Revision of the Europass framework

With more than 60 million CVs created, the Europass framework is the best known European initiative for documenting skills, qualifications and professional experience. Despite having undergone several improvements since its launch, major challenges remain regarding its tools and services due to recent technical, educational and labour market developments. The European Commission's proposal would revise the Europass tools (and repeal Decision 2241/2004/EC). The objective is to ensure the realisation of the tools' full potential and to update them so that they meet ever-shifting requirements (for instance, the increasing role of non-formal skills and digitalisation). It also aims to raise public awareness and to ensure better synergies with other online tools in the same domain, in order to allow matching, reuse and integration of data. The proposal is based on two evaluations and includes four different scenarios which build progressively on each other. In the European Parliament, the Culture and Education Committee and the Employment and Social Affairs Committee will jointly adopt a report on the topic. The draft joint report highlights the importance of the voluntary aspect of the Europass portal and its links to other tools in the field of education and training. Furthermore, it emphasises the importance of the national centres and of respecting the requirements and expectations of all users and providers.

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


Committees responsible: Culture and Education (CULT); Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL)

Rapporteurs: Svetoslav Hristov Malinov (EPP, Bulgaria); Thomas Mann (EPP, Germany)

Shadow rapporteurs: Monika Smolková (S&D, Slovakia); Marita Ulvskog (S&D, Sweden); Andrew Lewer (ECR, United Kingdom); Jana Žitnánská (ECR, Slovakia); Martina Dlabajová (ALDE, Czech Republic); Ilhan Kyuchyuk (ALDE, Bulgaria); Nikolaos Chountis (GUE/NGL, Greece); Tania González Peñas (GUE/NGL, Spain); Jill Evans (Greens/EFA, United Kingdom); Jean Lambert (Greens/EFA, United Kingdom); Dominique Bilde (ENF, France); Joëlle Mélin (ENF, France)

Next steps expected: Adoption of report in committee.
Introduction

On 4 October 2016, the European Commission adopted the ‘Proposal for a decision on a common framework for the provision of better services for skills and qualifications (Europass) and repealing Decision No 2241/2004/EC’. The raison d’être of this proposal is that the Europass tools created in 2004 do not necessarily reflect the changing needs of potential users, changes in learning and communication habits, or current and future demand created by technological developments. The Commission aims to modernise the Europass toolkit by simplifying it and reinforcing its service orientation, including adding a new feature – a tool allowing for the anticipation of labour-market trends and skill needs, based on different data collections. Further goals include widening the scope of users in order to include disadvantaged groups on the labour market. The revision of the Europass decision will also seek to enable tools and services to better support transparency and understanding of skills and qualifications. Finally, by bringing together information currently provided by different tools, such as the Learning opportunities and qualifications in Europe portal, the EU skills panorama or the European skills, competences, qualifications and occupations (ESCO) portal, the Europass toolkit should also contribute to the quality assurance of the acquired skills.

The proposal is linked to the first of the ten priorities of the Commission, namely ‘A new boost for jobs, growth and investment’, and is part of the ‘new skills agenda’, adopted on 10 June 2016. It is engrained in previous initiatives of the Commission on new skills and jobs, including the 2010 communication, ‘An agenda for new skills and jobs,’ the 2012 communication, ‘Rethinking education: investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes,’ and the ‘Employment package’.

The proposal is also in line with the Regulation on a European network of employment services (EURES), which envisages synergies and cooperation between Europass and EURES, in particular as regards the use of the classification of ESCO. The proposed decision is also consistent with the Recommendation on a skills guarantee, another action under the ‘new skills agenda’ for Europe.

There have been several technical developments since the original Europass decision, but the current proposal is the first time a revision has been put forward.

Context

With more than 126 million website visits, 93 million document template downloads and 60 million CVs created online since 2005, Europass is one of the most successful and cost-effective EU initiatives of the past ten years.¹

The overall objective of the Europass initiative is to support educational and working mobility in Europe by making skills and qualifications transparent and easy to understand for learners, jobseekers and employers, as well as education and training institutions.

