

**Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a New Skills Agenda for Europe — Working together to strengthen human capital, employability and competitiveness**

(COM(2016) 381 *final*)

**on the proposal for a Council recommendation on establishing a Skills Guarantee**

(COM(2016) 382 *final* — 2016/0179 (NLE))

**on the proposal for a Council recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning and repealing the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning**

(COM(2016) 383 *final* — 2016/0180 (NLE))

**on the proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on a common framework for the provision of better services for skills and qualifications (Europass) and repealing Decision No 2241/2004/EC**

(COM(2016) 625 *final* — 2016/0304 (COD))

**and on ‘Upscaling skills of persons in the labour market’**

**(Exploratory opinion (Maltese Presidency))**

(2017/C 173/09)

Rapporteur: **Indrė VAREIKYTė**

Co-rapporteur: **Tatjana BABRAUSKIENė**

Consultation	European Parliament, 6 October 2016 European Commission, 17 February 2017 Council of the European Union, 21 October 2016 Maltese Presidency, 16 September 2016
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Section responsible	Employment, Social affairs and Citizenship
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Outcome of vote	196/0/6
(for/against/abstentions)	

## 1. Conclusions and recommendations

1.1. The Committee welcomes the New Skills Agenda for Europe proposed by the Commission and believes it to be a positive step towards a better balance between skills needed by individuals, the labour market and societies. It also believes that better skills matching should improve the access of skilled and competent people to the labour market.

1.2. It is understandable that the new Agenda and its initiatives focus on solving current issues, mostly by amending existing tools and measures in order to improve their application and functioning. However, there is a need to introduce more innovative solutions in the fields of education and skills development, as Europe needs a genuine paradigm shift in the goals and functioning of the education sector and an understanding of its place and role in society.

1.3. The EESC highlights that increasing labour market participation, meeting the needs of changing, uncertain and complex labour markets, as well as fighting poverty, inequalities and discrimination in the EU cannot be properly addressed without taking the related social and gender perspectives into account.

1.4. The Committee asks the Commission to provide a broader view on the functioning of and mutual encounters between the overall education and training, labour and social systems and their individual measures, especially on issues related to higher levels of education, the role of lifelong learning, cross-border mobility, the entrepreneurial mind-set, creativity, innovation, social and intercultural skills.

1.5. The EESC would also like to see more explicit links between the new Agenda and both the European Semester and the Europe 2020 Strategy — in particular, their education and employment targets, as well as to anticipate the New Skills Agenda's role with regard to the 2030 Agenda, the Digital Single Market Strategy, the Circular Economy Strategy, Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019, the Pillar of Social Rights and the Sustainable Development Goals.

1.6. The Committee regrets the lack of specific action in the new Agenda relating to the key role that non-formal and informal learning plays in preparing young people for life. In addition, entrepreneurship in its broader sense (i.e. sense of initiative) is not highlighted in the new Agenda as a life skill that benefits all individuals. In this respect the Commission should also pay special attention to the specific skills needs of the liberal professions <sup>(1)</sup>.

1.7. The EESC cannot accept that there is no new financing envisaged to enforce the new Agenda and firmly believes that making the best use possible of existing funding programmes will not be enough to underpin the Agenda's ambitions. Furthermore, the proposed sources of funding for the Agenda — namely the ESF and Erasmus+ — are already being planned and distributed at national level, thus using them for the purposes of implementing the Agenda is even more uncertain.

1.8. The Committee appreciates the strong focus on dialogue with social partners and businesses in the Agenda and encourages further strengthening of such dialogue, as well as dialogue with relevant civil society organisations (CSOs) and organisations which work directly with beneficiaries and can reach out to vulnerable people.

1.9. The EESC believes that the proposed Skills Guarantee will make a tangible difference only if lessons are learned from the implementation of the Youth Guarantee.

