

Low skilled take their qualifications “one step up”

edited by
PAOLO FEDERIGHI, FRANCESCA TORLONE

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3. FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents the recommendations which derive from the analysis of success factors. They are strictly based on evidence drawn from the 65 good practices and selected case studies analysed. In this sense they are founded upon elements of evidence emerging from the empirical material collected as well from the interpretation of the authors.

3.1. Political and institutional framework orientation

Paolo Federighi

Current experiences and the wealth of good practices show that in Europe there is widespread innovative development produced in response to the potential demand for learning from the 77 million low skilled citizens.

Recognise the urgency of developing quality competence supply to the low-skilled

The wealth of solutions adopted shows that the problem is not in understanding what to do or how to intervene. The problem lies in deciding whether to finally provide a sustainable and sound reply to the potential demand for learning from so many millions of people, and to activate the demand.

The European Union and its Member States should decide whether or not Europe can realise its economic growth for 2020 in social and equity terms, without fully including the human and professional potential of so many millions of low skilled. This is often a matter of low cost labour, that feeds the informal economy, yet which – if better qualified – would more effectively participate in developing the quality of products and services, and would reduce the social costs deriving from their frequent recourse to social and health policies (from the incidence of job accidents and deaths, to a greater exposure to all kinds of diseases).

The European Union has done much for the other three quarters of the European population, giving them opportunities that have obtained

significant results (such as in the field of higher education). In the strategic frameworks to 2020, so far there are no provisions for priorities and strategies for evaluating the impact in terms of reducing the phenomenon of the low-skilled. The only positive exception is the attention dedicated to containing early school leaving and the illiteracy problems among young people that it entails.

But to this regard, like other Lisbon Strategy priorities, "among concrete commitments and actions still a discrepancy of implementation and fulfilment remains". Radical problems require radical responses, mobilizing all stakeholders: nonetheless this has not affected the necessity to reduce the number of low skilled individuals in Europe.

The European Union must encourage the effort of Member States and social partners to recognise that the problem exists.

Adopt immediate, stabilising and appropriate strategies and measures

Without special interventions, today we know that in 2020 more than one fifth of the population between the ages of 25 and 35 years will be low skilled and lacking key competences for lifelong learning.

We must have more precise goals to achieve by 2020. These goals must include the following priorities:

- a) Know the exact dimension of the low-skilled phenomenon, its distribution among various economic sectors and among various classes of the population. Research and statistical services must assume responsibility for this field of study and guarantee its annual monitoring and communicate their findings;
- b) Recognise and acknowledge the necessity to reduce the number of low skilled in Europe as well as adopt strategies that would ensure a realistic but relevant impact: a reduction of millions per year could represent the goal for the next decade;
- c) Choose, implement and evaluate – using the Open Method of Coordination – a package of urgent indirect measures that would impact on:
 - I. Preventing the phenomenon, with special attention to education and training of young people with little schooling;
 - II. Educating and training young parents with an inadequate educational background;
 - III. Reinforcing education and training measures for the unemployed in particular and for the low-skilled (i.e. contribute to their "flexicurity");
 - IV. Promoting basic on-the-job training for low-skilled in employment;
 - V. Developing or creating local, regional, national systems that are characterised by combined action and involvement of a variety of key committed actors and that guarantee service continuity and supply.

Shared commitment: new policy measures strengthening the policy framework

Member States must introduce the requirement that all economic and social organisations, public and private, define their own *Skills and learning development plans* for upgrading the qualifications of low skilled people.

Each commune, each public and private institution, company, organisation of social interest has to:

1. define and adopt a *Document of competence need analysis* defining the minimal level of competences required to live and work in its environments.
2. adopt a *Yearly Action Plan* as a planning tool for implementing the actions needed to enable everybody reach an adequate level of competence, ideally not lower than the equivalent of EQF level 2.

There are no prescribed requirements standards for the supply learning opportunities in this context. The focus is on learning outcomes.

The Yearly Action Plan should be a duty supported through financial and fiscal incentives delivered by the State.

The dimensions of the problem are vast. In some countries they concern half, and even more, of the workforce. The effects of the crisis combined with today's performance of the school system and the characteristics of migratory phenomena foresee that the supply of skills available on the job market will be slight and inadequate.

Tackling the problem means, above all, taking action with people who have worked in some type of productive activity, who are waiting for work or who, in any case, live in an organised social context. For others, attention must be given to primary subsistence and social integration needs.