Europass is a portfolio which consists of five documents, namely:

- the Europass Curriculum Vitae (CV) completed by individuals to report on their qualifications, professional experience, skills and competences;
- the Europass Language Passport (ELP) completed by individuals to report on their language skills;
- the Europass Certificate Supplement (ECS) issued by the authorities that award vocational educational and training (VET) certificates;
- the Europass Diploma Supplement (EDS) issued by higher education institutions to their graduates alongside their degree or diploma; and
- the Europass Mobility Document (EMD) completed by the relevant home and host organisations for recording any organised period of time that a person spends in another European country for the purpose of learning or training.

There are other EU online information services and tools which are partially linked to, and whose functions may overlap with, those of Europass, including:

- online tools for the documentation of skills (such as EURES, Youthpass);
- tools for career and learning guidance (Euroguidance);
- tools to assist jobseekers and employers (EURES);
- tools for recognition of skills and qualifications (ENIC/NARIC networks);
- skills forecasting data (EU skills Panorama);
- general conceptual frameworks (European Qualifications Framework (EQF)); and
- tools for common terminology of skills, qualifications and competences (ESCO).

Existing situation

The single European framework for the transparency of qualifications, Europass, was established by Decision 2241/2004/EC of the European Parliament and the Council. The Europass initiative is administered by the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL); Cedefop, which is responsible for the website and provides expertise for development and implementation; and the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), which coordinates the operating subsidies and monitors the national Europass centres. In addition to the EU Member States, members of Europass include Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland, Turkey, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.
In the individual countries, the activity is coordinated by the EQF national coordination points, Euroguidance centres and National Europass Centres.\(^2\)

Since the launch of the initiative, some additional technical developments have been incorporated in Europass, such as:

> development of a tool to design a cover page to complement the Europass CV;

> development of the Europass skills passport, an electronic portfolio for storing the Europass documents;

> adaptation of the CV editor for use on mobile devices;

> enhancement of the CV tool to make it more interactive;

> launch of an initiative to improve the interoperability of Europass with other services; and

> ongoing development of the Europass portal.

**Parliament’s starting position**

The proposal is in line with the recommendation of the European Parliament and Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF). The Recommendation created a common reference framework of eight European generic levels of learning, which serves as a ‘translation grid’ between national qualifications frameworks in the EU and beyond. Such levels are intended to support the transparency and comparability of qualifications. The recommendation also addressed the validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

The European Parliament resolution on Youth Employment of 17 July 2014 focused on promoting relevant skills for a modern economy and lifelong learning. It called on the European Commission and the Member States to further improve the transparency and recognition of qualifications within the EU, in particular through the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training, Europass and the European Qualifications Framework.

In its resolution on skills policies for fighting youth unemployment of 19 January 2016, the European Parliament emphasised the importance of addressing skills shortages and mismatches by promoting and facilitating mobility for learners, as well as cross-border recognition of qualifications, through a better use of all EU tools and programmes. These include Erasmus+, the European Qualifications Framework, the European Skills Passport, the Youth Guarantee, the Europass CV, the entrepreneurial skills pass, and EURES.

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\(^2\) The number of bodies managing the centres is different depending on the country: 12 states have one managing body, 17 have two bodies, and seven countries have three.
In its resolution on Erasmus+ and other tools to foster mobility in VET – a lifelong learning approach of 12 April 2016, the European Parliament welcomed the tools developed by the Commission, such as the EQF, Europass, EURES, and the Learning Opportunities and Qualifications in Europe platform (Ploteus), which offer information on vocational education and training (VET) and mobility. However, the Parliament regretted the fact that these tools are not sufficiently known or used. It therefore calls on the Commission, the Member States and public employment bodies to broadcast and raise awareness of the Erasmus+ programme and other tools aimed at promoting mobility in the area of VET.

