

EU must modernise - and harmonise - skills recognition

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Opinion

It's time to modernise how skills and qualifications are recognised, says Renate Weber.



Renate Weber | *Photo credit: European Parliament audiovisual*

The world we live in changes every day, facing constant technological challenges that demand a continuous development of knowledge, skills and competences which were almost unconceivable 30 years ago.

These new skills are required by both the private and public sectors. More and more, the use of digital economy, robots and artificial intelligence will shape the labour market. The question is, how easy or difficult is it to adapt to these changes?

Senior workers' associations admit that people over 50 - or even younger - are less open to embracing change and spending their time in training courses.

Not even recent high school or university graduates acquire all the necessary knowledge and skills needed for the labour market. When it comes to education, member states and all social actors must stop following 'old school' ways.

As Parliament's resolution on the European qualification framework for lifelong learning rightly points out, "the promotion of critical thinking and thinking outside the box is crucial for developing new skills that will be needed in the future".

If, for good reasons, workers are not interested in spending time obtaining old-style qualifications, we should adapt and start recognising knowledge and skills acquired in other ways, including through volunteering, apprenticeships and informal education. It is time to have similar qualification laws and procedures in all member states.

In spite of all the evidence, our education and training systems lag behind this new dynamic, limiting the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, including skills gained during volunteering activities.

This is damaging, not only in relation to a short-term economic outcome, but also to the main aim of education - generating adaptable and independent individuals, able to face the challenges ahead with open-mindedness and confidence.

Greater flexibility in skills recognition is beneficial to European citizens, but can also lead to better economic and social integration for migrants and refugees, thus responding to another of the EU's challenges.

At the same time, through structured dialogues with EU neighbourhood countries, especially ones that have an association agreement with the EU, we should aim to reference their national qualifications frameworks to the European qualification framework.

In this way, if sooner or later these countries become EU member states, their citizens will be ready from day one to cope with the demands of the European market.

Moreover, EU support through development aid should be directed to third countries, in order to offer assistance in developing national qualifications frameworks.

The revision of European qualification framework should result in an innovative meta-framework, that responds to all these existing challenges, but also thinks ahead, anticipates potential problems and offers 'out-of-the- box' solutions. We cannot fail our citizens, especially our young generation, every time we face hardship, be it economic, social or political.

About the author

Renate Weber (RO) is Parliament's ALDE group rapporteur on the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning

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