

# SOCIAL AGENDA

## Skills A new agenda



SKILLS  
FORMATION



VISIBILITY  
AND  
COMPARABILITY



INTELLIGENCE  
AND  
INFORMATION



### I focus on

6

#### HEALTH AT WORK

Cancer-causing  
chemicals



12

#### INCLUSION

Third-country  
nationals



## EDITORIAL



*In the new, increasingly digital working world that is emerging, being properly equipped with skills is more than ever a right. For the EU workforce, operating in an ageing society, better take-up of life-long learning and (re-) training is an absolute must to ensure a sustainable and inclusive growth in the years to come.*

*Life-long learning is one of the rights that are listed in the outline of a European Pillar of Social Rights which the European Commission adopted on 8 March and upon which it is consulting the public and all the stakeholders concerned, both **on-line** and **face-to-face**.*

*On 10 June, the European Commission put forward a New Skills Agenda for Europe. It represents a key milestone in the shaping of the European Social Pillar. The skills issue is very much at the cross-roads between social and economic policy, working life and life in society, employment and unemployment, inclusion and poverty...*

## *“A strategic and systemic approach to skills”*

*The Skills Agenda provides a pathway to up-skill the EU workforce, in particular the 66 million people aged 25-64 who have not gone beyond lower secondary education. In so doing, it reinforces other pathways to the labour market which the EU has created recently, for young people and for the long-term unemployed.*

*It gives a boost to the recognition of informal and non-formal skills and seeks to make mentalities evolve so that vocational education and training is perceived for what it is: a first class option.*

*It will help make re-skilling and continuous training possible locally to those who do not have the time or means to drop everything and go on a course - or had not so far received a relevant and realistic training offer.*

*It will make it easier to establish the skills profile of third-country nationals and it will help turn the EU into a single labour market where education systems and qualifications in one country are understood, recognised and trusted in another.*

### **Michel Servoz**

*Director General of the European Commission's Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion department*

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## NEWS IN BRIEF

### 13 July: Work-life balance consultation

The European Commission launched the second-stage consultation of EU social partner organisations on how to reduce obstacles to women's participation in the labour market, by improving work-life balance and possibilities for women and men to make use of their rights more equally. The Commission has identified possible avenues for EU legislative action on which it would like to seek the views of social partners, including whether they would be interested in opening negotiations with a view to concluding an agreement at EU level between themselves. EU employees' and employers' organisations have until 30 September to submit their views.



*Equal use: Seeking social partners' views on improving possibilities for women and men to use their rights more equally.*

### 27 June: New start for social dialogue

Vice-President for the Euro and Social Dialogue Valdis Dombrovskis together with Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, Marianne Thyssen, signed on behalf of the European Commission a statement on a 'new start for social dialogue', together with the

European cross-industry social partners and the Netherlands Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The statement is part of the 'New Start for Social Dialogue' initiated by President Juncker at a high level conference on 5 March 2015.

### 24 June: Commission President at ILO

European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker was the guest of honour of this year's International Labour Conference, the supreme body of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), that took place in Geneva over May-June 2016. He made a vibrant pledge to social Europe, youth employment and social dialogue at the World of Work Summit.



*Jean-Claude Juncker: The European Commission President was the guest of honour at the ILO International Labour Conference.*

### 16 June: Integrated approach to poverty

The EU Council of Ministers called on the European Commission and the Member States to develop an integrated approach to combat poverty and social exclusion by combining adequate income support, access to quality services and inclusive labour

markets, while ensuring equal opportunities for women and men. The integrated approach is characterised by comprehensive, continuous and coordinated interventions throughout the life cycle and requires cooperation among all stakeholders.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

## 10 June: New Skills Agenda

The European Commission adopted a new and comprehensive Skills Agenda for Europe. The aim is to ensure that people develop a broad set of skills from early on in life and to make the most of Europe's human capital, which will ultimately boost employability, competitiveness and growth in Europe. It calls on Member States and stakeholders to improve the quality of skills and their relevance for the labour market. According to studies, 70 million Europeans lack adequate reading and writing skills, and even more have poor numeracy and digital skills. This puts them at risk of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion (see page 14 onwards).



**From primary school to lifelong learning:** 70 million Europeans lack adequate reading and writing skills, even more have poor numeracy and digital skills.

## 7 June: Integration of third-country nationals

The European Commission adopted an Action Plan on the Integration of Third Country Nationals. It provides guidance as to how to address this challenge which all EU Member States are facing, each in its own way, and

turn it into an opportunity. Special attention is given to asylum seekers and refugees: it is crucial to "invest" in them as early as possible in the asylum-seeking process (see page 12).

## 27 May: EU platform against undeclared work

The European Commission joined forces with Member States and stakeholders to launch a new European platform on undeclared work. The network aims at turning undeclared work into declared work, thus ensuring

social protection for millions of Europeans who lose out through various kinds of risky job arrangements, including dependent work relationships hidden as self-employment (see page 10).

## 13 May: Work-related cancer

To improve protection for workers from cancer-causing chemicals, the European Commission proposed changes to the Carcinogens and Mutagens Directive of 2004 to limit exposure to 13 cancer-causing chemicals at the workplace by including

new or amended limit values in the Carcinogens and Mutagens Directive. These limit values set a maximum concentration for the presence of a chemical carcinogen in the workplace air (see page 6).

## 29 April: Fishing sector working conditions

Following an agreement in 2013 by social partners on working conditions in the fishing sector, where the accident rate can be 15 times higher compared to other sectors, the European Commission translated the agreement into a legal proposal for a Directive, to align EU law with the 2007 "Work in Fishing" Convention of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). Once adopted by the EU Council of Ministers, this directive will implement the social partner agreement, which provides for a higher level of protection of EU fishermen.



**New EU directive:** There are 15 times more accidents in the fishing sector compared to others.

## HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK

# Tightening the grip on Cancer

The EU is reviewing legislation on exposure to chemical agents



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**New exposure limits:** Construction workers are particularly exposed to respirable crystalline silica.

Cancer is the number one cause of work-related deaths in the EU, responsible for an estimated 48 000-96 000 deaths per year, out of a total of over 217 million workers.

To improve worker protection from cancer-causing chemicals, the European Commission proposed on 13 May to set new or amended limit values in an EU directive on carcinogens and mutagens dating back to 2004.

For example, for the first time at EU level, it sets an occupational exposure limit value for respirable crystalline silica. Construction workers are particularly exposed to this substance, which is to be found in dust created by work processes such as mining, quarrying, tunnelling, cutting, crushing or grinding materials such as concrete, bricks or rocks.

