

Call for a More Ambitious Union of Skills

Brussels, 06/03/25 – The Intergroup welcomes the European Commission's Union of Skills Communication as a positive step towards a competitive, inclusive, and forward-looking Europe, and is delighted to see that many of our demands have been taken into account. However, to make even more impact, we call for bolder policies, increased investment, and a stronger commitment to lifelong learning to truly empower all people in Europe and ensure Europe remains a global leader in innovation and social progress.

Investing in skills is essential for Europe. It empowers individuals to take charge of their future and strengthens the EU. The cost of inaction is high. Anticipating change by investing in skills today will prevent disruptive transitions and save public money in the long run. We welcome the proposal which recognises education and skills as EU competences, something that member states cannot tackle on their own.

We are content with many elements, but the Union of Skills must go further. In some aspects, this proposal still falls short of the challenges we are facing. Companies must actively invest in workforce training, not just benefit from skilled workers. We need a Right to Training Directive. In addition, we welcome that the Erasmus+ programme will be expanded, but without a significant budget increase, its full potential cannot be realised.

The Intergroup strongly supports several key elements of the Commission's proposal:

- Recognising skills as an investment rather than a cost.
- Strong commitment by the EU to take on leadership role in education and skills.
- More ambitious strategic targets for basic skills.
- Facilitating the recognition of skills across borders to boost worker mobility.
- Expanding the use of micro-credentials to integrate formal and informal learning.
- Enhancing the inclusivity of Erasmus+.
- Strengthening VET with an EU diploma/ label and Centers of Vocational Excellence.
- Positioning EU as a magnet for researchers: Choose Europe pilot and Visa Strategy.
- Ensuring budget rules allow for investments in education, training, and reskilling.

Sections in the Commission Communication that could benefit from stronger commitments and how we would address them:

A Right to Training: No measures are foreseen to ensure that companies play an active role in the training of their own workforce, apart from a vague mention of coordination and boosting of private sector investments. We believe that companies have a responsibility to keep their employees vital in a changing world.

Lifelong Learning for All: While basic skills for students are addressed, we need adequate infrastructure in place for adults to take up basic training.

Civic Knowledge and Competences: We are missing strategic targets or an action plan. Even though the Union of Skills recognises civic education as a need to improve social cohesion and European preparedness, there are no actions foreseen in this sense.

A More Integrated Approach: Existing education and skills initiatives must be better connected under a comprehensive EU strategy, to combat fragmentation in the sector and integrate civil society.

Stronger Funding Commitments: The next Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF) must include a dedicated investment framework for education and skills, with at least 20% of the budget mainstreamed to future-proof education systems.

A Stronger Erasmus+: While Erasmus+ is announced to be strengthened through expansion into Erasmus for VET and by making it more inclusive, there is no mention of an increased Erasmus+ budget explicitly.

Better Incentives for Investment: Financial incentives for companies and member states to invest in training must be strengthened, including within public procurement rules.

Focus on Time and Financial Barriers instead of Motivation: Many adults struggle to access training due to time constraints and financial limitations, not lack of motivation. Policies must prioritise solutions that address these fundamental barriers.

Tackling Social Inequality: The skills agenda must be closely linked to broader efforts to reduce social inequality and ensure access to education and training for underrepresented groups.

Signed,

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