The answer to this problem must be wide-ranging and varied. It must be based on the concerted effort of all the social actors who benefit from the development of skills in this sector of the population, and who take on this goal as their ethical responsibility. Public intervention alone, through the current systems of adult education, shows that results can only be guaranteed for a limited percentage of the targeted population and, mainly, for the unemployed.

This is not just a problem of insufficient resources. Even in the countries where programmes with significant impact goals are adequately financed, there are difficulties in achieving the target: the number of participants is lower than expected and available financial allocations are not entirely used.

For these reasons, the State – and in particular the Ministries of Education and Labour – must assume the role of sponsor and regulator, requesting action from the others: companies and social partners for employed workers, the municipalities for unemployed citizens, health system structures for the ill, the army for soldiers, prisons for prisoners, com-

munity and religious membership organisations for their members, etc.

Each social actor must have a *Skills and learning development plan* in order to monitor and be constantly aware of the skills development needs of its members. It includes a *Yearly Action Plan* in which to describe concrete actions to guarantee rapid answers for their development needs.

Each undertaking, each organisation, must be free to adopt the most suitable, effective and sustainable solutions. Research shows that there is a plurality of methods, their effectiveness varyingly depending on context (learning embedded in work, the study clubs, dual models for the unemployed, etc.).

For this reason, and also due to the shortage of specialised adult teachers, it is appropriate that each organisation be left free to decide the teaching models to use for achieving its own Action Plan.

In the first place, this measure should produce a collective benefit, since it will enhance the quality of the offer of skills on the job market and will reduce the social and health costs of those with low education and training levels. In the second place, it should increase individual productivity, i.e. the Work Ability Index.

This is why implementation costs should be shared among the various actors involved: the direct costs should weigh on public finance, and, partially private, the indirect costs, such as the opportunity costs, on businesses and on private citizens.

Above all in this phase of introduction, the State should intervene with fiscal incentives aimed at supporting and rewarding the businesses and organisations involved in processing the documents, analysing skill needs and in the implementation of the Yearly Action Plan.

Short term initiatives

To begin implementation of the general recommendations, we feel that the European Commission should take the following initiatives:

1. Promote the **studies necessary to define the quantitative goals** that Europe can set for itself to increase competence supply and development, founded on and including part of the 77 million low-skilled citizens. We must know more about the actual dimensions of the problem and the sustainability of interventions. Therefore, the general quantitative goals to achieve, as well as the specific goals, must be defined in relationship to the various population segments, according to their social classes and productive sectors;
2. Promote the **Open Method of Coordination among decision makers on each of the five urgent measures** mentioned above: prevention, educating parents, active policies and training for the unemployed, basic on-the-job training, developing systems with multi-actor participation;
3. Promote collaboration with **local and regional governments with direct responsibilities in the field of education and training**

in order to work for reaching benchmarking and create a network of municipalities and regions that develop policies to eradicate illiteracy (15% of adults in lifelong learning in any period of one month). The realisation of the interventions, in many cases, does not only depend on the efforts of the State, but on local and regional policies too. Moreover, benchmarks at local and regional levels should be developed in order to promote identification and comparison of the different local policies capable of reducing the number of low-skilled adults.

4. European Institutions should recommend to Member States that they adopt a policy committing all socio-economic organisations to define their own **“Plan for competences and learning development”** for upgrading qualifications of low skilled people. The European Commission should support the Member States in defining minimal common denominators to drive and inspire the Plan and its implementation.
5. Also in policies and European programmes it is essential to promote adult basic education and training through all forms of learning – formal, non-formal and informal. Policies enabling the low-skilled to take their qualifications one step up concern education and training, and also social, regional and economic policies (agriculture, industry, commerce, environment, etc.). **Substantial European investments and incentives should be earmarked** for the funding of activities aimed at reaching low skilled adults, especially for those investments devoted to economic growth (i.e. agriculture, infrastructure, trade, etc.).
6. This wide commitment has to be accompanied by a strong **motivation and information campaign** addressed first and foremost to those responsible for the adoption of each **“Plan for competences and learning development”**. At the same time it has to be addressed to low-skilled people as well.

The European Commission should commit itself to promote “viral” information campaigns every year, in order to support the development of policies and interventions aimed at reaching low skilled adults. In this regard, it would be appropriate to concentrate the objectives of the campaigns on specific priorities affecting each organisation involved in the planning process.

3.2. Integrated strategic action

Simona Sava

Make the system comprehensive and well articulated

The approach to underprivileged target groups has to be complex; all relevant partners have to be involved, all suitable instruments and measures have to be combined.