Altogether, the Commission proposal foresees limit values for 13 chemical agents. This is only the first in a series of further limit value proposals to be made for other chemical agents.

Obtaining relevant exposure data, collected with the same purpose in mind throughout the EU, is a challenge. Where it is available, it indicates that introducing the newly-proposed limit values to the 13 chemical agents of the first batch would improve legal protection for an estimated 33 % to 98 % of exposed workers, and save around 10 000 lives by 2069.

### Time bomb

The best way of preventing ill-health in the future is to prevent exposures from happening today. However, the problem about health-endangering exposure is that it is invisible and that its impact may manifest itself long after the exposure has ceased – and when a worker might have left the company where he/she was exposed.

Occupational exposure limits are a very important tool for helping employers comply with the obligations established



**Water against dust:** Occupational exposure limits help employers carry out risk assessments and taking risk management measures.

in the Carcinogens and Mutagens directive, such as conducting risk assessment and risk management measures. They are also very helpful for the enforcement authorities.

The limits are specific for the chemical for which they are set out but are applicable to any use of a chemical in any sector. They provide a broad approach to the control of risks resulting from exposure and contribute to further enhance the coherent framework in the overall EU chemicals legislation, in the field of chemicals at work.

### A long process

Revising EU occupational health and safety directives, which spring from an overarching framework directive of 1989, takes a long time. In the case of the current modification of the carcinogen and mutagen directive, the process started back in 2004 with a first consultation of the social partners. It was followed by a second consultation, an external study, discussions within the Working Party on Chemicals (where the three interest groups - governments, workers and employers - are represented) with the outcome of three opinions adopted by the Plenary of the Advisory Committee of Health and Safety at work (where interest groups are represented).

Finally, an impact assessment was carried out and accompanied the Commission proposal, thus triggering the EU inter-institutional decision-making process (in particular the European Parliament and the EU Council of Ministers) through which the proposal is now going through.

### Fit for purpose

Because the process of reviewing all exposure limit values for chemicals is drawn out over quite a period of time, it is being considered in the framework of the review of the 24 EU occupational safety and health directives.

As a result of EU legislation on health and safety at work, employers must assess all risks at the workplace and, on

that basis, decide on the best measures to protect workers - and apply them. But the world of work is changing rapidly.

To ensure that the EU framework in this area remains “fit for purpose” and reflects new scientific and technical knowledge, new technologies and modern ways of working, the 2014-2020 EU Health and Safety Strategic Framework aims to improve safety levels, better implement EU legislation on the ground and further reduce accidents and work-related illness. In particular, it seeks to improve the prevention of work-related diseases.

### More information (easily accessible via the on-line version of *Social Agenda*):

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=2536&furtherNews=yes>

### ***Risk assessment tools available on-line***

*The European Commission and the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) are providing practical support for implementing safety and health measures – in particular for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). There are practical guides explaining EU rules on a wide range of subjects such as construction, vibrations, working at a height, explosive atmospheres, noise, etc.*

*In addition, the on-line interactive risk assessment tool OiRA developed by EU-OSHA makes a major contribution in helping SMEs to comply with occupational health and safety requirements. This is a free and easy-to-use sectoral risk assessment tool for SMEs. Currently, there are both EU and national OiRA tools for around 40 sectorial and occupational activities, and many more under development.*

## EU FUNDING

# Innovative projects ready to be scaled up

## Twice a year, the European Commission reports on experimental employment and social innovation projects

Directly managed by the European Commission, the Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) funding programme was launched in 2014. It brought together three programmes which the Commission had managed separately between 2007 and 2013: PROGRESS (Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity), which supported the development and coordination of EU policy in the areas of employment, social inclusion, social protection, working conditions, anti-discrimination and gender equality; EURES, a co-operation network between the Commission and the national public employment services; and the European Progress Microfinance Facility, which increased the availability of microcredit to individuals for setting up or developing a small business.

Today and until 2020, these programmes make up the three axes of EaSI. In addition to creating synergies, EaSI gives a boost to each of these strands: a new emphasis is placed via PROGRESS on social innovation and experimentation; EURES

is being turned into a genuine pan-European employment agency; and the microfinance strand has been extended to supporting social entrepreneurship. Funding for social policy experimentation has jumped from €2-4 million per year to €10-14 million.

Every six months, EaSI produces implementation reports. They constitute a wealth of interesting practices which EU countries, their socioeconomic partners, NGOs, academia and civil society at large, could up-scale and experiment elsewhere, this time with the help of the European Social Fund or other EU Cohesion and Investment Funds which they co-manage with the European Commission.

### In another country

The fourth report, which was published in April 2016, contains an account of a series of projects carried out under the "Your first EURES Job" label: an intra-EU mobility scheme to



**Urgent improvement:** The EU co-funded a vocational training project for emergency professionals, as around 70% of medical errors could be caused by human factors.





help young people find a job, traineeship or apprenticeship in another EU country and also help employers find employees in another EU country for their bottleneck vacancies.

The target for the three calls launched between 2011 and 2013 was to ensure 5 000 work placements for young people with an overall budget of €12 million. By the end of the second quarter of 2015, around 4 300 participants had obtained a work placement in another EU country. Since 2014, “Your first EURES job” has been carrying on under EaSI with an annual budget of € 6-9 million.

In one of the projects, the German Federal Employment Agency provided support for both young jobseekers and businesses interested in recruiting skilled young people from outside Germany. During an 18-month long programme, 361 young people were supported through the payment of travel and relocation expenses, as well as through preparatory language training. And 32 small-and-medium sized enterprises benefited from financial support for a total of 46 integration programs.

### Trampoline

Another series of projects covered by the fourth report was funded under the PROGRESS label: developing pension models, creating European Skills Councils, developing inclusion models for vulnerable groups or developing simulation models. Their aim was to support experiments in anticipating on policy changes prior to embarking on welfare reforms, as well as to develop and test socially innovative approaches. Particular attention was paid to vulnerable groups, quality childcare services, active and healthy ageing and youth transition from education to work.

For example, in France, the Tremplin project was designed to structure and formalise a whole series of labour market integration initiatives in pilot vocational education and training schools, in Lille and Grenoble. Sixteen info points dedicated to labour market integration (“*Pôles premier emploi*”) were created. Their aim was to facilitate the accession of future graduates to the labour market, in particular by reducing the

period of transition between school and the labour market and fighting employment inequality.

At these info points, numerous activities were developed: providing information and advice, training, awareness-raising, network development and boosting mobility. And three study visits to partners in Scotland, Germany and Poland enabled the contact points to discover other educational systems, initiate contacts and secure the reception conditions of exchange students.

