



Thematic Session A

Reflecting on the ‘Union of Skills’



A union of **skills**



Union of skills

To be competitive and prepared for the future, the EU needs to support and prepare its people with the skills and competences needed for success in learning, work, and life [...]. Europe's social market economy, with its strong foundations in education, training, research, innovation and democracy, can serve as a solid base.

Union of skills

Investing in people for a competitive EU

It aims to

- deliver higher levels of basic and advanced skills
- provide opportunities for people to regularly update and learn new skills
- facilitate recruitment by businesses across the EU
- attract, develop and retain top talent in Europe

The problem: the need for more and better skills

- 1 Skills Shortages & Gaps
- 2 Transformation Speed Gap
- 3 Fragmented Governance & Skills Intelligence





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Skills shortages and gaps

Current state of affairs

Skills Mismatch

- Lack of skilled graduates from higher education and VET
- Limited upskilling/reskilling

Global talent attraction

- Europe as a less attractive destination for global talent

Obstacles in skills development

- Esp. for persons with disabilities and a migrant background



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Skills shortages and gaps

Key numbers

- Nearly half of young and adult population in Europe lack basic digital skills.
- 2/3 of widespread shortages are crafts occupations requiring VET.
- There's a low share of young workers (under 30) in agriculture and fisheries.
- 1 in 5 adults struggles to read and write.
- Less than 40% of the adult population in education and training. This is much lower among low-skilled adults (18.4%)
- 2x more men than women are studying STEM.



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Transformation speed gap

Skills & Education lagging behind technological change

- STEM talent shortages in strategic sectors (digital, clean and circular tech, aerospace etc.)
- Traditional sectors are now requiring STEM skills.
- Four out of five SMEs struggle to find skilled workers, particularly in breakthrough technologies.

Challenges

- Decline in basic skills linked to shortage of math & science teachers
- Need to attract teachers and trainers via continuous professional development



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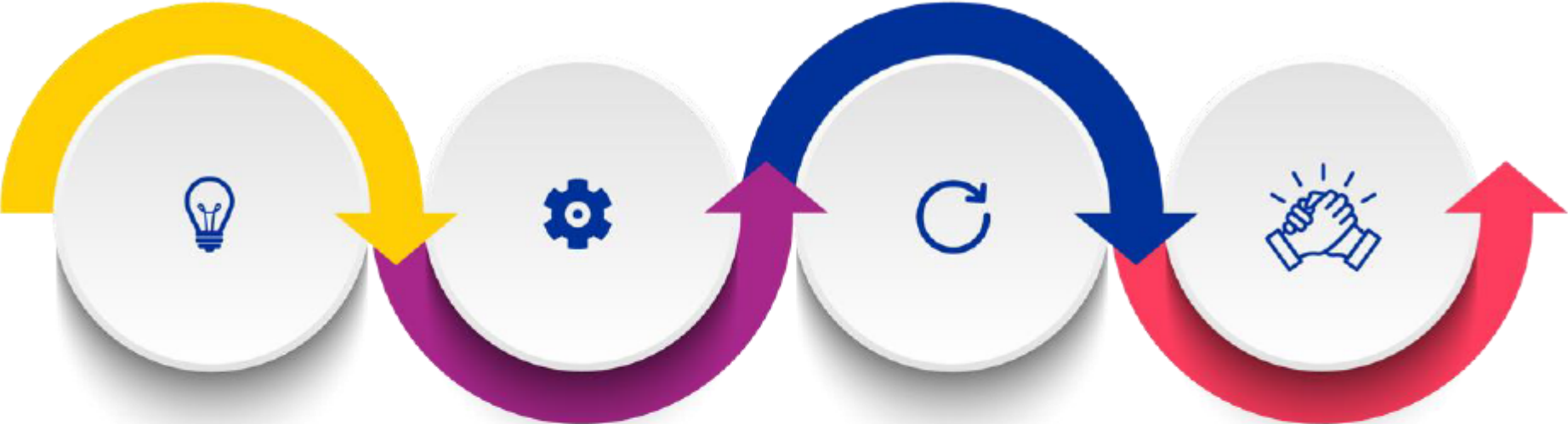
Fragmented governance and skills intelligence

Challenges

- Skills policy spans education, labour, economic, finance and, social inclusion- often governed by different ministries.
- Multiple stakeholders (e.g. education systems, industry, public employment services, social partners, etc.) work without coordination.
- Lack of consolidation & foresight in skills intelligence systems.