Council & European Council starting position

The proposal is in line with the Council recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning. This recommendation invited Member States to have arrangements in place for the validation of learning acquired outside formal education and training.

The Council recommendation of 28 June 2011 and the Council conclusions of 23 November 2015 on reducing early school-leaving highlighted both the importance of high-quality ‘second chance’ schemes and other opportunities responding to the specific needs of early school-leavers (such as personalised, age-appropriate and innovative teaching, and flexible educational pathways). These schemes should ensure that knowledge, skills and competences acquired by these means, including through non-formal and informal learning, are recognised and validated.

One of the tasks for the future set out by the European Council of 27 June 2014 was to step up the fight against unemployment, in particular for young people not in employment, education or training (NEETS) by promoting the right skills for the modern economy and lifelong learning, as well as by facilitating mobility of workers, especially in fields with persistent vacancies or skills mismatches.
Preparation of the proposal

Two evaluations of the Europass framework were carried out for the European Commission in 2008 and 2013.3

The first evaluation, covering the 2005-2007 period, confirmed that the Europass portfolio has the potential to facilitate mobility. Users were generally satisfied with the documents and the guidance offered by Europass. The survey showed that the tools were more useful for individuals than for employers or educational institutions. The analysis highlighted the need for more EU funding, better communication on the initiative, and more coherence and complementarity with other transparency initiatives and tools.

The second evaluation covered the 2008-2012 period. It confirmed once again that the Europass documents are useful means for persons wishing to work and study in other countries. They are also beneficial for employers looking for a skilled workforce, and they have become even more relevant to the unemployed. The evaluation also recommended that Europass be simplified, become more target-oriented and be kept more up-to-date. Synergies between Europass and other European initiatives, in particular guidance and information services, should also be further improved. The evaluation also emphasised that Europass documents have not evolved sufficiently to allow for the description of different types of learning and skills, for instance those acquired through non-formal or informal learning. The evaluation also suggested merging the diploma supplement (a document explaining the nature, level, context, content and status of higher education qualifications) with the certificate supplement (a similar document issued for vocational training) into one single document.

Although no formal impact assessment was carried out by the Commission, both the proposal and the Commission working document both mention a baseline scenario and four options which are progressive and build on each other.

The baseline scenario does not provide new activities or measures. Rather, it aims to improve the implementation of the existing ones by, for instance, simplifying documents for communicating skills and qualifications, improving online tools and services, reducing duplication of information, and increasing awareness. However, these actions would be carried out on a case-by-case basis, without coordinated efforts.

Beyond this baseline, the first option intends to enhance and simplify existing documents and online tools, adapt them to the new needs of a digitalised world, reduce duplication, and avoid the need to use multiple tools for documenting skills through a coordinated common approach.

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3 The legal basis for these evaluations is Article 15 of Decision 2241/2004/EC of 15 December 2004 on a single Community framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences, which states: ‘by 1 January 2008 and then every four years, the Commission shall submit to the European Parliament and the Council an evaluation report on the implementation of this Decision, based on an evaluation carried out by an independent body’.
The second option aims, in addition to the action included in the first option, to integrate and interlink relevant EU tools and services for skills and qualifications (such as Europass, EU Skills Panorama, Learning opportunities and qualifications portal, and EURES) in a clear and comprehensive way.

The third option, building on the previous two, includes the provision of tools and services by one integrated network of centres at national level. Its mandate would also be to provide advice and guidance to users, and promote and support the use of the online tools and services offered at EU level. These integrated centres would also allow for more coordinated promotion of tools and services.

The fourth option would go further by proposing better exploitation of data for diverse purposes (such as job matching) and would harmonise online tools and services with digital developments. This option could possibly raise concerns regarding data protection.

The changes the proposal would bring

The objective of the proposal of the European Commission is to revise the Europass initiative in order to provide better services for skills and qualifications to individuals, employers and other stakeholders. It also aims to provide better visibility of skills and qualifications in order to support mobility across professions, sectors, regions and borders.