Another series of projects focused on the demand side of job creation, setting out ways for EU countries to encourage hiring by reducing taxes on labour or by providing more support to business start-ups, in areas with the biggest job potential: the green economy, health services and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT).

### Emergency

Another Progress project, run by an Italian vocational training centre, aimed at improving the operational skills of health professionals working in emergency departments as well as of medical students.

Indeed, the number of reports of “malpractices” in the area of emergency medicine has been increasing in Europe. According to some reports, around 70% of medical errors are caused by human factors. It is important, therefore, to define new care process mechanisms with a “safety culture” dimension.

The project led to an exchange of best practices and experience with partners in Denmark, Germany and the United Kingdom. It developed technologically innovative training tools and facilitated the transfer of knowledge on simulation technologies.

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### EaSI monitoring reports:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1081&newsId=2497&furtherNews=yes>

## WORKING CONDITIONS

# Undeclared work – a drive for change

A European platform against undeclared work is operational since May



**Household work:** Undeclared workers often suffer from hazardous working conditions and violations of labour rights.

“There is no place for unfair working conditions in our European Union,” said European Commissioner Marianne Thyssen, in charge of Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, on 27 May. She was opening an event marking the launch of the European Platform against Undeclared Work.

The Platform is a network of practitioners and experts bringing together the European Commission, national authorities, social partners and other experts. They exchange information and good practices, develop knowledge and tools and engage in joint activities.

The ultimate objective of the Platform is to drive change at national level in order to turn informal work into formal employment and promote better working conditions.

### Distorting the labour market

Being paid “in black” can seem attractive at first as, for some, it might be the only way to earn money – sometimes a great deal more than in a regular job. However, undeclared

workers often suffer from hazardous working conditions and violations of their labour rights. For example, health and safety obligations at their workplace are often neglected, as well as the right to paid annual leave and limits to working time. Furthermore, undeclared workers do not build up pension rights and cannot claim other benefits, as no (or less) contributions are paid.

The State, on its side, loses income from taxes and social security contributions, resulting in less money for child- and healthcare or other quality services, for instance for the unemployed, elderly or migrants.

The undeclared economy also tends to distort the level playing field between companies, thus undermining the smooth functioning of markets: employers who do not declare their work can provide cheaper goods and services than those following the rules.

Another risk of undeclared work is exploitation of workers in cross-border situations: Differences in national legislations and little knowledge of rights and obligations can facilitate abuse.



**A forum:** The Platform is a forum where for example labour inspectors can exchange information and engage in closer cross-border cooperation.

Tackling this issue by working better together and exchanging relevant information is one of the priorities of the Platform.

### High expectations

Expectations regarding the Platform are high, especially in terms of fighting social fraud. With the Platform, the Commission intends to contribute to a fairer single market with a level playing field for companies and a high protection of workers and their rights, including posted workers.

At the launch event, the European Parliament and the Council of the EU emphasized the importance of improving labour inspections in this context. There was also strong support on the part of Member States and the social partners to focus on sectors strongly affected by undeclared work, and on cross-border issues.

The main responsibility for tackling undeclared work lies with the Member States but EU-level action can make a difference. Mutual learning and capacity building will be the drivers for change in national approaches, and the Platform's launch is a milestone in this respect.

The Platform is not a European Labour Inspectorate but a forum where different actors – enforcement authorities (such as labour inspections, social, tax, customs and immigration authorities), ministries and social partners – can exchange information, develop knowledge and tools and engage in closer cross-border cooperation and joint activities.

The Commission presented some first ideas for Platform activities, such as a study on bogus self-employment and a mutual assistance project with Romania. It will support the Platform by providing a secretariat as well as technical and logistical support.

### A holistic approach

The output of the Platform will contribute to changes at national level and to initiatives of the European Commission to improve the protection and working conditions of workers. It

is therefore important that the fight against undeclared work is looked at from an all-compassing viewpoint, as it touches upon several policy fields such as taxation, labour law or social security. Correlations and causal links will have to be made.

In fact, the fight against undeclared work ties in with many more domains, for instance migration or free movement of workers. Making the European Union a social triple A is the underlying vision for setting up the Platform. There is a need for a more global policy approach and the EU-level network should be the driver towards that change.

### More information:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=88&eventIds=1093&furtherEvents=yes>

### Where is it happening?

*There is no standard definition but at EU-level, undeclared work is defined as any paid activities that are lawful as regards their nature, but not declared to public authorities. It takes a variety of forms, ranging from under-declared or partially declared employment in formal enterprises right through to clandestine work done on somebody's own account to provide goods and services to formal enterprises or other clients.*

*It is prevalent in the building industry but it is also widespread in renovation and repair works, gardening, cleaning, provision of childcare, agriculture, the private security world, in the household and personal services sectors and in the hotel, restaurant and catering (HORECA) industry.*

*According to a 2013 Eurofound study, the undeclared economy accounts for 18,4% of EU GDP, from below 8% of GDP in Austria to over 30% in Bulgaria.*

## INCLUSION

# Better integrating third-country nationals

## Labour market access is central to a recently adopted action plan

How can the EU better manage the integration of third-country nationals (who come from a non-EU country and have not yet obtained the citizenship of the host country) so that it may benefit EU countries' social cohesion and economic performance?

Adopted on 7 June by the European Commission, the Action Plan on the Integration of Third Country Nationals provides guidance as to how to address this challenge - which all EU Member States are facing, each in its own way - and turn it into an opportunity.

### The cost of non-integration

The cost of non-integration is higher than that of investing in integration policies. Yet in most EU countries, third-country nationals and their children - sometimes over several generations - continue to face a greater risk of poverty or social and labour market exclusion than the rest of the population.

The Action Plan is designed to strengthen EU countries' ability to integrate people from outside the EU, in a way which could also benefit other vulnerable or disadvantaged groups or minorities. It provides a common and comprehensive policy framework and set of measures to support Member States as they further develop and strengthen their national integration policies for third-country nationals.

Acknowledging the need to invest more in integration to ensure that third-country nationals can fully contribute to our economies and societies, the Action Plan tackles integration as a multidimensional process, where interventions and policies must take a cross-cutting approach. Early and effective labour market participation is a crucial aspect of the integration process.

All relevant EU funding will be instrumental in helping EU countries, regional and local authorities, social partners and



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**Help:** It is crucial to help asylum-seekers integrate as early as possible in the asylum-seeking process.



non-governmental organisation succeed in implementing the Action Plan. The Commission has mapped the potential of the different EU funds to support integration and the role which international financial institutions could play. It is also actively working with all relevant stakeholders to ensure that all funding instruments are used to their maximum potential and in an integrated and strategically coordinated way.

