**European Commission - Questions and answers**



**Questions and answers on the Union of Skills**

Brussels, 5 March 2025

**Why are you launching the Union of Skills now?**

Europe is facing a skills crisis that threatens its competitiveness, innovation, and ability to adapt to global challenges.

* Skills shortages and gaps are widespread—nearly four in five SMEs struggle to find workers with the right skillsets, particularly in breakthrough technologies like AI and quantum computing. Shortages will likely increase with the projected decline in the working age population from 265 million in 2022 to 258 million by 2030.
* Education systems are not keeping pace with technological change, with nearly half of young people lacking basic digital skills and declining performance in mathematics, reading, and science. Meanwhile, only 40% of adults participate in education or training, far below the 60% target, and almost half lack basic digital skills despite 90% of jobs requiring them.
* Gender imbalances in STEM, lack of attractiveness, and fragmented governance further exacerbate the issue.

Without urgent action, labour shortages in high-demand sectors will grow, limiting Europe's economic growth, global competitiveness, decarbonisation efforts, and resilience in times of crisis.

**How is the strategy going to tackle these issues?**

The Union of Skills focuses on four strands to ensure everyone in Europe is empowered to build solid skills foundations and engage in lifelong upskilling and reskilling:

* Building skills for quality lives and jobs through strong educational foundation;
* Upskilling and reskilling an agile workforce for the digital and green transition;
* Circulating skills across the EU for competitiveness;
* Attracting, developing, and retaining talent for Europe's future.

Starting today and continuing over the coming years, the Commission will launch a series of actions under each of the four strands to deliver on the Union of Skills, in close collaboration with citizens, businesses and education and training providers. More information on each of these strands found below.

**How will you fund the Union of Skills?**

Education and skills are an investment which yields benefits many times over. The current EU budget allocates over €150 billion in funds to education and skills, including through programmes such as ESF+, RRF, ERDF, Erasmus+ and InvestEU.

This is only part of the picture. It is crucial to leverage financing and initiatives beyond EU funds in both the public and private sector. To this end, the Union of Skills puts forward actions to:

* Boost private sector investment in training, upskilling and reskilling;
* Help Member States make appropriate use of EU funding possibilities and partnerships with the European Investment Bank (EIB) Group, and other multilateral or national promotional banks.

**How will you improve the provision of the basic skills needed for a solid educational foundation?**

To ensure quality jobs and lives, skills should be built through strong educational and vocational training systems, in a lifelong learning approach. An **Action Plan for Basic Skills** will pilot a **Basic Skills Support Scheme**. This will focus on root causes of basic skills shortfalls and allow for early identification and intervention. An EU **Teachers and training Agenda** will be developed, and sharing best innovative practice will be boosted by piloting **European Schools Alliances**.

**What actions are you proposing to tackle skills and labour shortages in the EU?**

The proposed actions cover different levels and types of education and training, different groups of learners and skill levels. These measures encourage as many people as possible to participate in the labour market.

Focusing on the role of vocational education and training (VET) in supporting EU competitiveness and innovation, the new **European Strategy for VET** will address skills shortages and mismatches by enhancing its attractiveness, excellence, quality and labour market relevance. The Strategy will also address gender and other stereotypes in making study choices and ensure that VET is an equally valued learning pathway as higher education.

Actions also include a **reinforced** and **streamlined Pact for Skills** to upskill and reskill more workers in strategic sectors, that will build on the success of the existing Pact, where its members have pledged to upskill 25 million workers by 2030. The Commission is calling on Pact members to at least double their commitments.

The Commission will also review and strengthen the roll-out of **EU Skills Academies**, to deliver the skills to meet the economic needs of today and the future. The academies will help strategic sectors such as defence and digital technology, covering for instance for artificial intelligence, quantum computing and semiconductors.

**How will the strategy make it easier for skilled people to move freely across Europe?**

We need to ensure that learning, skills and qualifications, irrespective of where and how they were acquired, are transparent, trusted and recognised across the EU. This will contribute to unlock the Single Market's full potential.

The **Skills Portability Initiative** will help make skills more visible and portable. It will facilitate the recognition of qualifications, where necessary. This is essential to avoid that people end up working in positions not corresponding to their qualifications and to improve skills matching in the single market.