Within these general objectives, the following specific aims can be identified:

> As the Europass documents no longer meet today’s needs resulting from labour market changes and evolution in learning environments and procedures (for instance the increasing role of skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning), the current Europass tools should be more adapted to support individuals’ specific needs resulting from these changes. They should, for example, allow the recording and self-assessment of transversal skills.

> Due to developments in information technology, the Europass tools (which are a set of fixed templates, printable or completed online) should be transformed into more flexible tools, allowing for the presentation of skills and qualifications in other, less traditional formats, including graphical. They should also be adapted to social media and mobile applications.

> Europass needs to be better harmonised with other relevant tools. For now, it does not have sufficient synergies with such tools and some features of Europass unnecessarily overlap with online tools offering skills documentation, career and learning guidance, skills and qualifications recognition, services for jobseekers, and forecasting of skill needs.

> Services for skills and qualifications in Member States are promoted and supported by several different centres or EU-supported contact points (Euroguidance centres, European qualification network national coordination points, National Europass centres, EURES advisers) which often show a lack of coordination and uneven geographical spread. The proposal designates the national skills coordination point as the body responsible for the coordination of activities associated with implementing the Europass Decision and linked tasks related to the EQF, validation, skills intelligence and guidance.
To avoid terminological inconsistencies, the proposal establishes the classification of European skills, competences, qualifications and occupations as a common reference in the exchange of information and documents on occupations, skills and qualifications.

In order to increase general awareness, Europass should be more visible at national and local level. Europass is currently mainly used by social groups with higher digital literacy; conversely, more disadvantaged groups such as persons with lower levels of education, senior citizens or long-term unemployed persons are often not aware of its existence and therefore cannot benefit from the tools.

Constant changes in society and the learning and working environment necessitate continuous development of tools and services. Currently, there is no clear strategic approach to anticipate needs and developments, and the proposal calls for the creation of a common approach to provide services still under development and anticipate future developments.
Views

Advisory committees

The Committee of the Regions (CoR) adopted an opinion on the New Skills Agenda for Europe on 7 December 2016; and the Economic and Social Committee (EESC) adopted its opinion on the same topic on 22 February 2017. In both opinions, a chapter is dedicated to the Europass framework. The CoR emphasises the fact that the revised Europass framework must draw on current local and regional experience, in order to ensure accurate and real-time information about skills demand and supply. The EESC supports the new Europass Framework, particularly the move from using Europass as a document-based facility to a service-based platform. It notes that the framework should be accessible to persons with disabilities.

National parliaments

The deadline for the submission of reasoned opinions on the grounds of subsidiarity was 30 November 2016. No reasoned opinion was adopted. The German Bundesrat reacted in a letter, questioning the added value of Europass and expressing its disapproval for the obligatory interlinking of Europass and the ESCO framework. The Italian Senate also raised a few concerns: the Europass platform and its governance might prove weak as a result of Member States’ different stances on education; the system seems to lack flexibility as well as adaptability to the requirements of Member States; the scope of the tools made available by the proposal might cause the system to slow down in the long run; and the proposal should include a deadline for its implementation by Member States.

Stakeholders’ views

In 2014, a public consultation was carried out for the preparation of an initiative called, at that time, ‘European area for skills and qualifications’ and addressed amongst other things the efficiency of existing skills tools. The result of this public consultation was that, concerning the current range of web tools, there was a significant need for improvement in the area of skills and qualifications. There was also strong support for merging Europass documents. In addition, respondents backed the creation of a ‘one-stop shop’ providing integrated services on the full range of European services on learning opportunities, career guidance and the recognition of qualifications. Furthermore, the consultation found that existing tools for transparency were not entirely adapted for recognising the outcomes of digital learning.