Special attention is given to asylum seekers and refugees: it is crucial to “invest” in them as early as possible in the asylum-seeking process. This can be done through effective access to employment, education, language and vocational training, information on the values of the host country, access to basic services and incentives to actively participate in the integration process, both on the part of the third-country nationals and on that of the welcoming society - integration is a two-way process.

### Supporting actions

The Action Plan also presents a series of supporting actions at the EU level to be implemented in the next few years.

One of the challenges facing the host countries is to assess the skills, qualifications and professional experiences of newly arrived third-country nationals. The Commission is proposing a Skills Tool for them, as part of the New Skills Agenda for Europe which it adopted on 7 June (see page 14 onwards).

The Commission will also work with national authorities to support the official recognition of third-country nationals' qualifications. It will support the training of staff in reception facilities to allow for faster recognition of procedures, including by sharing best practices and providing information on transparency and recognition of qualifications.

Online language training will also be made available for newly arrived migrants and refugees through the Erasmus + online linguistic support: in particular, 100 000 licences for online language courses will be made available to refugees for a period of three years.

### Peer learning

Considerable differences exist between EU countries in terms of the policies and actions pursued. In addition, integration requires significant policy coordination across different levels and areas. This is why the European Commission has planned several initiatives to promote peer learning opportunities. For example, on 22 June it hosted a peer learning event on measures to support the integration of asylum seekers and refugees, featuring European Commissioner Marianne Thyssen, responsible for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility.

A diverse range of audience and panellists – e.g., Member State representatives, European Social Fund managing authorities, Public Employment Services, social partners, civil society, think tanks and representatives of international and European institutions – gathered to discuss challenges and opportunities, as well as several examples of promising practices.

The Refugee Task Force of the European Commission's Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion department has also recently put online a repository of promising practices for the labour market integration and social inclusion of asylum seekers and refugees across EU Member States.

The aim of this database is to enhance mutual learning and transferability between EU countries. It presents examples (20 at the time of printing) of ongoing practices from a series of stakeholders working on the ground, which are deemed promising according to national administrations.

### More information:

#### Action plan:

[http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-16-2041\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-16-2041_en.htm)

#### Data base:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1208>

*See also the previous issue of Social Agenda, with a special feature on refugees:*

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=737&langId=en&pubId=7897&type=1&furtherPubs=yes>

**SPECIAL  
FEATURE**

# Skills – a new agenda

## A New Skills Agenda for Europe was adopted by the European Commission on 10 June

The figures spanning this special feature speak for themselves, whether concerning the number of people who need to reinforce their basic literary, numeracy or digital skills, who actually engage in vocational education and training (VET), or those of unfilled vacancies due to the skills gap etc.

The New Skills Agenda for Europe, which the European Commission adopted on 10 June, will set in motion a host of actors, from EU to local level.

Ultimately, it is about reaching out to each and every member of the EU workforce, in the context of a rapidly changing labour market and of an ageing society. What is more, at a time when youth employment and long-term unemployment (and the risk of poverty that goes with it) are still very much an issue in many EU countries.

The skills angle is very much a needs-based approach to these issues and to economic and social policy in general: identifying the needs of individuals as much as those of companies, in order to address them and make them meet.

In this special feature, the spotlight is placed on the Skills Guarantee which the New Skills Agenda proposes, as well as on the review of the European Qualifications Framework, in particular to widen its scope.

Beyond the special feature, the skills issue is also addressed elsewhere: in the article on the action plan for the integration of third-country nationals (page 12) which the European Commission adopted on 7 June; in the “Other Voices” section (page 26) in an article by René van Schalkwijk, board member of Horizon College, a VET college in the Netherlands with 12 000 students, who is also President of EUproVET, the EU association of VET providers; and in the Interview section page 27.

This issue of *Social Agenda* follows on from issue n°41 of July 2015, when work was starting on the New Skills Agenda for Europe.

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### **Social Agenda n°41 on skills:**

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=737&langId=en&pubId=7810&type=1&furtherPubs=yes>



**Making needs meet:** Skills is a needs-based approach to employment, economic and social policy.



**First choice:** Vocational training is often regarded as second choice but its good employment outcomes can make it a genuine first choice for more people.

# Up-skilling the EU workforce

Ten actions are to be implemented over the next eighteen months

On 10 June, the European Commission adopted a New Skills Agenda for Europe. Its aim is to improve the quality and relevance of skills formation, from primary and secondary education to lifelong learning, and make sure that no one is left on the side of the road.

It is also about making the skills acquired by people more visible and comparable from one country to another, and improving data on skills so as to make it easier to anticipate developments and help people make better career choices.

## A Skills Guarantee

Three concrete actions were launched immediately: a Skills Guarantee to help low-skilled adults acquire a minimum level of literacy, numeracy and digital skills and make progress towards an upper secondary qualification (see page 18); a review of the European Qualifications Framework for a better understanding of qualifications across the EU (see page 20); and a Blueprint for sectoral cooperation on skills, to improve skills intelligence and anticipation in specific economic sectors.

Others will follow towards the end of 2016 and in 2017: a tool to help identify the skills and qualifications of migrants, including asylum-seekers and refugees (see page 12); a Digital Skills and Job Coalition, building upon the existing Grand Coalition for Digital Jobs; a revision of the Europass framework to help people present their skills and obtain

real-time information on needs and trends throughout the EU; an initiative to make vocational education and training (VET) a first choice; a review of the Key Competences Recommendation of 2006 to deepen a common understanding of what is required to work and live nowadays - and facilitate ways of developing, assessing and validating skills that have been acquired in non-formal and informal settings (e.g. through volunteering, industry courses, on the internet...); and an initiative to improve information on how graduates progress in the labour market.

## Skills intelligence

*Policy makers, education providers and employees need sound evidence on the skills which will be required in the future. But the speed at which skills needs evolve and the fact that they are shaped not only globally but also regionally and locally, makes it challenging to provide reliable information.*

*To help people make informed career and learning choices, the European Commission is proposing a revision of the Europass framework. Data on skill needs and trends will be strengthened by web crawling and big data analysis, and further underpinned by sectoral evidence.*

# SPECIAL FEATURE



**Skills intelligence:** A Blueprint to improve skills intelligence and anticipation in specific economic sectors is being created.

## A strategic approach

Implementing the European Commission's top political priority – a new boost for jobs, growth and investment – the New Skills Agenda aims to ensure that the entire EU workforce has maximum access to skills – basic skills, horizontal skills that are useful for life at work and life in general (e.g. the ability to communicate, learn and take initiatives), vocational or technical skills, entrepreneurial skills, right through to the high-end skills that drive competitiveness and innovation.