1.10. Skills development in the digital era is occurring in a context of rapid and at times disruptive change, where business models may change fundamentally. Therefore the EESC believes that merely helping individuals to acquire a minimum set of skills is not enough and that it is crucial to ensure that the Skills Guarantee becomes a guaranteed pathway that enables and encourages people to advance further and reach the highest achievable level of skills. The EESC presses for further solutions to increase the funding, such as public and private investment, required to ensure the swift provision of skills. Instruments used in some EU Member States, such as collective agreements on paid training leave, should also be examined.

1.11. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that improving individual skills alone will not give the desired effect of employability unless the closely intertwined supporting social, economic and gender policies are also developed further.

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<sup>(1)</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/promoting-entrepreneurship/we-work-for/liberal-professions\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/promoting-entrepreneurship/we-work-for/liberal-professions_en)

1.12. The EESC believes that efforts to further develop the EQF should focus on strengthening cooperation between Member States and all stakeholders, the importance of recognising skills and further education qualifications and validating skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning, with special attention to transversal skills. Furthermore — especially with regard to achieving a high level of skills — it is important to enhance non-formal and informal learning in such a way that they can blend into existing formal education and training systems without obstacles and in a way that it is acceptable to all relevant stakeholders.

1.13. It is crucial to ensure that the attempt to upgrade the EQF does not become too burdensome and bureaucratic, as well as to achieve greater consistency between EU qualification instruments — namely the EQF, ECVET and EQAVET. ESCO should support the development of the EQF and its use, but it is essential to finalise the referencing processes in order for ESCO to be able to contribute.

1.14. The EESC strongly supports the new Europass Framework, particularly the move from using Europass as a document-based facility to a service-based platform. It believes that transparency, usability, accessibility and efficiency should be the main drivers in its development. It is crucial to ensure that the renewed Europass Framework is accessible to persons with disabilities.

1.15. The EESC has reservations, however, on whether it is ethical to use Erasmus+ programme funds, as the initial financial source. At the same time, the Commission should reassess the budgetary implications in a more realistic manner, especially in relation to the financial implications for the Member States and budgetary implications resulting from the dissemination of the new Europass Framework to the public.

## 2. Overview of the Commission's proposal

2.1. The Commission has adopted a New Skills Agenda for Europe with the aim of ensuring that people develop a broad set of skills from early on in life and of making the most of Europe's human capital, which should boost employability, competitiveness and growth in Europe.

2.2. The Commission estimates that 70 million Europeans lack adequate reading and writing skills, have poor numeracy skills, and more than 20 % practically can't work with computers <sup>(2)</sup>, which puts them at risk of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion. On the other hand, over 30 % of highly qualified young people work in jobs that do not match their talents and aspirations, while 40 % of European employers report that they cannot find people with the right skills to grow and innovate. At the same time, too few people have the entrepreneurial mind-set and competences to start their own business and keep adapting to evolving requirements of the labour market.

2.3. The Commission believes that increasing skills levels, promoting transversal skills and finding ways to better anticipate the labour market's needs, including based on dialogue with the industry, are essential to improve people's chances in life, and support fair, inclusive and sustainable growth as well as cohesive societies. To help tackle skills challenges, the Commission proposes ten initiatives to be implemented over the next two years:

- a Skills Guarantee to help low-skilled adults acquire a minimum level of literacy, numeracy and digital skills and progress towards an upper secondary qualification,
- a review of the European Qualifications Framework for a better understanding of qualifications and to make better use of all available skills in the European labour market,
- the 'Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition' — bringing together Member States and stakeholders from education, employment and industry to develop a large digital talent pool and ensure that individuals and the labour force in Europe are equipped with adequate digital skills,

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<sup>(2)</sup> This rate is higher among the 55-65 age group where 50 % of adults have no basic ICT skills. OECD, *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)*, June 2015.

