



**Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions – Union of Skills Strategy**

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<b>Reference documents:</b>	Union of Skills Communication COM(2025) 90 final STEM Education Strategic Plan COM(2025) 89 final Action Plan on Basic Skills COM(2025) 88 final

**POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS (COR)

**Territorial Cohesion**

1. highlights that investing in skills is fundamental for Europe's long-term competitiveness, resilience and cohesion, particularly as certain regions face demographic shifts, heightened global competition for talent and the imperative of navigating the green and digital transitions. This approach should be sensitive to regional disparities, with particular attention paid to regions at risk of being left behind;
2. reaffirms the importance of territorial cohesion in ensuring equitable access to the benefits of skills development across all regions, with specific interventions designed to overcome structural barriers in rural, remote and less-developed areas, including youth emigration, limited employment opportunities and educational infrastructure gaps;
3. recommends adopting place-based strategies to align skills development initiatives with specific regional economic conditions and demographic contexts. These strategies should actively work to revitalise sustainable traditional economic sectors, reverse youth migration trends and promote fast-track integration processes for migrants and asylum seekers;
4. recognising the critical role played by local and regional authorities (LRAs), underscores their proximity to citizens and their unique capacity to tailor educational initiatives to local contexts. LRAs should actively integrate advanced digital technologies, into local educational infrastructure in order to effectively respond to regional socio-economic realities;
5. believes that addressing territorial disparities through targeted, region-specific investments is essential, especially in rural, remote and depopulating areas, and disadvantaged suburbs which frequently suffer from inadequate infrastructure, limited access to quality education and youth emigration. Emphasising educational infrastructure and connectivity improvements is crucial in order to provide equitable opportunities for all;
6. recommends strengthening regional competitiveness by aligning local workforce training programmes with regional industrial strengths and innovation potential, ensuring workforce skills are relevant and in high demand;
7. stresses that the Union of Skills must be implemented with full respect for multilevel governance and the partnership principle, ensuring the meaningful involvement of local and regional authorities in the design and implementation of skills policies;

### **Modernisation of education and training systems**

8. reaffirms the importance of building regional skills ecosystems through dynamic public-private partnerships aimed at fostering collaboration between local authorities, educational institutions, businesses and innovation centres. These ecosystems should align with regional economic profiles, facilitating the development of relevant, high-demand skills;
9. at the same time, it is essential that the Union of Skills is inclusive. Equitable access to up- and reskilling opportunities must be ensured for vulnerable groups, including women, young people, migrants, persons with disabilities, and those living in rural and peripheral regions, so that no one is left behind in the green and digital transitions;
10. highlights that education and training systems across Europe must embrace digital innovation; important factors here include responsible use and cybersecurity awareness, up-to-date curricula and the implementation of modern pedagogical methods. These initiatives are critical for equipping learners with robust digital competencies and comprehensive STEM skills, which are essential for future labour market success;
11. recognises the strategic importance universities have in preparing individuals for emerging occupational demands, particularly in STEM fields closely linked with the green and digital economies. While aiming to meet the urgent skills gaps at present, universities may find it useful, in cooperation with the private sector, to innovate curricula and training methods to anticipate and prepare learners for future roles that may not yet exist;
12. stresses that, with a view to current and future labour market demands, it may be helpful to involve universities and companies, and especially SMEs, strategically in educational reform and skills alignment efforts, particularly in STEM disciplines;
13. stresses the importance of enhancing vocational education and training (VET) and recommends addressing systemic resource constraints, promoting the attractiveness of VET and balancing vocational skills with broader competencies. Such reforms are necessary to align VET more closely with evolving labour market needs;
14. draws attention to the need to modernise education and training systems by investing in digital innovation that respects responsible use and cybersecurity awareness, updating curricula, strengthening the involvement of businesses and SMEs and using contemporary pedagogical methods;
15. stresses the urgent need to address teacher shortages, particularly in STEM fields, by improving how the skills assigned to the various teaching bodies are matched to the subjects provided taking into account the level of content and curricular specialisation, and through improved training, enhanced working conditions and targeted support for educators, responding directly to gaps in the teaching workforce;

### **Labour market inclusion**

16. emphasises the importance of developing tailored strategies for the labour market integration of vulnerable groups, such as migrants, long-term unemployed individuals and older workers. These strategies should include specialised community-level infrastructure and support systems, promoting inclusive and resilient labour markets;
17. underlines the critical need to strengthen foundational skills, including literacy, numeracy, digital literacy, scientific knowledge and civic engagement. Such skills form the backbone of meaningful societal participation and labour market entry, especially in increasingly complex technological and social contexts;
18. underlines the importance of workplace-based learning and gaining practical experience; highlights the importance of investing in dual education systems, combining apprenticeships with vocational school education, thereby giving especially young and vulnerable people access to the labour market while connecting companies with potential employees;
19. reiterates that urgent measures are required to address teacher shortages, especially in STEM fields. Improving the quality of teacher training, enhancing professional working conditions and offering targeted support for educators are essential steps towards ensuring sustainable educational outcomes;

