



Ceemet
European Tech &
Industry Employers

Skills portability: A step closer to the single labour market

Position paper

March 2026

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Preliminary remarks

Ceemet welcomes, in principle, and while awaiting a more detailed analysis, the idea of establishing a future Skills Portability Initiative, aimed at enhancing the recognition and portability of skills and qualifications across the EU, independently of where they were acquired. Overall, we strongly support the objectives of the initiative to facilitate smoother intra-EU mobility of talent and especially to enhance the EU's attractiveness for skilled workers from third countries. Indeed, the lack of adequate skills continues to be one of the main obstacles to the competitiveness of MET companies. Improving the functioning of the internal market for skills is, therefore, central to the competitiveness and growth of European industry.

That said, the practical added value for companies still needs to be demonstrated, including how the initiative would facilitate simpler recruitment for the industry. Crucially, this future initiative must not place any additional administrative burden on companies.

Today, **questions remain as regards the link with existing tools**, such as the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), European Skills, Competences and Occupations (ESCO), Europass, and the future EU Digital Identity (EUDI) Wallets, etc. As the Commission rightly points out in its consultation document^[1], implementation of these tools is uneven across Member States. Hence, the connection between all these programmes needs to be clarified, and, in addition, the overlap between them must be avoided. Against this background, we also call for an evaluation of the effectiveness of these tools, as there are certainly synergies that can be exploited. Until proper evaluation has been conducted, we would caution against the development of additional EU tools in this field.

Indeed, there are plenty of instruments successfully used for the recognition of skills and qualifications at the national, sectoral, and regional levels. European tools should complement the existing (national) ones. It is important to avoid further fragmentation in this field as this would lead to confusion for businesses and workers alike.

On another note, while we welcome this initiative, we would like to stress that the recognition of skills and qualifications is neither the main obstacle to intra-EU mobility nor to the recruitment of foreign workers.^[2] We analyse this further below.

[1] Background note for Social partner hearing on the Skills Portability Initiative, DG EMPL, European Commission, 23 January 2026

[2] European Court of Auditors calculated that professional recognition is only used in 6% of the cases of EU mobility. However, there is no data showing how many EU citizens have moved to another country without being able to exercise their profession.<https://www.brusselstimes.com/1123273/citizens-face-difficulties-having-professional-qualifications-recognised-say-eu-auditors>





Introduction

In its Communication on the Union of Skills of March 2025, the European Commission announced the development of a Skills Portability Initiative (SPI). As part of the forthcoming Fair Mobility Package to be presented in October 2026, the SPI is intended to enhance the portability and recognition of skills and qualifications across the European Union, irrespective of where they were acquired. The initiative seeks to remove practical and administrative barriers that hinder mobility and to promote greater transparency and comparability of competences throughout the Single Market.

By simplifying recruitment procedures for employers and facilitating cross-border labour mobility for workers, the Skills Portability Initiative has the potential to contribute meaningfully to addressing persistent skills shortages. In doing so, it can support productivity, innovation and the long-term competitiveness of Europe's manufacturing, engineering and technology-based (MET) industries, which are undergoing twin technological and green transitions.

Ceemet, as a recognised European social partner representing 200,000 companies and providing 19 million direct and 40 million indirect jobs across Europe, underlines that building a genuine single market for skills is essential to sustain Europe's industrial base. Skills are a cornerstone of competitive MET industries. In this paper, Ceemet sets out its views and key considerations regarding the forthcoming initiative.



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What can be done to enhance skills portability?

1. Removing existing barriers in unregulated professions

Ceemet endorses the Commission's goal to remove existing barriers (be it administrative, redundant recognition procedures or others) that hamper the portability of skills and qualifications in unregulated professions across borders.

In this regard, we firmly believe that the digitisation of qualifications and skills credentials will facilitate the recognition of skills and qualifications across Member States. Hence, we see as a positive development the Commission's approach to leveraging the EU Identity Wallet, which will be part of the Fair Mobility Package. Indeed, in order to make hiring decisions, employers need one thing above all: transparency. Hence, digital qualifications will be more effective provided that the systems are interoperable throughout the EU. By making qualifications and further training more easily accessible, the EUDI wallet can further strengthen the mobility of skilled workers.

Against this background, we also believe that it is important to increase the visibility of already existing instruments, such as EQF, which is used within companies' human resources functions but not as systematically by SMEs (with significant variation across Member States).

With regard to the recognition of skills and qualifications within non-regulated professions, which represent the vast majority in the MET industries, we would like to stress that we favour a trust-based approach, allowing employers to hire professionals and workers in a more simplified manner. Indeed, proof of professional experience can be decisive in a recruitment decision.