- the 'Blueprint for Sectoral Cooperation on Skills' to improve skills intelligence and address skills shortages in specific economic sectors,
- a 'Skills Profile Tool for Third-Country Nationals' to support early identification and profiling of skills and qualifications held by asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants,
- a revision of the Europass Framework, offering people better and easier-to-use tools to present their skills and get useful real-time information on skills needs and trends which can then help with career and learning choices,
- making Vocational Education and Training (VET) a first choice by enhancing opportunities for VET learners to undertake a work based learning experience and promoting greater visibility of good labour market outcomes achieved by VET,
- a review of the Recommendation on Key Competences to help more people acquire the core set of skills necessary to work and live in the 21st century — with particular focus on promoting entrepreneurial and innovation-oriented mind-sets and skills,
- an initiative on graduate tracking to improve information on how graduates progress in the labour market,
- a proposal to further analyse and exchange best practices on effective ways to address brain drain.

### 3. Scope of the document

3.1. In this opinion the EESC focuses on the Agenda itself and three of the initiatives already proposed alongside the Agenda: the Skills Guarantee, the review of the European Qualifications Framework, and the revision of the Europass Framework.

3.2. The Committee also responds to the request made by the Maltese Presidency of the Council of the European Union to provide an exploratory opinion on the topic of *Upscaling skills of persons in the labour market*. Due to the overlap in scope and area, the Committee's response to this request has been incorporated into this opinion and enriches it by expanding on the Committee's views on the social dimension and gender-related aspects of skills and employability.

### 4. General remarks on the Agenda

4.1. The Committee welcomes the New Skills Agenda for Europe proposed by the Commission and believes it to be a positive step towards a better balance between society's and business' needs for skills. While it is understandable that the new Agenda and its initiatives focus on solving current issues mostly by amending existing tools and measures in order to improve their application and functioning, the EESC stresses the need to introduce more innovative solutions in the fields of education and skills development. Many Member States and EEA States have various innovative approaches already in place, yet they are not monitored and mentioned in the Agenda, let alone promoted to the Member States.

4.2. The EESC strongly believes, and the relatively low impact of the overall EU measures <sup>(3)</sup> in education and youth employment sectors since 2009 supports the belief, that now is the time for a genuine paradigm shift in the goals and functioning of the education and training sector, encompassing all its strands — formal, non-formal and informal and understanding its place and role in society, as well as recognising education itself as a factor in productivity. Stronger focus on investment in human development is crucial to the future of Europe; thus the new Agenda should provide not only partial solutions to existing labour market disparities, but measures to empower every single individual in the EU to become better, more qualified and more flexible in choosing economic activities.

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<sup>(3)</sup> e.g. European Commission, 'Education and Training Monitor 2016', September 2016; European Policy Centre, 'Towards a Europeanisation of Youth Employment Policies? A Comparative Analysis of Regional Youth Guarantee Policy Designs', September 2016.

4.3. Upscaling and matching skills, as well as retraining and continuing professional development are highly relevant in relation to the European Union's social and political commitments, with a view to increasing labour market participation and meeting the needs of changing labour markets, as well as fighting poverty, inequalities and discrimination in the EU. These issues cannot be properly addressed without taking the related social and gender perspectives into account. Yet, the Committee regrets that the new Agenda focuses on skills and employability in general, but does not identify specific measures to engage the potential of individuals in part-time employment and precarious work, as well as economically inactive women, elderly citizens and persons with disabilities who could all make substantial contributions to the development and growth of the EU.

4.4. The EESC believes that the main aspects of gender disparities<sup>(4)</sup> in relation to skills development were left out during the planning stage of the Agenda. These include: pressures on women to take caring roles and to reconcile work and family life, discrimination, stereotyping, higher representation of women in non-standard employment, limited occupational choices for part-time work (which raises the risk of overeducation, especially in cases of 'occupational downgrading') and fields of study in which women and men are heavily represented, thus being more likely to be affected by overeducation in the labour market.

4.5. The Agenda focuses firmly on the provision of a minimal set of skills and the development of low and medium skills, yet the Committee notes the lack of a broader view from the Commission on the functioning of and mutual encounters between the overall education, labour and social systems and their individual measures. Such a limited view ignores the equally important issues of higher levels of education and training, the role of lifelong learning, cross-border mobility, entrepreneurship, creativity, innovation, social skills and intercultural education, to name a few. In this respect the Commission should also pay special attention to the specific skills needs of the liberal professions<sup>(5)</sup>.