A strategic approach to skills is what the Commission is calling for. One which mobilises all the stakeholders concerned, at every level of governance and across policy areas, with each country prioritising particular aims and groups of people according to the specific challenges it is facing.

## Common challenges

Beyond their specific characteristics, EU Member States also face similar problems and opportunities. Digital skills, for example, are increasingly required in all jobs. The EU

workforce is ageing and shrinking. New ways of working are emerging, including collaborative economy models. Vocational education and training is often regarded as second choice. And there is little recognition of what people learn outside formal educational settings.

Skills development is an important item in the European Semester process of common economic governance which every year produces country-specific recommendations, adopted by the European Council of Heads of State and Government.

In May 2016, for the Eurozone countries as a whole, the Commission recommended that comprehensive lifelong learning strategies be set up, in line with the New Agenda.

## EU co-funding

The more strategic approach to skills which the Commission is calling for may also materialise in a more focused use of EU co-funding, to support systemic measures rather than one-off interventions.



# SPECIAL FEATURE

## More focus on disadvantaged people

*On 18 May 2016, the European Commission proposed Recommendations on skills to all EU countries except Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Ireland and Cyprus, as part of the annual European Semester cycle of common economic governance.*

*For several countries (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia), the Recommendations stipulate inter alia improving the educational achievements for disadvantaged people, including Roma people and people with a migrant background.*

*For others (Denmark, Estonia, Spain and Portugal), the Recommendations include strengthening cooperation between tertiary education and the business sector.*

*The Czech Republic, Luxembourg, Romania and Slovakia are asked to increase the quality of teaching. Spain and Italy should improve the labour market relevance of tertiary education. Belgium, Spain, France, Latvia, the United Kingdom and Greece should accelerate the reform of their vocational education and training systems.*

An initial assessment of the way the Member States intend to use the European Social Fund (ESF) in the 2014-2020 EU budgetary period shows that they aim to target over 8 million low-skilled people under the education and training priority alone, not to mention other priorities such as support to vulnerable groups, integration in the labour market and social inclusion.

The programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI), the European Regional Development Fund, Erasmus +, the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, Horizon 2020, the European Fund for Strategic Investments and the European Investment Bank may also provide complementary funding to policy initiatives in the area of skills.

### Numerous stakeholders

A more focused and strategic policy intervention to invest in upskilling the workforce is crucial for the EU, in order to achieve a sustainable social and economic recovery and an inclusive growth - especially in a context of demographic ageing and rapid technological change.

The New Skills Agenda for Europe offers a coordinated approach which will ensure synergies and cooperation within and between EU countries. Its success depends on the commitment and expertise of a great number of players: Member States, regions, local authorities, business and employers, workers and civil society.

Success also depends on people's capacity to take up opportunities to make the best of their potential. Improving

the education and training on offer, and informing them about it, will therefore be decisive.

The European framework provided by the New Skills Agenda will reduce the costs of such an improvement. In due course, it should have significant economic and social benefits.

### More information:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=958>



**Making the best of one's potential:** The New Agenda's success depends on the commitment of a great number of players and on people's capacity to take up opportunities to make the best of their potential.

## SPECIAL FEATURE

# A skills guarantee

## A pathway to enhance literacy, numeracy and digital skills



**Going beyond:** 66 million people aged 25-64 in the EU have not gone beyond lower secondary education.

Sixty-six million people aged 25-64 in the EU have not gone beyond lower secondary education. They are directly concerned by the Skills Guarantee proposed by the European Commission, as part of the New Skills Agenda for Europe it put forward on 10 June (see page 15).

The Skills Guarantee aims to provide them with a real opportunity to raise their literacy, numeracy and digital skill levels via a customised learning pathway. At a second stage, if they so wish, they will have the possibility to go further and acquire a qualification that is recognised on the labour market and in the education system.

To make this happen, flexible pathways should be made available: their current skills levels will be assessed; their personal needs for support and accompaniment identified; they will then have access to training to improve their basic

skills or progress towards a qualification and they should gain recognition of the skills thus acquired.

### A huge challenge

The challenge is huge as, at present, only 4% of low-qualified adults take part in further education and training! The present training offer is not sufficiently flexible and adapted to their needs. There might also be more personal factors, such as previous negative learning experience at school, and social ones like the stigma of “going back to school”. Reaching out effectively to them is key for the success of the Skills Guarantee.

Validation of the skills that they have already acquired informally would feed their need for acknowledgement and self-confidence. It would also make them – and their

# SPECIAL FEATURE

employer, if they are at work – save time thanks to a more focused and customised training offer.

The Skills Guarantee gives a boost to the EU Recommendation of 2012 on the validation of informally and non-formally acquired skills, which EU countries have to implement by 2018.

## Step by step

Implementing this pathway approach requires taking a whole range of steps: publicising the Skills Guarantee; recruiting and motivating the learners; providing them with information and guidance; assessing and validating skills; providing individual learning opportunities; supporting learners in various ways throughout the process and helping them to persist; reach the desired outcomes; and, finally, testing, certification and qualification.

This in turn requires coordinating a myriad of organisations: relevant ministries and public agencies (especially regional and local authorities, as proximity will be key); companies, social partners, chambers of commerce and sector institutions; public employment and career guidance services; education and training institutions and providers, local authorities and community institutions (schools, VET centres, libraries, community centres), non-governmental organisations; and existing European networks and contact points dealing with adult education and training, second chance education and specific groups.

A “whole-of-government” approach will be needed, spanning all the relevant ministries and public authorities.

Funding will also be crucial. Important sums are already available through EU-co-funding. The European Social Fund (ESF), for example, is poised to reach around 8 million low-qualified people between now and 2020. Between 2007 and 2013, the ESF “human capital” interventions reached out to 7.1 million people, around half of whom had not completed upper secondary education.

## Social investment

Each country has to prioritise its own target groups. Depending on the individual starting point of a country, not all of the costs involved in up-skilling low-qualified adults will be new. Some of them will already be embedded into existing national measures.

Of course, being low-skilled has negative consequences for the individuals concerned. It also involves a cost for society in terms of public expenditure on unemployment and social benefits, public health and security. Boosting the level of qualification of the EU workforce could result in considerable economic and social returns for individuals and society at large.