We firmly believe that the digitisation of qualifications and skills credentials will facilitate the recognition of skills and qualifications across Member States.



Against this background, we would also like to mention that today, given the recruitment difficulties faced by companies, some of them hire candidates based on simple interpersonal skills criteria and usually take care of their training internally.

Last but not least, Ceemet would like to mention that over the years, we have gathered very good examples of the so-called "digital initiatives" developed at national, regional, and sectoral levels, which have been successfully deployed to facilitate the recognition and portability of qualifications and skills. Many of these good examples are social partners' own initiatives^[1].

We therefore call upon EU policymakers to facilitate a structured exchange of best practices and to leverage these successful examples. It would be greatly productive if all schemes that work at national, regional, or sectoral levels were integrated into the wallet in order to have a single common instrument.

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2. Improving recognition processes for regulated professions

To our knowledge, there are no regulated professions in our industries. Hence, whereas we are not commenting in depth on this Commission proposal, we see it as a positive development that the European Commission intends to facilitate, modernise and expand recognition processes for regulated professions.

[1] For example, METAPPRENDO (<http://metapprendo.it/>) is a MET sectoral social partner initiative in Italy. Under this scheme workers in the MET industries in Italy have a digital dossier where the company can record the training of an employee (through blockchain and other technologies) . This dossier is portable. In this way, if an employee changes company, he/she brings the digital dossier with him/she, and companies have access to the updated 'skills set' of the new staff member. It is an example for the recognition and portability of skills acquired in a digital manner, even if focused on the Italian labour market.

3. Simplifying procedures for the recognition of qualifications and skills of third-country nationals (TCNs)

As regards third-country nationals, we welcome the Commission's intention to simplify the procedures on the recognition of skills and qualifications and the portability of third-country nationals' skills. This initiative could help facilitate faster labour market entry for non-EU workers and thus contribute to addressing labour shortages.

As rightly pointed out by the Commission^[1], the majority of Member States encounter similar challenges in recognising the qualifications and validating skills acquired in non-EU countries. In most EU countries, the formal recognition of foreign qualifications is extremely complex, bureaucratic, and time-consuming. In addition, multiple bodies are often involved in the recognition of qualifications, and numerous documents must be translated and submitted at different stages, making the process cumbersome, costly, and complicated.

In short, these extremely bureaucratic procedures end up being a major disincentive for foreign workers and EU companies alike and therefore represent a significant obstacle to labour migration to Europe.

It is for these reasons that Ceemet welcomes the Commission Recommendation on the recognition of qualifications of TCNs, as it provides guidance to Member States on how to best simplify and accelerate the recognition of qualifications gained in non-EU countries, including by reducing processing times, facilitating access to electronic procedures, and reducing the burden for applicants.

Bureaucratic procedures end up being a major disincentive for foreign workers and EU companies alike and therefore represent a significant obstacle to labour migration to Europe.



For the same reason, Ceemet has, from the outset, been supportive of the Talent Pool^[2], an online platform that aims at connecting talents from all over the world with employment opportunities across Europe, making labour mobility easier and more accessible, particularly for SMEs. In this regard, we welcome the co-legislators' focus on a user-friendly design and accompanying targeted communication campaigns to raise awareness of the platform among workers and companies. We therefore call on the co-legislators to swiftly adopt and deploy this tool. At the same time, we would welcome further clarification on the interaction between the Talent Pool, the proposed Portability scheme, and the numerous national bodies involved in the recognition of foreign qualifications.

[1] Background note for Social partner hearing on the Skills Portability Initiative, DG EMPL, European Commission, 23 January 2026

[2] Ceemet position paper on the Commission proposal for a Regulation establishing an EU Talent Pool, 19 March 2024, <https://ceemet.org/position-papers/ceemet-position-paper-on-the-commission-proposal-for-a-regulation-establishing-an-eu-talent-pool/>





2

Which other challenges exist to the mobility of workers?

As already mentioned in our views, the recognition of skills and qualifications is not the main obstacle to reduced mobility within the EU. Rather, limited intra-EU mobility is primarily due to administrative obstacles, language barriers, and differences in regulatory frameworks and legal requirements, which make cross-border mobility even more challenging.

In the case of TCNs, the immigration rules and procedures are the main difficulty for the recruitment of foreign labour. The complexity of identifying the appropriate immigration pathway, excessively long and unpredictable processing times, uncertainty regarding final decisions, and the risks associated with employing foreign workers without valid work or residence permits continue to represent major obstacles for our companies seeking to recruit foreign labour. In some cases, companies are even required to pay a tax when they recruit a third-country national, which constitutes an additional obstacle.