4.6. The EESC therefore urges the Commission to adopt a coordinated, coherent and consistent approach to its policy initiatives, particularly where they involve the development of skills. There is a lack of efficient coordination between simultaneous initiatives proposed by separate DGs which are closely intertwined. Better coordination could highly increase the effectiveness and impact of such measures.

4.7. Given that skills development has key implications for economic growth and in order to ensure real impact, the Committee would also like to see more direct links between the new Agenda and both the European Semester (especially country-specific recommendations) and the Europe 2020 Strategy. This refers in particular to their education and employment targets, as well as the Agenda's role in relation to the 2030 Agenda, the Digital Single Market Strategy, the Circular Economy Strategy, Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019, the Pillar of Social Rights (especially proposed benchmark schemes) and the Sustainable Development Goals. Establishing such connections would strengthen the Agenda's place among the EU's long-term goals and overarching policy frameworks and, therefore, guarantee its status as a strategic initiative.

4.8. The Committee acknowledges that effective skills matching is crucial, as having 30 % of young Europeans overqualified for their jobs in terms of acquired formal qualifications, and, at the same time, 40 % of employers reporting a lack of employees with the required skillset is unsustainable. Yet it is of the utmost importance to bring skills matching into line with the creation of quality jobs, as well as to emphasise the importance of cross-border mobility as a method for skills matching in order to have a fully functional and effective society.

4.9. The new Agenda underlines both the importance of inclusion and the acquisition of employability skills. Moreover, while it focuses mostly on the needs of industry, the EESC believes there should also be greater focus on the skills that are more broadly relevant to society. Skills are also for the wider benefit of individuals and society — such as transversal, transferable or soft skills (e.g. critical and creative thinking, social, civil and cultural competences)<sup>(6)</sup>. The Committee also

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<sup>(4)</sup> International Labour Organisation, 'Skills mismatch in Europe' Statistics Brief, September 2014.

<sup>(5)</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/promoting-entrepreneurship/we-work-for/liberal-professions\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/promoting-entrepreneurship/we-work-for/liberal-professions_en)

<sup>(6)</sup> EESC opinion on *Fostering creativity, entrepreneurship and mobility in education and training* (OJ C 332, 8.10.2015, p. 20).

regrets that entrepreneurship (in a broad sense, i.e. sense of initiative) is not highlighted in the new Agenda as a life skill that benefits all individuals.

4.10. Furthermore, the EESC once again highlights the multibillion Euro missed opportunity which has arisen as a result of a lack of support for female entrepreneurship <sup>(7)</sup>. Women in business create jobs, innovation and new skills in all sectors of industry. In addition they are proactive in social entrepreneurship, enhancing and promoting community and social innovation <sup>(8)</sup>.

4.11. The EESC recognises that ensuring all young people have basic skills is vital, yet regrets the lack of specific measures in the new Agenda to address the key role that non-formal and informal learning plays in preparing young people for life. Skills and competences acquired outside formal education and training give young people an opportunity both to be employed and to take their place in and contribute to wider society. The majority of communication, cultural, managerial and personal skills that employers look for are gained through non-formal and informal learning and these competences must be validated and recognised <sup>(9)</sup>.

4.12. Taking into account the prioritisation of financial investment in educational disciplines that are considered more relevant to boosting national economies, the Committee believes that the new Agenda should not encourage governments to withdraw commitments made in the Bucharest Communiqué of the Bologna Process, relating to securing proper funding for higher education. Such divisions might undermine other areas of education and limit general access to education and generic skills.

4.13. In order to further facilitate the integration of young people into today's labour market, the Member States should also recommit to the strategic framework for cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) and the 2006 Oslo Agenda, which remain highly relevant today. Without further progress in the fields of STEM and practical skills, it will be difficult to improve vocational education and training and apprenticeship systems.