## More information:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1224&langId=en>

## The proximity factor

*Local authorities and community bodies, as well as employers and trade unions, have a key role to play in implementing the Skills Guarantee. Its success very much depends on providing learning opportunities as close as possible to the learner.*

*The 65 000 public libraries present in the EU are the first place to which people of all ages and abilities can go to gain minimum levels of literacy, numeracy, digital and foreign languages. In 2013, 24 million adults in the EU took part in training organised by libraries and 2.3 million people attended digital literacy courses there.*

*The workplace also has a privileged role in the learning pathway of over half of adults with low qualifications. This adds to the multiplicity of stakeholders required to implement the Skills Guarantee.*

*Coordination could take place at sectoral level. Encouraging employers to enrich the workplace with learning opportunities is key, especially in countries where employers are not engaged in training their employees.*

## SPECIAL FEATURE

# Boosting the European Qualifications Framework

## The EQF will become more detailed and wider in scope

A number of EU tools already exist to enhance cross-border learning and working mobility by making skills and qualifications more transparent.

As far as the general public is concerned, the best known one is Europass, with its Europass CV. Towards the end of 2016, the European Commission will put forward a proposal to further improve the Europass CV and the Europass portal more generally, which is visited over one million times a month.

The best known tool by professionals and stakeholders is the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF), which exists since 2008. It provides an overarching framework for EU countries to relate their

national classification levels to a set of European levels: from level 1 (elementary education) to 8 (PhD or chartered accountant).

Upper secondary education level, for example, which the Skills Guarantee aims to help low-qualified people attain (see the previous article), corresponds to EQF level 4.

Other tools to enhance cross-border learning and working are the European Skills Panorama, which provides labour market data and trends; EURES, a cross-EU job placement online portal which also covers Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein; and the European classification of European skills, competences, qualifications and occupations (ESCO), which will be launched at the end of 2016.



© Belgarimage

**Learning outcomes:** The European Qualifications Framework focuses on acquired skills rather than on how they were acquired.

# SPECIAL FEATURE

## Learning outcomes

As part of the New Skills Agenda for Europe, adopted by the Commission on 10 June (see page 15), the Commission proposes to review the EQF to strengthen its use, ensure its objective is fully achieved, broaden its scope and enhance comparability of qualifications between EU and third (non-EU) countries.

If its first objective - having EU countries draw up national qualifications frameworks related to the EQF - has been by and large achieved, more needs to be done to relate qualifications to EQF levels - so that an individual can see how his/her own specific qualification fares at European level, and an employer can check whether the qualification submitted by a job applicant based in another EU country is trustworthy.

The philosophy of the EQF is the “learning outcomes” approach: focusing on acquired skills rather than on the education and/or training system or institution or duration of study that led to them. This philosophy has had an impact on the way education and training systems are conceived and governed at national level.

However, this varies between countries as well as between education sectors: firmly embedded in vocational education and training, and more and more in higher education, the learning outcomes approach is used to a lesser extent in general education, in particular at upper secondary level.

The Commission also proposes to constantly up-date the referencing of each qualification.

## Quality assurance

The EQF is based on trust: more transparency and a better understanding of qualifications increases the trust in qualifications from other countries and creates trust between employers and cross-border job applicants.

Quality assurance is among the key EQF referencing criteria. At present, most of the referenced qualifications have to do with vocational education and training and higher education. As the EQF is a comprehensive framework covering all types and levels of qualifications, the Commission proposes to widen the scope of EQF quality assurance principles so that they apply also outside the fields of vocational education and training and higher education - such as private sector qualifications, international qualifications

## Beyond the EU

*The European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF) has become the global reference in the world of qualifications.*

*Presently, more than 150 countries are working on national or regional qualification frameworks, including all the EU neighbouring countries.*

*Three pilot projects exploring comparability with the EQF were undertaken between 2014 and 2015 with Australia, New-Zealand and Hong Kong.*

and qualifications obtained further to the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The EQF review is therefore likely to boost the implementation of the 2012 Council Recommendation on the validation of informal and non-formal learning, which encourages Member States to put in place national arrangements for validating these types of learning by 2018.

Common EQF principles are also proposed for credit systems that allow for the accumulation and transfer of learning outcomes. Existing national credit systems are presently operating mainly within sub-sectors of education and training: mainly vocational education and training or higher education. As a result, they only offer limited support to people's progress across different levels and types of education and training, as well as across national borders.

## Non-EU countries

National and regional qualification frameworks are rapidly emerging around the world, very often taking the EQF as a reference (see box). The Commission raises the issue of relating the EQF to third-countries' frameworks. This would improve comparability of EU and non-EU countries' qualifications and thereby attract talent from outside the EU - and increase the EU countries' capacity to integrate migrants into their labour markets, an issue which has taken on a new dimension in the context of the refugee crisis (see page 12).

## More information:

<https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/recognition-qualifications#>

## SPECIAL FEATURE

# The facts on skills

A series of factsheets show the situation which triggered the New Skills Agenda



**Digital skills school:** 39% of companies are already reporting that they have difficulties finding suitably skilled information and communication technology professionals.

At EU level, 41% of individuals aged 16-74 are without basic digital skills, 24% have low numeracy skills and 20% low literacy skills. Only 38.5% of adults have received higher education and 11% are in lifelong learning. 40% of employers are having problems in recruiting employees who have the right skills and 66% of companies finance training to their own employees.

As for young people, 80.5% of those who are highly skilled have a job, while the employment rate of the low skilled ones amounts only to 53.1%. The professional occupation that is growing fastest in the EU is that of primary school and early childhood teacher, followed by software application developers and analysts and finance professionals.

In the near future, nearly all jobs will require some level of digital skills. By 2020, there will be 756 000 unfilled vacancies for Information and Communication Technology (ICT) professionals in the whole economy. 39% of companies already report that they are having difficulties finding suitably skilled ICT professionals.

## Mismatches

Future job profiles will require high and medium level qualification. In the automotive industry, 880 000 jobs need to be filled by 2025, due mostly to an ageing workforce and a forecasted production growth. A significant number of assembly line jobs are expected to disappear, partly due to new production technologies and “clean” vehicles.

In the textile, clothing, leather and footwear industry, five times more jobs are to be created for highly-qualified employees than for low-qualified ones by 2025. By then, 300 000 existing craft jobs are forecasted to disappear, alongside some 100 000 of the plant and machine operator jobs, while the technician and associated professional occupations are expected to grow.

Skills mismatches can only be reduced by improving skills relevance through business-education partnerships. The Blueprint for sectoral cooperation on skills, which is part of the New Skills Agenda adopted by the European Commission on 10 June, promotes industry-led sector-specific skills solutions: collecting evidence of skills gaps and their potential impact on growth, innovation and competitiveness; translating sectoral strategy into forecasts and actions on jobs and skills; and rolling out EU sectoral partnerships at national and regional level and expanding them to more sectors.

The Blueprint will initially be experimented in six sectors: automotive, defence, maritime technology, textile, clothing, leather and footwear, space and tourism. Construction, steel, health, green technologies and renewable energies will be assessed in a second wave.