The same year, a special edition of Eurobarometer was issued on the European Area for Skills and Qualifications addressing, amongst other things, the views of individuals on the tools and their effectiveness. One result of this survey was that Europass is the best known tool for documenting skills and qualifications, known by 15% of respondents at EU level. Awareness among more educated and younger persons is approximately 10 percentage points higher. The majority of respondents (69%) highlight the importance

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4 This section aims to provide a flavour of the debate and is not intended to be an exhaustive account of all different views on the proposal. Additional information can be found in related publications listed under ‘EP supporting analysis’.
of the possibility of acquiring a qualification through flexible learning pathways (education, vocational education and training and work experience).

In 2016, several targeted consultations\(^5\) were carried out on the elements of the Europass proposal. In this context, social partners provided their feedback on the policy networks supported by Erasmus+ (EQF national coordination points, national Europass centres and Euroguidance centres). They agreed that the current fragmentation of services for skills and qualifications represented a challenge, and they therefore welcomed the idea of more integration and synergy, also in relation to the integration of existing national contact point networks. They pointed out that there is a need to establish closer links with governmental skills agencies or observatories and social partners. The Europass framework was generally appreciated for its accessibility to individuals; however, improvements are necessary, in particular regarding the diploma supplement and the certificate supplement. Efforts to treat certain elements consistently between the two supplements could be helpful in raising visibility and reinforcing use. The consultations also identified a need to focus more on guidance issues, which cannot be properly addressed through web-based tools and services but require a face-to-face approach with users.

This same need was pointed out during the consultation with civil society, which also asked for simplified administrative procedures and longer-term planning compared to the current annual exercise. The latter would be in line with the European Commission’s proposal to simplify the operation and financing of the networks.

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\(^5\) Among social partners, European civil society organisations, national public employment services, European social fund managing authorities, policy networks (EQF, Europass, Euroguidance), European cities, education and training providers, national education and training policy makers.
Legislative process

The European Commission adopted the proposal for a decision on a common framework for the provision of better services for skills and qualifications (Europass) on 4 October 2016.

The Commission presented the proposal at the Council of the European Union on 13 October 2016. Europass was one of the topics mentioned at the Education, Youth, Culture and Sports Council on 21 November 2016. The Council noted that working on the Europass framework would be one of the priorities of the Maltese Presidency in the domain of culture and education.

In the European Parliament, the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) and the Committee on Culture and Education (CULT) are jointly, under Rule 55, preparing a report on the Europass framework (rapporteurs: Svetoslav Hristov Malinov (EPP, Bulgaria) and Thomas Mann (EPP, Germany)).

The draft report, published on 6 March 2017, draws attention to the following points:

> making Europass a completely new instrument would be a drastic step and would lead to a heavy administrative burden for Member States;

> Europass should not become a 'one stop' portal on education and training, but for better synergy it should be linked to other EU tools already providing services in this domain;

> Europass should aim to improve the understanding of learning acquired, not only in formal but also in non-formal and informal settings, as well as through practical experience, including mobility;

> the National Europass Centres should be the cornerstones of the new framework;

> the voluntary aspect of Europass should be preserved;

> Europass services should be adapted to the needs and expectations of all users and providers (for instance, learners, job-seekers, employers, SMEs, education and training facilities, social partners, Europass Centres and national authorities responsible);

> the core targets of Europass should respect the principles of diversity and responsibility, simplification, effectiveness and efficiency, while taking into consideration national structures and administrative arrangements;

> obligations as well as the administrative and financial burden for Member States must be clearly predictable and balanced regarding costs and benefits;

> use of the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations framework (ESCO) as the basis for the Europass referencing terminology is not possible, as ESCO is an instrument which has not been fully developed, tested or approved by the Member States. Further testing and evaluation of the cost-effectiveness and relevance of ESCO for the labour market should be supported.
References

EP supporting analysis

Other sources
Better services for skills and qualifications (Europass), European Parliament, Legislative Observatory (OEIL).

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