20. advocates ensuring labour market inclusion for vulnerable groups, including migrants, the long-term unemployed and older workers, through targeted training programmes and dedicated community-level support infrastructure;

### **Regional competitiveness and innovation**

21. stresses the need to simplify and better align EU funding instruments for regional skills initiatives, accompanied by effective technical support for LRAs, which will ensure that regional skills strategies are effectively implemented and impactful;

22. highlights the importance of enhancing the portability and recognition of qualifications across the EU, which are essential for fostering labour mobility, combating brain drain and fully harnessing the Single Market and talent within regional economies;

23. stresses the need of EU funding instruments that offer companies subsidies to experiment with work processes that cater to the needs of diverse groups, like more flexibility, part-time working, organising your own work or in consultation and developing programmes for cultural change so that more employees can more easily 'settle in';

24. emphasises that employing a comprehensive, data-driven approach to regional skills intelligence can significantly improve the precision of policy interventions, ensuring responsiveness to real-time regional labour market demands;

25. encourages interregional and cross-border cooperation among LRAs, which is vital for sharing best practices, collective problem-solving, the mobility of students and professionals, and building resilient skills systems that address common challenges;

26. recommends targeted regional policies designed to mitigate brain drain, such as supporting private initiatives and fostering multi-helix partnerships among academic institutions, governments and industries, as these can significantly enhance regional innovation and retain valuable human capital;

27. calls for skills development to be explicitly prioritised within Europe's strategic planning for competitiveness, resilience and social cohesion, addressing the challenges posed by global talent competition, demographic shifts, and the green and digital transitions;

28. calls for a proactive approach in equipping Europe's workforce to meet future labour market demands by addressing identified critical challenges, such as regional disparities, inadequate foundational skills among young people and adults, insufficient VET investment and barriers to labour market inclusion for vulnerable groups;

29. advocates lifelong learning and inclusive educational policies as fundamental tools to enhance Europe's economic security and prevent exclusion of any region or social group during transformative economic transitions;

### **Empowering local and regional authorities**

30. advocates strengthening cooperation with LRAs through structured dialogues, ensuring that diverse regional perspectives and local needs inform EU policy-making comprehensively;

31. highlights the need for educational policies to be flexible and adaptable and respond quickly to economic fluctuations and labour market shifts. This flexibility is critical for sustaining resilient economic development and employment;

32. advocates multilingual and dual education systems to enhance intercultural competencies and employability, particularly in cross-border regions, preparing individuals for diverse labour markets across Europe and promoting educational inclusivity;

33. stresses the key role played by LRAs in implementing the Union of Skills strategy, leveraging their direct engagement with citizens and oversight of local education and training infrastructure;

34. calls for proactive efforts to facilitate effective regional skills partnerships and promote public-private collaboration through clear mechanisms and adequate funding and administrative support, enabling LRAs to effectively lead and implement regional skills development strategies;

35. emphasises the importance of enabling LRAs to support local adaptation to green and digital transitions by establishing strategic partnerships among educational institutions, private enterprises and innovation clusters, enhancing local capacities to navigate the economic dimension of these transitions;

#### **Lifelong learning and continuous adaptation**

36. stresses the importance of prioritising early childhood education and care, particularly in disadvantaged communities, to improve foundational skills development and long-term educational outcomes;

37. advocates expanding the implementation of individual learning accounts (ILAs) to empower lifelong learning and facilitate the upskilling and reskilling necessary for career adaptability;

38. recommends increasing investment in micro-credentials and flexible learning solutions that provide targeted skill enhancements relevant to immediate industry needs;

39. calls for strengthened gender equality initiatives within STEM fields through targeted outreach, gender-sensitive teaching methods and career support in order to significantly increase female participation and retention;

40. highlight the importance of promoting digital safety, media literacy and cybersecurity education across all education levels to prepare individuals for secure participation in digital society;

41. calls for addressing the financial and entrepreneurial skills gap; emphasises the need for investing in initiatives aimed at improving the financial literacy of especially young people, as well as the fundamental role of entrepreneurial education within educational institutions to cultivate the entrepreneurial mindsets and skills necessary for innovation and business creation;

42. advocates increased support for older workers' continuous learning and integration into labour markets, capitalising on their experience and facilitating intergenerational knowledge transfer;

43. recommends developing comprehensive strategies to better integrate non-formal and informal learning experiences into formal qualification frameworks, recognising diverse learning pathways;

44. draws attention to the importance of enhancing risk preparedness and crisis response capabilities within educational systems to ensure continuity and resilience in educational provision during emergencies, for example with the integration of formal and informal climate education;

45. advocates developing more efficient ties between education, research institutions and industry without compromising the independence and intellectual integrity of educational institutions, both in rapidly evolving technological sectors and in important fields for social cohesion, to enhance practical skills application and innovation outcomes.

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*The President*  
*of the European Committee of the Regions*  
Kata TÜTTŐ