## Greener economy

The employment effects of the transition to a green economy are already visible and more jobs require more green skills. New jobs are mainly created in the industries

# SPECIAL FEATURE

of renewable energy, green construction and retrofitting, transport, waste and water resource management.

Skill shortages have already developed in certain green sectors and occupations, which are not well served by traditional training institutions. To enable this economic transformation, the workforce across a wide range of sectors would need to adapt to new business models and methods and meet the demand for new green skills. For example, increased investment in insulation and energy efficiency is likely to have a positive impact on job creation in the construction sector, where more than four million workers will need upskilling.

The global market for eco-industries was estimated at roughly €1.15 trillion a year in 2010. This could almost double to around €2 trillion a year by 2020. The EU has a strong export position in this field towards nearly all of the world's largest economies.

## Migrant integration

In 2014, over 2.3 million third-country nationals were granted resident permits in the EU. In 2015, approximately 1.3 million asylum applications were recorded in the EU. Non-EU migrants in the EU have a lower than average level of skills and qualifications. On the other hand, two-thirds of highly-educated third-country migrants work in low or medium skilled occupations or simply fail to find a job.

Action is required to improve skills levels and qualifications among migrants and the use of their existing skills

and qualifications to support effective integration into the labour market (see page 12).

## New Skills Agenda factsheets:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/keyDocuments.jsp?pager.offset=0&langId=en&mode=advancedSubmit&advSearchKey=SkillsAgendaFactsheets>

## First European VET Skills Week

*On 5-9 December, the European Commission is organising the first European VET (vocational education and training) Skills Week in Brussels.*

*Thirteen million learners are engaged in VET in the EU, yet a shortage of VET graduates is expected in several EU countries.*

*Often perceived as a second-choice option, VET provides both job-specific and transversal skills, facilitates the transition into employment and maintains and updates people's skills. It really should be perceived as a first choice option!*

*VET must be made more attractive in terms of quality and flexibility. It must be better connected with business, higher education and research. It should have a strong work-based and, whenever possible, international dimension.*



**Fastest growing:** Primary school and early childhood teacher is the job that is growing fastest in the EU.

## FUND FOR EUROPEAN AID

# Poverty - breaking the vicious circle

A network of actors involved in implementing FEAD was launched in June



The European Commission hosted a conference on 2-3 June 2016 to launch the EU-wide network of actors involved in the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD). Entitled “The FEAD network: sharing knowledge, finding synergies to break the vicious circle of poverty and deprivation”, the conference was an important milestone in establishing a network for the exchange of experience and good practice in initiatives tackling poverty and social exclusion.

By including a wide range of stakeholders, the Commission aims to build a comprehensive network of actors involved in the delivery of FEAD. The event brought together members of this network face-to-face for the first time. With an emphasis on interactive networking, it set the tone for future activities.

### A social triple A

In her opening address, Marianne Thyssen, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, stressed the importance and benefits of learning from each other. Actors involved in the management and implementation of the FEAD and other initiatives and funds should work together to tackle the prevailing issues of poverty and

social exclusion across Europe. Recalling the Commission’s ambition to “earn a ‘Social Triple A’ for Europe”, she stressed the necessity of empowering the most deprived individuals to foster their re-integration into mainstream society.

Delegates at the event took part in various sessions which offered the opportunity to share knowledge. Network members were able to take part in thematic workshops, ‘world café’ style discussions and interactive panel discussions with experts.

The event clearly demonstrated that there is a need for FEAD practitioners to connect and share experiences and good practices across borders. Future network meetings and an animated online community will provide more opportunity for learning from each other.

### For more information:

<http://ec.europa.eu/feadnetwork>

### Keep in touch, join the FEAD Network!

*The FEAD (Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived) Network is an animated community of practice with a lively exchange of experience and shared learning. It allows the sharing of tools, ideas and resources that can help with delivering the Fund successfully.*

*The Network discusses all aspects of planning, managing and delivering activities across Europe. Conversations within the FEAD Network can cover any theme related to the role of the FEAD in the fight against poverty such as the food aid, child poverty, issues relating to migration, access to social services, and assistance for older people.*



# Not forgetting the S in ESF

German European Social Fund stakeholders debated in a participatory way about long-term unemployment



**Opening up:** 80 German stakeholders representing the different facets of ESF implementation took part in a participatory workshop.

There they were, all assembled in one room on 7-8 March, for a participatory workshop organised by the European Commission on how the European Social Fund (ESF) can contribute more effectively to reducing long-term unemployment in Germany.

Eighty German stakeholders representing the different facets of ESF implementation: national authorities, project managers, project implementers and people who work directly with the long-term unemployed (social workers, members of social welfare organisations, trainers, coaches...).

They opened up and shared experience as professionals with a role - and as people with a heart. And what came out was their passion for what they were doing.

## Time

"We should not forget the 'S' in 'ESF' ", one person said: Making sure that time, customised help and coaching is available beyond the set labour market integration targets, to those who need to be accompanied in all aspects of their lives. Sometimes, they need to be supported for a year or two before they can even contemplate applying for a job.

If they are pushed prematurely into the labour market, it might be good for the statistics but they might collapse six months later.

Time, a personalised approach and the capacity to experiment are crucial to get the people who have fallen through the holes of the safety net, back into the labour market. "This is what I mean by 'social'", this person stressed.

What they love about the ESF is that it allows for experimentation and makes it possible to reach out to people who would otherwise be side-lined: "If it wasn't for the ESF, who would be interested in training 25 migrant women who do not know how to read and write?", one participant asked.

Looking to the future, they would like more freedom in implementing ESF projects and, at the same time, more leadership and vision on the part of the European Commission.

## More information:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=88&ventsId=1117&furtherEvents=yes>

OTHER  
VOICES

# Investing in our fellow 70 million Europeans



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**René van Schalkwijk, EUpVET President:** "We have a huge underdeveloped country in our midst, hidden under national averages".

The New Skills Agenda for Europe states that "skills are a pathway to employability and prosperity" and that "in a fast-changing global economy, skills will to a great extent determine competitiveness and the capacity to drive innovation". This is quite different from the Lisbon declaration of 2000 on being the most competitive knowledge economy in the world. For many reasons, it did not happen. In reaction to this ambition we could use "It's the skills, stupid!" bumper stickers.

Knowledge is increasingly becoming a globally fluid asset. Internet technology is so powerful that language and legal barriers will not stop knowledge from flowing. Skills that effectively put knowledge in practice become the most critical in an economic and employment sense. Economic competitiveness is more and more about achieving the right combination of knowledge and skills. Skills are not a sufficient but absolutely a necessary precondition

The New Skills Agenda rightfully puts the finger on one of the largest deficits in our continent: A staggering 70 million people that suffer from lack of education and (basic) skills. This makes the discussion on skills gaps in individual sectors a relatively minor problem.