Indeed, the recognition of qualification as such is not, in most Member States, a condition to get a work or a stay permit, as MET industries rely primarily on unregulated professions. Hence, if a company considers that a diploma obtained in a non-EU country is sufficient for the job, the person is free to enter the labour market provided he/she has the appropriate work and residence permit required by the Member State.

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Conclusion



Skills shortages and gaps remain widespread across all sectors of the economy, with nearly 75% of SMEs struggling to find the rightly skilled workforce they need to thrive^[1]. The MET industries are no exception. These recruitment difficulties undermine their competitiveness, innovation capacity, and the ability to create quality employment.

Ceemet therefore welcomes any Commission initiative aimed at improving the functioning of the internal market for skills by removing obstacles to the recognition of skills and qualifications across borders and thereby improving labour market mobility.

The digitalisation of recognition processes of skills and qualifications can certainly play an important role in this regard. Hence, as said above, we consider the forthcoming EU Digital Identity Wallet to be a positive development, as it has the potential to serve as a practical tool to support intra-EU mobility for employers and workers alike, notably by facilitating access to skills- and qualifications-related documentation, including diplomas, equivalence certificates, and related supplements in digital format.

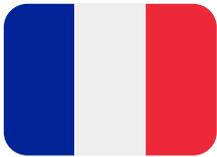
Likewise, we fully support efforts to simplify the recognition of skills and qualifications obtained in non-EU countries. As stated above, any scheme designed to simplify recognition and portability processes must be unbureaucratic and easy to use both for workers and companies – in particular SMEs – as this is the only way to ensure widespread uptake.

Finally, as the recognised sectoral social partner for the MET industries, Ceemet would also like to point out that it is crucial to consult and involve social partners and industry stakeholders in the development of these initiatives. Social partners have first-hand knowledge of the challenges faced by companies and workers in assessing the relevance of qualifications and their alignment with labour market needs. Hence, their involvement from the outset is, therefore, essential.

In a nutshell, any initiative that modernises and simplifies access to the labour market and supports companies in finding the skilled workforce they need can only be welcomed by Ceemet.

[1] European Year of Skills, May 2023- Skills shortages, recruitment and retention strategies in SMEs, <https://ceemet.org/position-papers/joint-statement-on-omnibus-package-streamlining-esg-and-due-diligence-regulation/>

Annexe 1: Sorting out the recognition of skills and qualifications of TCNs at the national level

Country	National examples
	<p><u>FINLAND</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tools, such as skills testing conducted in the country of origin, are used in Finland in order to verify that a candidate truly has the required skills before undertaking a costly recruitment process • In Finland, it is also very common to use staffing and recruitment agencies as intermediaries. These agencies handle skills testing and other verification processes to ensure that a candidate is suitable for the company (in the case of international recruitment). • The recognition of degrees and qualifications obtained abroad, is handled by the Finnish National Agency for Education. The process can take quite a long time, depending on the country where the degree was obtained.
	<p><u>FRANCE</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In France, a body called ENIC-NARIC facilitates the recognition of foreign qualifications. You can find more information here.
	<p><u>GERMANY</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Germany, the recognition portal provides information for the recognition of foreign professional qualifications.
	<p><u>THE NETHERLANDS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FME (the employers' organisation for the technology industry) is working on a skills passport. Together with partners, they are involved in an exploratory pilot coordinated by TNO[1], which focuses on how skills can be transparently described, validated and made portable across education, training and work. The pilot addresses key questions related to governance, trust, interoperability and the respective roles of public and sectoral actors. • FME is actively participating in the Dutch Skills Coalition, a partnership of sectors and branch organisations working towards a coherent and future-proof skills ecosystem. Through their involvement in several working groups, they contribute to the development of shared approaches for skills description, registration, validation, governance and communication. The aim is to create sector-overarching agreements that make skills more transparent, portable and broadly recognised across education and the labour market.

[1] TNO is a large non-profit research organisation that focuses amongst others on research policy effectiveness



About Ceemet

Set up in 1962, Ceemet is the European employers' organisation representing the interests of the metal, engineering and technology-based (MET) industries with a particular focus on topics in the areas of employment, social affairs, industrial relations, health & safety and education & training.

Ceemet members are national employers' federations across Europe and beyond, based in 20 countries. They represent more than 200,000 member companies, a vast majority of which are SMEs.

Ceemet members provide direct employment to 16 million people and indirect employment for 35 million people, and cover all products within the MET industrial sectors, detailed below.

Together, these companies make up Europe's largest industrial sector, both in terms of employment levels and added value, and are therefore essential to ensuring Europe's economic prosperity.

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