4.14. The EESC highlights the fact that national education systems are the first level responsible for efficient and well-functioning education and training; the responsibility, therefore, to ensure minimum levels of basic skills lies with the governments of the Member States. Thus it is crucial for the Commission to re-evaluate whether the new Agenda will allow the authorisation and promotion of required changes at national level and genuinely help the Member States to make better use of existing funds. It is nonetheless important to support a national mechanism for consultation between governments and stakeholders with a view to strengthening social dialogue, fostering cooperation, ensuring effective distribution of best practices and swift collection of feedback and relevant data.

4.15. However, the Committee has concerns over whether the value of the proposed initiatives may be lost, considering that in reality European countries are still facing the crisis. Budget cuts, especially in the resources earmarked for education and training can make it harder to remedy young people's unequal starting points and to promote high-quality lifelong education and training for all.

4.16. The EESC cannot accept that there is no new financing scheme envisaged to enforce the new Agenda. It suggests incorporating the Agenda into an enabling macroeconomic framework where investing in people's skills and capabilities is not treated as a cost but an outlay which will bring positive benefits over time.

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<sup>(7)</sup> EESC opinion on *Female entrepreneurs* (OJ C 299, 4.10.2012, p. 24).

<sup>(8)</sup> 10 country case studies on the impact of female social entrepreneurship in Europe have been analysed as part of the Europeans Women's Lobby project *WEStart*.

<sup>(9)</sup> EESC opinion on *EU Policies and Volunteering* (OJ C 181, 21.6.2012, p. 150).



4.17. The EESC firmly believes that making the best use possible of existing funding programmes will not be enough to underpin the Agenda's ambitions. More funding will therefore be needed in addition to the potential adjustments during the mid-term review of the multiannual financial framework for 2014-2020 envisaged in the document. The EESC also encourages the Member States to increase expenditure on education and ensure that it is spent effectively. It believes that contributions made by the Member States to cover expenditure on education and training should not be included in the framework used to calculate their budget deficit.

4.18. Furthermore, the Committee highlights that the proposed sources of funding for the new Agenda — namely the ESF and Erasmus+ — are already being planned and distributed at national level, thus using them for the purposes of implementing the Agenda is even more uncertain.

4.19. The Committee appreciates the strong focus on dialogue and consultation with social partners and businesses in the new Agenda and encourages a further strengthening of such dialogue to improve skills matching and ensure better access for skilled workers to the labour market, both as part of the *New start for Social Dialogue* <sup>(10)</sup>, as well as within the Member States. It is also essential to recognise and support the role of civil society organisations (CSOs) due to their vast experience of service provision under social enterprise frameworks and preparedness to deliver on social entrepreneurship skills, which are a key building block in the Agenda. Additionally, and especially with regard to harnessing entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial skills, it is important to include the professional representative bodies in the dialogue.

4.20. The EESC also stresses the need for more emphasis on targeted measures to reach out to disadvantaged groups, including persons with disabilities. This entails collecting data at national level to assess the impact of current measures on targeted groups and making sure that measures are adapted to learners' specific needs in terms of access, duration and delivery. This means working in partnership with decision-makers, organisations and associations which work directly with potential beneficiaries. Some such associations are quite small which prevents them from accessing EU grants. Solutions should therefore be found to ease their access to such financial support.

## 5. On the proposal to establish a Skills Guarantee

5.1. The EESC believes that the proposed Skills Guarantee will make a tangible difference only if lessons are learned from the implementation of the Youth Guarantee (i.e. avoiding overlaps, ensuring greater consistency). In particular, the Skills Guarantee should aspire to ensure prompter implementation, have an integrated approach with accompanying social services, be more open to partnerships with businesses, social partners and CSOs, and be more flexible in order to accommodate users with special integration needs. It is essential that the Skills Guarantee is viewed as an added value intervention measure rather than just a job creation measure.

5.2. The Committee has previously highlighted <sup>(11)</sup> that skills development in the digital era is occurring in a context of rapid and at times disruptive change, where business models may change fundamentally. Some of the impact that digitalisation is having on employment is already visible, while various estimations suggest that roughly 50 % of today's medium-skilled jobs are at risk of being replaced by digital technology in the next 20 years and that in the future workers will need comprehensive re-skilling measures every five years <sup>(12)</sup>. Therefore, a continuous approach to re-training and lifelong learning, as well as close dialogue with businesses, social partners and stakeholders become all the more important. The EESC presses for further solutions to increase the funding, such as public and private investment, required to ensure the swift provision of skills. Instruments used in some EU Member States, such as collective agreements on paid training leave, should also be examined.