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Union of Skills



Building skills

for quality lives and jobs

Upskilling and reskilling

for the digital & green transition

Circulating skills

across the EU for competitiveness

Attracting, developing and retaining talent

for Europe's future

Union of Skills

Key components

1

Building skills

- Pilot basic skills support scheme
- Improve skills in STEM
- Introduce new VET strategy

2

Regular upskilling & reskilling

- Expand use of microcredentials
- Reinforce the Pact for Skills
- Pilot a skills guarantee

3

Circulating skills

- Focus on skills portability initiative
- Work towards European degree and VET diploma
- Strengthen school/universities alliances

4

Attracting, developing, and retaining talent

- Set up EU talent pool
- Present a visa strategy
- Launch 'Choose Europe' initiative



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Building skills for quality lives and jobs

Context

- Sharp decline in basic skills, incl. digital skills among young people
- Socio-economic, gender and rural-urban disparities
- Global competition in STEM and AI-related fields
- Decrease of doctoral graduates in STEM fields
- Teacher shortages, notably in STEM



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Building skills for quality lives and jobs

Key deliverable 1- Solid Foundations in Education and Training

Basic Skills Action Plan

- Basic Skills Support Scheme for children/young people struggling with basic skills
- European Innovative School Award to recognise school excellence in STEM and citizenship skills.

Digital Education 2030

- Equal access to digital education for all
- Long-term partnerships with EU-based EdTech, support AI in education
- Update Digital Competence Framework by 2023



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Building skills for quality lives and jobs

Key deliverable 1- Solid Foundations in Education and Training

STEM Education Strategic Plan

- Reverse the trend of declining performance in STEM skills at school
- Attract more girls/women in STEM studies
- Strategic targets on enrolment in STEM by 2030

Attractiveness of teachers' and academic careers

- EU Teachers and Trainers Agenda to tackle teacher shortages and improve teachers' working conditions
- European competence framework for academic staff in higher education



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Building skills for quality lives and jobs

Key deliverable 2- Attractive and innovative VET system

Attractive and innovative VET system – Focus areas

- Support EU competitiveness and innovation, economic, territorial and social cohesion
- Address skills shortages and mismatches
- Enhance quality and labour market relevance
- Support mobility and internalisation
- Address gender and other stereotypes in study choices
- VET as an equally valued learning pathway as higher education



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Building skills for quality lives and jobs

Key deliverable 3- Inclusive and future-oriented higher education system

Accessibility of higher education

- Support EU competitiveness and innovation, economic, territorial and social cohesion

Entrepreneurship education

- Include more dedicated modules – including cross-border ones – at universities, in cooperation with their innovative ecosystem.



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Regular upskilling and reskilling

Context

- Rapid transformations (tech, green transition, AI) demand new skills fast
- Skills are Europe's competitive advantage

Challenges

- 42 EU-wide shortage occupations (e.g. construction, transport, health professions)
- Adult learning participation: 39.5% (target: 60% by 2030)
- Women, older citizens and vulnerable groups facing barriers
- Lack of motivation due to negative experiences with school-based learning



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Regular upskilling and reskilling

Key deliverable 1- Upskilling and Reskilling of Adults

Individual Learning Accounts (ILA)

- Help people affected by transitions to acquire new skills and move into new occupations

Micro-credentials

- Expand the use of micro-credentials as flexible learning solutions
- Where relevant, link micro-credentials to NFQ and EQF
- Increase the use the business use of micro-credentials in recruitment and career promotion



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Regular upskilling and reskilling

Key deliverable 1- Upskilling and Reskilling of Adults

Innovative community learning spaces

- Engage adults with low basic skills to upskill in conducive environments

Skills Guarantee Pilot

- Help workers in sectors undergoing restructuring or at risk of unemployment to develop further their careers in other sectors/companies

Review of training-related state aid rules

- Update state aid rules to provide better incentives for industry to invest in upskilling/reskilling



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Regular upskilling and reskilling

Key deliverable 2- Public-Private Partnerships & Strategic Sectors

Pact for Skills

- Support strategic sectors in their upskilling/reskilling
- Improve linkages between EU Skills Academies, European Alliance for Apprenticeships, Centres of Vocational Excellence & European Univ. Alliances

EU Skills Academies

- New academies to deliver skills needed by industry for the green and digital transition
- Launch of Cybersecurity Skills Academy by June 2025
- EIT to equip 1 million learners by 2028 with skills needed in strategic sectors



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Regular upskilling and reskilling

Key deliverable 2- Public-Private Partnerships & Strategic Sectors

Transnational University-Business Partnerships

- Joint programmes and micro-credentials
- Support entrepreneurship and mentorship for startups and scale-ups

Apprenticeships

- Expand European Alliance for Apprenticeships
- Goal: 700 pledges by 2030



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Circulating skills

Goal

- Enable the free movement of skills & qualifications to unlock the full potential of the Single Market.

