

YouthProAktiv

Declaration of Young Europeans on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning

YouthProAktiv is a coalition of young people promoting a culture of proactivity and entrepreneurship in education and policy.

A recent study from the European Commission's Eurobarometer has identified that almost 50% of young Europeans expect schools to prepare them for future employment and skill them with the critical mindset that is necessary to thrive in the job market. The European Commission has taken note of this and has made some great strides in recent years when it comes to fostering the relevant skills young people need to enter the labour market. Nevertheless, there still seem to be substantial discrepancies between the competences that the formal education sector supplies and the abilities that the labour market demands. More specifically, the European Commission has stated that to this day mismatches between skills and jobs have grown by 29% in Europe since 2008.

The education we receive as youths has furthermore proven to be insufficient to survive the unpredictable nature of the labour market. Continuous changes in competence requirements as well as fast-changing working environments are making it increasingly more difficult for adults to remain competitive and productive in the current job market without further training. Although projections differ, the European Commission estimated in 2018 that by 2030 nearly 50% of all jobs will be automated, 65% of today's children will be employed in jobs that do not currently exist and more than one third of the core skills the education sector focuses on today will be different. This is exactly why lifelong learning is of vital importance for this age group as well. Eurostat found that the participation rate for lifelong learning by adults across the EU in 2018 stood at 11,1%, which is a slight increase of 0,2% from the previous year. To achieve the ET 2020 goal of 15% however, a lot of efforts still need to be made.

With this in mind, the European Commission published a recommendation in 2018 outlining the minimum competences every individual should develop throughout their lives. These so-called key competences for lifelong learning can be defined as the 8 non-job-specific competences each European citizen needs for personal fulfilment and development, employment, social inclusion and active citizenship. They include literacy, multilingualism, STEM, digital, personal, social and learning to learn, citizenship, entrepreneurship, and cultural awareness and expression. To achieve a successful labour market integration where the gap between education and employment is bridged and where more focus is placed on the importance of key competences for lifelong learning, encompassing yet specific initiatives need to be adopted by all levels of stakeholders. Consequently,

1. We propose on a transnational level that the EU institutions increase their efforts to inspire a change in mindsets within the Member States so they are encouraged to create an environment that is more friendly to lifelong learning and the key competences. With a strong and broad policy platform at its base, the EU must commit to raising awareness of the benefits as well as enhancing the perception of key competences for lifelong learning. Having this in mind, the EU should encourage more Member States to not only develop a national strategy to promote the key competences but also to create a national competence framework that comprehensively and explicitly addresses all the key competences.

2. We encourage the EU to promote cross-governmental collaboration in all relevant areas, including education, employment, integration, innovation... with regards to key competences for lifelong learning. By including key competences on a cross-curricular level and investing in peer-learning and the sharing of best practices, the significant differences that exist between their citizens' skills can be diminished.
3. At a national level, we call upon each EU Member State to prioritize the concrete implementation of these relevant skills into their education curricula on an interdisciplinary level. Seeing as the interdependence between the different key competences cannot be stressed enough, it is important to combine these multidimensional competences in pedagogical practice. The 2016 EURYDICE report on Entrepreneurship Education clearly states that Member States still have a lot of progress to make when it comes to incorporating entrepreneurial experiences into formal education. As a recent survey from JA Europe, called "Why Europe matters for youth", moreover concluded, entrepreneurship education has a strong positive effect on the active citizenship competence as well as many others. Since the Eurobarometer survey from March 2019 details that more than one third (36%) of young people are not interested in participating in civic activities even though 33% of respondents demonstrated that schools should prepare young people to be active citizens in democratic societies, we therefore encourage Member States to advance entrepreneurship education at all levels of education so both competences can be consolidated. According to the Digital Society and Economy Index 44% of Europeans do not have basic digital skills while 9 out of 10 jobs in the future will require digital skills. Already today, 40% of European companies have difficulties with finding ICT specialists. The European Commission has furthermore added that future jobs will not only require enhanced digital skills but also stronger quantitative and social skills. Both competences are underrepresented in current education curricula but could amplify each other when implemented on an interdisciplinary level. Lastly, the recent emphasis on the STEM competence should be fully shifted to the STEAM competence in order to fully recognize the equal value of culture and arts in this field. By mainstreaming the STEAM competence, the pivotal role that culture plays in sparking students' imagination and helping them discover new and creative ways to be innovative will finally come more to the forefront.
4. We strongly encourage national education institutions to listen to the call from European youths to invest more attention to critical thinking, democracy, entrepreneurship, financial competences and multilingualism. Creativity, adaptability and self-employment will be greatly promoted by devoting more time and resources to entrepreneurship education, which is something 38% of young people have demonstrated to be a priority for them. Through sharing of best practices, peer-learning and cross-border networking between formal education institutions, they will furthermore stay up-to-date on key competences practices and reduce the skill gap on a regional, national and transnational level.
5. We urge employers to play a more prominent role in the lifelong learning cycle of their employees on a regional level. Adapting the education landscape is not sufficient since the labour market requires the continuous re-skilling of workers. To achieve professional resilience at all ages, employers need to fundamentally support the lifelong learning of their employees by investing more in adult learning programs that focus on the specific skills necessary for the particular jobs they offer. At the moment, this employer engagement is still lacking substantially, with Eurostat estimating that for example only 8% of employees in the EU27 countries carried out a training paid or proved by their employer to improve their digital skills in 2018.
6. We call for an increased role of the non-formal and informal education sector on a local level to help foster these key competences for lifelong learning. By cooperating

effectively with these stakeholders, a more supportive and practical dimension can be added to lifelong learning. The skills acquired outside of the formal education system should furthermore be formally recognized and validated through certificates and tools such as YouthPass. Since particularly vulnerable and marginalised groups, including migrants, youths and people with lower qualifications, have difficulties up-skilling or re-skilling through formal education, this will benefit their learning outcomes immensely and foster more inclusive communities.

We strongly believe that there is still a lot more we can do to help foster key competences for lifelong learning in every individual. By investing in the development of each European individual, we can not only add more value to our economy as a union but also to our society as a whole.