<sup>(10)</sup> *A new start for Social Dialogue*, Statement of the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the European Commission and the European Social Partners, 27 June 2016.

<sup>(11)</sup> EESC opinion on *Effects of digitalisation on service industries and employment* (OJ C 13, 15.1.2016, p. 161).

<sup>(12)</sup> e.g. Bowles, J. *The computerisation of European jobs — Who will win and who will lose from the impact of new technology onto old areas of employment?*, 2014, Frey, C. M., Osborne, M., *'The future of employment: How susceptible are jobs to computerisation?'*, 2013, Pajarinen, M., Rouvinen, P., Ekeland, A., *Computerisation Threatens One-Third of Finnish and Norwegian Employment*, ETLA, 2015.

5.3. Therefore the EESC believes that merely helping individuals to acquire a minimum set of skills is not enough and that it is crucial to ensure that the Skills Guarantee becomes a guaranteed pathway that enables people to advance further and reach the highest achievable level of skills. The objective of the Guarantee should be not only to enhance basic skills, but also to allow progression towards higher qualifications and a broader set of skills. Otherwise these individuals — especially women<sup>(13)</sup> and the elderly — will remain trapped in unemployment or low-skilled occupations, which are continuously diminishing in a digitalising world.

5.4. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that improving individual skills alone will not give the desired effect of employability unless the closely intertwined supporting social, economic and gender policies are also developed further. This refers especially to policies relating to: services enabling a work-life balance, encouraging entrepreneurship, support services to single parents in difficulty, the provision of qualitative, accessible and affordable full-time childcare facilities, as one of the main drivers to encourage both female and male labour market participation and the availability of proper care services for the elderly population, etc.<sup>(14)</sup>

5.5. The EESC highlights the essential role of the social partners and their activities<sup>(15)</sup> in skills improvement and policy development. The Committee also believes that the role of relevant CSOs should be better promoted, given their wide-ranging experience of dealing with skilling measures for persons currently unable to access the labour market. These groups are usually correlated with lower qualification levels and have weaker links with other skills suppliers such as public employment services, providers of formal education and training, etc. Furthermore, the variety of service users grouped together by not-for-profit providers of work inclusion services — sometimes with complex needs — means that CSOs are ready to provide tailor-made learning offers, which is one of the three pillars contained in the Skills Guarantee. If people with low qualifications are to be the main target of the Skills Guarantee, CSOs should therefore be recognised as one of the key players in the implementation process.

5.6. The EESC believes that the roles and responsibilities relating to the acquisition of qualifications and second chance and upskilling programmes should be shared between the state, companies, learners and education providers and the activities should be built upon successful cooperation. Yet, the incentives needed to ensure that employers and employees accept and share such roles and responsibilities when engaging in upskilling are still unclear.

## 6. On the proposal for a revision of the European Qualifications Framework

6.1. The EESC believes that further development of the EQF should focus on strengthening cooperation between Member States, social partners and other stakeholders, thus building trust in each other's qualifications frameworks and education quality systems. It is important — following the principles of Lifelong Learning — to keep in mind the importance of recognising skills and qualifications for further education and not just for the labour market. Formal qualifications must find ways to validate skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning, with particular reference to transversal skills. This is just a way of acquiring knowledge through different and more flexible learning pathways that the core principles of learning outcomes and qualifications frameworks give solid ground for.

6.2. It should be noted that even though ESCO has a great potential, it is still under development and causing uncertainty among the Member States. ESCO should support the development of the EQF and its use, but it is essential to finalise the referencing processes in order for ESCO to be able to contribute.

6.3. The Committee agrees with the need to improve the understanding and comparability of different qualifications. As such, the proposed revision's focus on strengthening the transparency and consistency of the EQF is highly welcome. However, it is crucial to ensure that the attempt to upgrade the EQF does not become too burdensome and bureaucratic.