Context

- Transparency and labour market tools such as EQF, Europass, ESCO, EURES
- European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System under Bologna Process
- Action is needed to facilitate recognition of qualifications and reduce brain drain



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Circulating skills

Key deliverable 1- Portability of skills

Skills Portability Initiative

- Explore new legislation to address barriers to workers mobility
- Facilitate recognition for regulated professions by leveraging digital tools
- Simplify procedures for recognition of qualifications of third-country nationals

Development of Common Framework for automatic recognition

- To cover school, VET, and higher education
- Explore EU accession to the Lisbon Recognition Convention



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Circulating skills

Key deliverable 2- Future-oriented European qualifications

Joint European study programmes

- Develop joint study programmes in disciplines for strategic sectors and key technological domains
- Explore a European degree/label

European VET diploma/labels

- For IVET, upper-secondary and post-secondary VET
- Pilot with Erasmus+ (2025-2026)



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Circulating skills

Key deliverable 3- Deepening transnational cooperation

Cooperation across education sectors

- Explore legal status for alliances of HE institutions and an investment pathways for European Univ. Alliances
- Expand Centres of Vocational Excellence and contribute to VET national reforms through private-public partnerships.
- Pilot European School Alliances to increase pupil and teacher mobility and cross-border cooperation



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Circulating skills

Key deliverable 4- Mobility for learners

Erasmus+

- Make Erasmus+ more inclusive and accessible
- Focus on learners with fewer opportunities, including in VET



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Attracting, developing and retaining talent

Challenges

- EU's working-age population to shrink by 1 million/year until 2050
- EU population will not be enough to tackle labour shortages

Opportunities

- Gradual integration of candidate countries into parts of the Single Market
- Support to education and training in partner countries
- Integration of third-country nationals legally residing in the EU into labour market



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Attracting, developing and retaining talent

Key deliverable 1- Europe talent magnet framework

EU talent pool

- Facilitating international recruitment of third country jobseekers residing outside the EU

Increase attractiveness of Europe for researchers

- Tackle precarity in early research careers through MSCA 'Choose Europe'
- Implement new framework of research careers and of European Charter of Researchers



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Attracting, developing and retaining talent

Key deliverable 1- Europe talent magnet framework

Increase attractiveness of European education and training systems

- EU target: 350,000+ non-EU students/year by 2030 earning tertiary degrees in the EU
- Pilot virtual study fairs, specifically on STEM and strategic disciplines and organise physical promotion activities under the 'Study in Europe' banner

Integration of skilled third-country nationals

- New Visa Strategy for top students, researchers, and trained workers from third countries
- Review EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion to better support integration and family reunification measures
- Develop 'Train to hire programmes' to address workforce needs

Investing in Education and Skills

Mobilising Public and Private Investment

Education and skills are an investment - not a cost.
They drive:

- Access to quality jobs
- EU's competitiveness and preparedness
- Inclusive growth and resilience
- Social and territorial cohesion

Current investment schemes (2021-2027): ESF+, Recovery and Resilience Facility, European Regional Development Fund, Erasmus+, Just Transition Fund, Invest EU, etc.

Investing in Education and Skills

Mobilising Public and Private Investment

Key deliverables

- Launch “EU Invest in Talent” platform to coordinate private-sector initiatives and boost private sector investment in training, upskilling, reskilling
- Encourage MS to use the extended adjustment path in the reviewed economic governance framework for reforms and investment
- Continue and reinforce the work on social investment
- Further support investment in education and training and promote reskilling of workforce through public procurement
- Evaluate the quality and relevance of investment in education and training, supported by the Learning Lab
- Encourage MS to make use of financing possibilities

Governance

Main elements

1. European Skills Intelligence Observatory

Aim

To provide strategic data and foresight regarding skills, and the performance of education and training systems

How it works

Aggregates data from Eurostat, Eurofound, ELA, Cedefop and centralises them in a one-stop-shop

Governance

Main elements

2. European Skills High Level Board

Aim

To bring together key stakeholders to provide cross-sectoral insights and guidance on skills to the EU policymakers

Functions

- Supports the EU-27 Recommendation on human capital and country specific recommendations
- Aligns with Digital Decade Board & other bodies
- Responds quickly to evolving situation on EU sectoral skills

Governance

Main elements

2. EU Recommendation on human capital: education and skills in the European Semester

Aim

To provide a contribution to the agenda setting for issues related to human capital for the EU and input for the relevant policy debates

Key elements

- Focus on education and skills structural issues
- Focus on labour market and competitiveness
- Underpinned by findings of European Skills Intelligence Observatory and European Skills High-Level Board

The way forward



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Union of Skills

New approach, combining education, training and employment policies, united around a common vision on **competitiveness**

Call to action

Need for whole-of-government approach addressing both the supply and demand side of including MS, social partners, the business community, universities and schools.





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Guiding questions for discussion

1. National Relevance & Alignment

- How does the Union of Skills resonate with your national priorities for VET and skills development?
- What concrete actions are being taken (or planned) in your country to align with the Union of Skills objectives—especially in areas like VET reform, adult learning, STEM and digital/green skills?
- What elements of the Communication present the greatest opportunity (challenge) in your context?

2. The Role of ReferNet & Cedefop

- How can ReferNet:
 - support capacity building at national level and
 - contribute to the Union of Skills priorities?
- What support and guidance can Cedefop provide to ReferNet partners?

Thank you

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