It will also promote the use of interoperable digital credentials to help and speed up the understanding and transparency of skills and qualifications.

The Commission will also continue the work on the **European Degree**, which can facilitate the development of innovative joint European study programmes, as a flagship for quality learning mobility. It will also strengthen **European Universities Alliances** and will explore a **suitable European legal status** for alliances of higher education institutions. The Commission will also work towards a potential **European VET diploma** for vocational education and training.

**How will you attract top talent to come and stay in Europe?**

The Union of Skills proposes measures to attract and retain talent from third countries. This includes measures to make the European education and training systems more attractive to people outside the EU, but also to facilitate the recruitment of third-country nationals. Established programmes like **‘Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions'** will develop a **‘Choose Europe'** dimension. Erasmus Mundus scholarships and ‘Study in Europe' promotional activity will be upscaled. In this way the EU will attract more top global talent.

The Commission will also set up the future **EU Talent Pool.** A **Visa Strategy** will ensure that students, researchers and skilled professionals from outside the EU can benefit from quicker procedures. This will help fill shortages in key sectors such as healthcare, IT, and construction Promoting air working conditions and integration support for third-country nationals will make Europe a more attractive destination for talent, while helping secure EU's future economic resilience and innovation potential.

**How will the Union of Skills help workers, in particular those whose jobs will transform?**

Most jobs will change to some extent due to the green and/or digital transitions. Everyone will need to develop the necessary skills to navigate these transitions.

The Union of Skills will also help those already in employment, putting forward actions to develop and retain talent. For example, a **Skills Guarantee** will be piloted, offering workers involved in restructuring processes, or at risk of unemployment, the possibility to develop further their careers in new employment opportunities.

The reinforced and streamlined **Pact for Skills** will also help to upskill workers in strategic industrial eco-systems. The expanded **European Alliance for Apprenticeships** will enable ever more adults to upskill, including those outside the labour market.

**How will the Union of Skills help businesses?**

The Union of Skills aims to ensure that European businesses can find people with the skills they need to create sustainable growth and quality jobs. With AI, robotics, data-driven processes and the clean transition transforming industries, addressing these and future skills shortages is critical to maintaining the EU's global competitiveness.

The measures proposed by the Union of Skills will also support small and medium-sized enterprises, scale-ups and start-ups. SMEs are the backbone of the EU economy, representing around 99% of all enterprises. Yet, nearly 4 in 5 have difficulties in finding workers with the right skills.

The measures proposed will help develop the skills needed by EU businesses, with a focus on basic skills, and future-oriented skills, such as STEM and advanced digital skills. They will also help employers recruit with less difficulties talent from abroad, including from third countries.

**What about young people?**

The Union of Skills will focus on:

* Increasing the accessibility of higher education to a wider range of learners as well as promoting support services for students' wellbeing to help them succeed.
* Providing more opportunities through innovative joint European study programmes, and get a European degree or a European VET diploma recognised across the EU.
* Strengthening the **Erasmus+** programme to make it more inclusive and accessible for all, with a particular focus on learners with fewer opportunities – including in VET.

**How will the strategy help to reverse the decline of basic skills in the EU?**

A **Basic Skills Support Scheme** will help Member States ensure that every child reach an adequate level of basic skills by the end of compulsory schooling with a focus on early intervention and personalised support.

Investing in our youth is an investment in our future. Measures will include an **EU Teachers and Trainers Agenda** to improve the working conditions, training and career prospects of educators, and better cross-border cooperation and mobility between schools across Europe.

**Erasmus+** will also be strengthened to make it more inclusive and accessible for all, with a particular focus on learners with fewer opportunities.

**How will you make this happen? What would be the governance of the UoS?**

A **European Skills Intelligence Observatory** will provide strategic data and foresight regarding skills (current and future) stocks, use and needs, in concrete sectors and regions, and the performance of education and training systems.

A **European Skills High-Level Board** bringing together the key stakeholders, including business leaders, education and training providers, and social partners to provide comprehensive, cross­sectoral insights and guidance on skills to the EU policy makers, ensuring a coordinated vision and the identification of the bold action necessary to strengthen our human capital.

The Board will support the work of the Commission towards an **EU-27 Recommendation on human capital** and on the country-specific recommendations in the **European Semester** cycle.

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