We have a huge underdeveloped country in our midst. It is hidden under national averages which is why we often do not see it properly. Investing in our fellow 70 million Europeans is one of the most urgent investments we will need to do. We need to do that in a way that they are really going to notice.

## Political ambition

We need to do this from both an economic perspective and a social perspective, in a Europe that is increasingly turbulent with people wondering why the real problems in their eyes are not addressed. Vocational Education and Training (VET) together with Adult (Basic) Education can provide the best answer to these issues. This requires a strong political ambition and a strong coalition with schools governments, employers and unions. And the necessary financial funding at all levels of government. Because of preconceptions on VET and Adult education, this is too often not the case.

For the future we will have to say goodbye to our educational systems that are based on the 19<sup>th</sup> century distinction between manual and brain work. A competence orientation in which knowledge, skills and attitudes are taught and learned in an integrated manner, will be necessary in the future. Initial education, paradoxically, needs to focus on knowledge and skills that will probably not change over at least a 10 year period, including a strong focus on adaptability and employability skills and knowledge. Continued education will need to focus on knowledge and skills acquisition with a short product life cycle.

For the short term, focus on increasing skills levels is the first priority. The first responsibility in this lies with the nation States. Through the Skills Agenda, the EU has helped opening more eyes. It does important work by organizing the sharing of knowledge and best practices, by making the diversity within the EU the most powerful instrument to reach higher skills levels. However we must realize that EU guarantees, frameworks and instruments have lost their shine and magic. At least for too many voters on our continent. We will have to make more of a difference, not only in the eyes of politicians and policy makers but also in the eyes of our people.

**René van Schalkwijk**  
EUpVET President

**Dana-Carmen Bachmann:** "The Skills Guarantee is a gigantic leap forward".

## INTERVIEW



Dana-Carmen Bachmann is head of the European Commission's Vocational Education and Training, Apprenticeships and Adult Learning service

# Breaking silos

*You studied European law and international relations, conflict analysis and resolution. Then you worked on environmental law and as a lawyer at the European Court of Human Rights before joining the European Commission...*

My dream had always been to work in a European environment! I joined the Commission in 2011, after Romania had become a member of the EU, to work in the area of adult education. I felt I could build upon my experience in project management, international dynamics and negotiations, seeking out the added-value each stakeholder around the negotiating table can provide.

*The Adult Education service you were heading was merged with the Vocational Education and Training (VET) service and later transferred to the Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion department!*

When adult learning was merged with VET, there were fears that it would lose its identity inside a bigger entity but those fears proved wrong, with adult learning gaining increasingly more attention at European level. The proposal for a Skills Guarantee adopted on 10 June 2016 (see page 18) is a gigantic leap forward in terms of focusing the EU agenda on adult learning! It addresses adults who are most likely to be disengaged from learning: anyone who has not completed

upper secondary education. It focuses on the people that need most support to acquire skills which are essential for functioning in society - basic literary, numeracy and digital skills - and is a stepping stone for those who wish to go further and acquire a qualification. It is about empowering people and creating a better, more cohesive society.

*Human rights are in the forefront with the arrival of numerous asylum-seekers in the EU...*

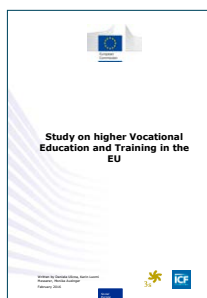
When I was at high school, I did some volunteer work with a European network dealing with migrants and refugees. Migrants are only one of the potential target groups of the Skills Guarantee and it is heavily outnumbered by another target group: the EU countries' native population! It is up to each country to decide which target group it wants to focus on. But the refugee crisis does make it all the more important to better use available resources and have a more structured and strategic approach. Lots of things are happening in each country at different levels and in different areas - employment, education and training - but they don't always connect with each other. And the funding available via the European Social Fund (ESF) could be used more strategically by focusing on supporting measures which have a systemic impact, rather than on one-off interventions. For 2014-2020, Member States' operational programmes for using ESF co-funding have the potential to reach 8 million low-qualified people.



## European Digital Competence Framework for Citizens

The EU has developed the Digital Competence Framework for Citizens — known as DigComp — and a related self-assessment tool. These resources provide people with the opportunity to assess their digital competence and identify gaps in their knowledge, skills and attitudes. Using DigComp will help citizens to achieve goals related to work, employability, learning, leisure and participation in the digital society.

Catalogue N°: KE-02-15-657-EN-N



## Higher vocational education and training in the EU

This study provides an overview of all forms of higher vocational education and training (VET) across the 28 EU member states. It focuses on identifying and understanding the main characteristics and features of higher VET and also reviews the main trends, developments and challenges of this form of education.

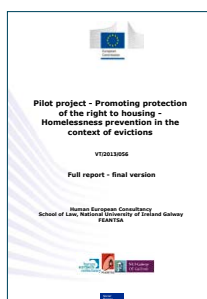
Catalogue N°: KE-04-16-319-EN-N



## Good practices in the areas of employment, social affairs and inclusion – volume 4

This monitoring report gathers good practices of projects across Europe dealing with working conditions, employment, social affairs and inclusion. One of the selected projects is “The job of my life” project, supporting young persons from Europe in finding an in-house vocational training position in Germany. Another example of good practice is a French project which created info points in selected schools to prepare future graduates integrate the labour market. All selected projects were supported by the EURES financial instrument or by the PROGRESS programme.

Catalogue N°: KE-BK-16-001-EN-N



## Homelessness prevention in the context of evictions

This study focuses on the protection of the right to housing in EU countries and in particular on evictions from primary residences. It provides an overview and analysis of available data and trends regarding housing evictions, and establishes the reasons for and impacts of eviction. The report focuses in particular on the link between eviction and homelessness. It also reviews the measures put in place by EU countries to prevent evictions and enable early interventions. In addition, the study suggests ways to improve data collection and monitoring of evictions. On the basis of this research and analysis, a number of recommendations are suggested to promote protection of the right to housing and homelessness prevention in the context of evictions.

Catalogue N°: KE0216339

## Useful websites

The website of Commissioner Thyssen: [http://ec.europa.eu/commission/2014-2019/thyssen\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/commission/2014-2019/thyssen_en)

The home page of the Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/>

The website of the European Social Fund: <http://ec.europa.eu/esf>

To download or to order these publications, please go to <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en>

To subscribe to the 'Social Agenda' magazine or to other publications of DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, please fill in the registration form available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=740&langId=en>