



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR  
THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

## For Information

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# Bringing European education systems and labour markets closer together through a strong Skills Portability Initiative

EAEA's Statement - April 2026

The European Association for the Education of Adults welcomes the new **Skills Portability Initiative** (SPI), with high hopes for the future of adult learners across Europe. EAEA took part in the [Open Public Consultation](#) to give its view on this important initiative.

## Key supporting measures

- **Skills validation and recognition** systems should also be fully interoperable and use a “common language” (or multiple languages) to represent and therefore certify skills and competences.
- **Representation of skills**, including all relevant stakeholder groups, with a flexible and real-world-oriented approach.
- **Peer learning and capacity building for the education sector** for providers, learning designers, and educators are also fundamental to credentials systems, skills and competences frameworks, and learning outcomes-oriented design.
- **Research on skills validation and recognition.** Extensive data and insight on processes and results related to skills and competences recognition and validation must be provided by relevant Higher education institutions, research bodies in Adult and Lifelong Learning, and thematic bodies in the education field, at the institutional level.



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Recognition and validation of skills remain one of the key barriers in the EU when it comes to education and training. An initiative aiming to break down this barrier will enable Enrico Letta's push to fully activate the five freedoms of the Single Market - especially the so-called **fifth freedom** aimed at strengthening research, innovation and education in the Single Market.

This initiative has the potential to shape the future of the European education area and labour markets. EAEA would like to highlight a few important points here so that the initiative can have its full effect.

## 1. Focus on skills and credentials

The initiative should make a clear differentiation and clarify the definitions of skills, competences, learning credentials and qualifications: while these terms seem to be often used interchangeably, they refer to different concepts.

A **qualification** is the formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards. **Skill** refers to the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. The term **competences** is sometimes used as synonym to skills as well. However, competence is broader and refers typically to the ability to use and apply knowledge and skills in an independent and self-directed way. Furthermore, we highlight the concept of **learning credentials**, as documented statement certifying the learning outcomes - knowledge, skills, and competences - a learner has acquired (e.g., diplomas, certificates) and that verify identity, authenticity, and the completion of formal or non-formal learning.

For this reason, we believe that the **Skills Portability Initiative should place skills and competences portability, together with credentials, at the centre of the proposed measures and standards**. Qualifications should remain an important element of the system, but as one possible 'format' within a broader, skills-oriented framework.

## 2. Interoperability

The SPI should provide guidelines and/or clear standards for designing and mapping new/existing learning programmes to ensure their interoperability at the EU level, both technically and semantically.

**Interoperability should be ensured across all education levels and types of instruments**, such as education opportunities registries, credentials and qualifications registries and skills/competences portfolio and wallet. We suggest that the achievements section in the Learning and Employment Record (LER) of any EU citizen appears as follows:

- skills and competence-first oriented, while keeping reference to qualifications of course;
- described in the same way for any learning process, from high school diploma to PhD, from a VET qualification to a short non-formal learning programme, from prior learning acquired during volunteering activities (informal learning) to on-the-job learning;
- maintained and updated across the whole education and employment life.

**Technical interoperability** is ensured by technologies in place, such as data hosting, but also credential issuing and delivery, and by the use of common data models. A candidate for the data model could be the European Learning Model, with expansions and revisions to fit the specific needs of representing skills and competences in a more structured manner and across EU Member States.

**Semantic interoperability** is ensured by one or more “common languages” to express and represent learning outcomes (expected/achieved), skills and competences. This common language should be able to represent the results of all kinds of learning, including formal, non-formal and informal learning, on all kinds of skills and competences. A potential candidate for this is the European Skills, Competences, and Occupations (ESCO). The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) system is complementary to the *skill-first approach* of representation and still valid for formal learning and qualifications, while often not sufficient or appropriate for non-formal and informal learning.

Furthermore, ESCO should also be updated regularly, and customisation at the national level should be encouraged, with the European version as a basic viable standard.

### **3. Accessibility and trust**

The SPI has the potential to be the right tool to provide guidelines, fostering accessibility of credentials while building trust in the credentials and skills portability system across countries, sectors and types of stakeholders.

**Accessibility, transparency and trust are the key aspects to make the Skills Portability Initiative relevant to citizens, training providers and employers.**



## 4. Stakeholder engagement

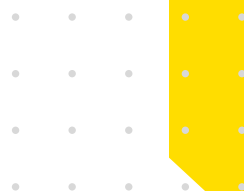
The SPI should focus its core measures and implementation guidelines on the fundamental aspect of **engaging all relevant stakeholders in the design, development and implementation of the systems at the EU and Member State levels**. This is essential to ensure trust, co-ownership and accountability among all relevant actors, as well as alignment between public and private systems. For learners, this is key to strengthening trust in the system and, therefore, their motivation to participate in adult education.

Early buy-in and opportunities for co-design are also essential for training providers, supporting their commitment to implement the measures when designing and validating prior learning and credentials, and for employers, encouraging them to recognise these credentials in recruitment and selection processes.

Furthermore, civil society and civil society organisations should be recognised as one of the fundamental actor and stakeholder of this ecosystem, highlighting their positive role especially in outreaching and engaging citizens and communities and supporting by design their access and participation to the ecosystem, both as training providers and as system co-designers.

## 5. Quality Assurance

Promoting comparable skills levels and common regulation at the European level is essential to ensure trust, transparency and recognition across Member States. Quality assurance mechanisms should therefore be embedded in the design and implementation of the Skills Portability Initiative, ensuring that credentials, validation processes and skills frameworks meet clear and shared standards. At the same time, **these mechanisms should remain flexible enough to accommodate the diversity of national education and training systems**, while guaranteeing reliability and credibility for learners, providers and employers.



## Key supporting measures

EAEA suggests the following core measures to support the development of the SPI system and proposes roadmaps for their implementation:

- **Skills validation and recognition**

Implementation and alignment of skills and competences validation and recognition is a fundamental step for the long-term impact of Skills Portability. Validation and recognition should be in place structurally across education levels and types of learning (formal, non-formal and informal) and aligned also between prior learning and new learning.

**Validation and recognition systems should also be fully interoperable and use a “common language” (or more than one) to represent and therefore certify skills and competences.** The same system should be used for prior learning (mapping to the SP system) and for assessment of learning outcomes and skills/competences acquired through new programmes (Skills Portability by design).

- **Representation of skills**

The common languages chosen to support semantic interoperability should be subjected to regular and co-designed updates and integration, **including all relevant stakeholder groups, with a flexible and real-world oriented approach.** Support actions should be in place also for Member States to develop and continuously update their own national ESCO-like frameworks and to align across Member States.

- **Peer learning and capacity building for the education sector**

Peer learning and capacity building programmes **for providers, learning designers and educators** are also fundamental on credentials systems, skills and competences frameworks and learning outcomes-oriented design. This includes the capacity to design flexible learning programmes based on clear learning outcomes and skills and competences frameworks, to map to and use such frameworks, and to support validation and recognition of prior learning as well as non-formal and informal learning.



- **Research on skills validation and recognition**

Extensive data and insight on processes and results related to skills and competences recognition and validation are necessary as well and must be provided by relevant Higher education institution, research bodies in Adult and Lifelong Learning and thematic bodies in the education field, at institutional level (such as CEDEFOP and ETF ) and European networks, such as EAEA, LLLP, EUCEN, EUA, etc.

### About us

The European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) is the voice of non-formal adult education in Europe. EAEA is a European NGO with 120 member organisations in 44 countries and represents more than 60 million learners Europe-wide.



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