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<sup>(13)</sup> European Commission Roadmap 'New start to address the challenges of work-life balance faced by working families', August 2015.

<sup>(14)</sup> EESC opinion on *Female employment in relation to growth* (OJ C 341, 21.11.2013, p. 6).

<sup>(15)</sup> Joint activities undertaken by the European social partners, focusing on VET and particularly apprenticeships, investment in education and training, tackling school drop-out rates and achieving better learning outcomes.



6.4. The EESC highlights that — especially with regard to achieving a high level of skills — there is still a lot of work left to do in order to enhance non-formal and informal learning in such a way that they can blend into existing formal education and training systems without obstacles and in a way that it is acceptable to all relevant stakeholders. Currently such integration is very limited due to the lack of commonly accepted definitions of equivalency, low mutual trust in national qualification frameworks and the vast differences in levels of referencing between the national qualification frameworks and the EQF.

6.5. The EESC also recommends ensuring greater consistency between EU qualification instruments — namely the EQF, ECVET and EQAVET.

## **7. On the proposal for a revision of the Europass Framework**

7.1. The EESC strongly supports the new Europass Framework, particularly the move from using Europass as a document-based facility to a service-based platform.

7.2. The Committee believes that transparency, usability, accessibility and efficiency should be the main drivers in establishing a European-wide platform through which individuals can access a range of services. It is crucial to ensure, that the new Europass Framework is accessible to persons with disabilities. It is also important to take into account the accessibility of information in terms of physical environment, as some disabilities affect the ability to use IT systems, and, in such cases, special access points and other alternative methods of access should be available.

7.3. However, the EESC has reservations over whether it is ethical to use Erasmus+ programme funds — an estimated EUR 2 500 000 — as the initial source of funding for developing web services for skills and qualifications. At the same time, the Committee urges the Commission to reassess the budgetary implications in a more realistic manner as there will be financial implications for Member States due to increased scope of information gathered and the resulting need to upgrade their data submission tools and channels.

7.4. The Committee believes that it is also important to evaluate the budgetary implications of the dissemination of the new Europass to the public, as the success of the new framework not only depends heavily on the general increase in the quality and the number of services, but also on a clear increase in users.

Brussels, 22 February 2017.

*The President*  
*of the European Economic and Social Committee*  
Georges DASSIS

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## APPENDIX

**Examples of relevant EESC opinions**

- SOC/555 — High quality education for all, (2017)
  - SOC/552 — Mid-Term Evaluation On Erasmus+, ongoing (2017)
  - SOC/524 — Engaged universities shaping Europe, 2015
  - SOC/523 — Improving the performance of national dual training systems, 2015
  - SOC/521 — Recognition of skills and qualifications acquired through non-formal and informal learning — the practical input of organised civil society, 2015
  - SOC/518 — Fostering creativity, entrepreneurship and mobility in education and training, 2015
  - CCMI/136 — Effects of digitalisation on service industries and employment, 2015
  - SOC/502 — Women in science, 2014
  - SOC/499 — Quality framework for traineeships, 2014
  - SOC/493 — Opening up education, 2014
  - CCMI/118 — Employability of young people — matching training with industry needs in an age of austerity, 2014
  - SOC/486 — Female employment in relation to growth, 2013
  - SOC/476 — Rethinking education, 2013
  - INT/679 — Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan, 2013
  - SOC/469 — The role of business in relation to education in the EU, 2013
  - SOC/446 — Female entrepreneurs, 2012
  - SOC/439 — Young persons with disabilities, 2012
  - SOC/438 — Erasmus for all, 2012
  - SOC/431 — EU Policies and Volunteering, 2012
  - SOC/429 — Modernisation of higher education in Europe, 2012
  - SOC/421 — Youth employment, technical skills and mobility, 2012
  - SOC/409 — Making post-secondary vocational education and training more attractive, 2012
  - SOC/404 — An agenda for new skills and jobs, 2011
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