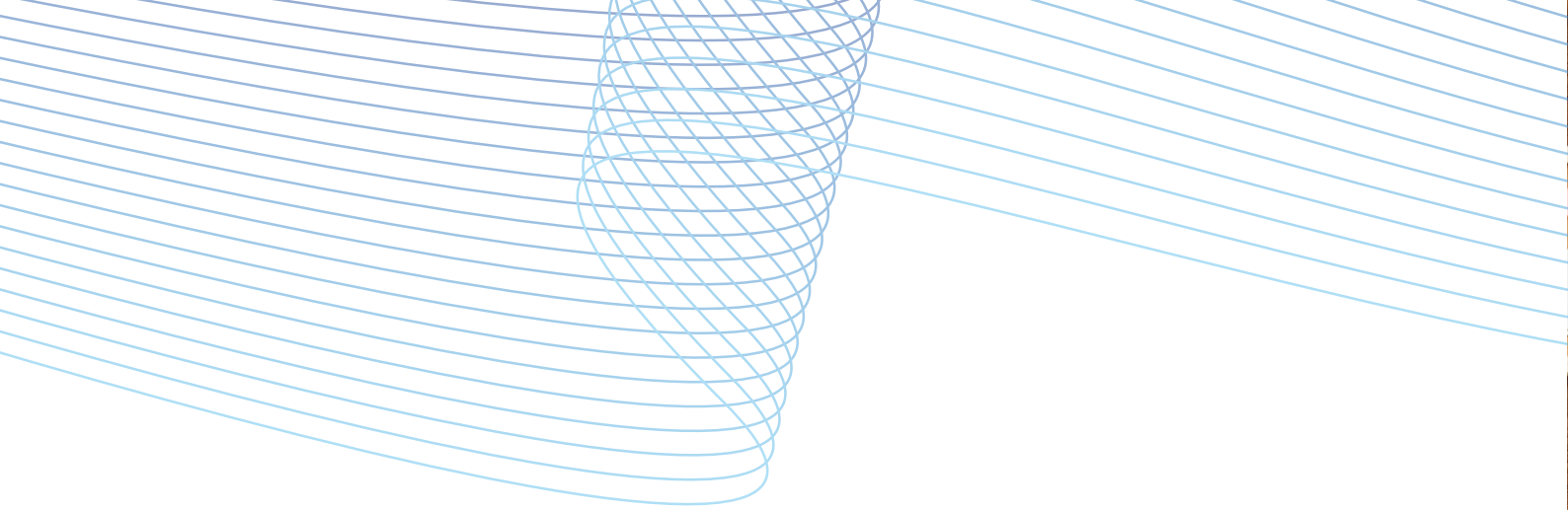
Encourage mobility: Given that mobility across Member States increases employability, VET should continue to promote mobility through programmes such as Erasmus+.

The economic benefits of VET are wide-ranging. It has brought positive changes in relation to wages, mobility and employment opportunities in several Member States. There are also advantages for enterprises, since VET has proven to increase productivity, innovation, employment growth, and organisational culture.⁷

Identifying skills of Third Country Nationals

In order to successfully integrate migrants into European society, the EU should increase its efforts to understand the qualifications, skills and professional experiences of migrants, as well as trying to identify them at an earlier stage.

⁷ European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), The Benefits of Vocational Education and Training, 2011.



The European Commission's Agenda states that the Skills Profile Tool Kit "will assist services in receiving and host countries to identify and document" migrants' competences. This initiative should specify which services should be responsible for implementing such measures and explain how the identification of migrants' skills can be executed. Adapting the **European Qualifications Framework** and the Europass to the requirements of the labour market could help in this regard. The EQF could work as an integration tool, enabling third country nationals to identify the skills needed while making sure that skills acquired outside of the EU are recognised. The EQF would not only benefit migrants coming into the EU, but also European citizens wanting to find jobs outside of the EU.⁸

Involving all actors

The European Commission should also provide a platform for discussion and exchange of experiences. In order to make it a Europe wide effort, information on how to get involved needs to be accessible to all organisations, education institutions, businesses and other stakeholders. The proposed portal on initiatives related to skills, education and unemployment could be a good platform for these stakeholders, and provide a space for the exchange of best practices.

The European Movement

seeks to provide a platform to encourage and facilitate the active participation of citizens and stakeholders in the development of European solutions to our common challenges. We offer thought leadership on the issues that affect Europe and we give the opportunity to representatives from European associations, political parties, enterprises, trade unions, NGOs and other stakeholders, through our 39 National Councils and 34 International Associations, to work together, towards improving the way that Europe works.

⁸ European Commission Communication, A New Skills Agenda for Europe, June 2016.

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