

## **EBI response to EU Skills Portability Initiative**

European Boating Industry (EBI) welcomes the Skills Portability Initiative and considers it highly relevant for addressing a persistent structural barrier within the EU's nautical tourism sector: the lack of effective mutual recognition of professional skipper qualifications for small commercial vessels (<24m).

Nautical tourism represents a significant part of the EU Blue Economy, generating up to 280,000 jobs and €45 billion annually. Charter operations, boat rental and associated marine services are largely SME-driven and play a crucial role in coastal, island and peripheral economies. However, the functioning of this market is hindered by fragmentation in qualification recognition.

Professional skippers face limitations in exercising their freedom of movement because their licences are not systematically recognised across Member States. In practice, skippers are often restricted to operating vessels flagged in the country that issued their qualification. Identical vessels under a different flag cannot be operated by the same professional. There is currently no effective EU-wide mechanism ensuring automatic or simplified mutual recognition.

Under the existing Professional Qualifications Directive (2005/36/EC, as amended), recognition procedures are typically handled on a case-by-case basis by national authorities. In the skipper context, this frequently entails individual administrative assessments, additional documentation requirements and, in most cases, de facto requalification. These processes are often lengthy and unpredictable, which is particularly problematic in a sector characterised by seasonality and short-term staffing needs. In practice, this means that there are very few skippers if any that have had their qualification recognised.

The economic implications are measurable. According to the Commission's Nautical Tourism Study, resolving the recognition barrier could generate €50–120 million in additional annual revenue, with updated estimates reaching up to €148 million per year. The absence of a functioning recognition framework therefore constitutes a tangible "cost of non-Europe".

Importantly, the technical groundwork for portability has already been developed. EU-funded projects such as TRECNET, TCC-SCV and MedSkippers, demonstrated substantial alignment between national training schemes and identified a common core curriculum, complemented by national "top-up" modules to address specific legislative or geographic requirements. This approach provides a practical model compatible with the objectives of the Single Market and skills transparency tools.

EBI therefore encourages the Commission to use the Skills Portability Initiative to:

- Establish a structured EU framework for mutual recognition of professional skipper qualifications for vessels under 24m, building on the core curriculum approach.
- Ensure that recognition procedures are proportionate, transparent and subject to reasonable administrative timelines, avoiding disguised requalification requirements.
- Align skipper qualification recognition with broader EU instruments on skills transparency, vocational education and labour mobility.
- Ensure that any system is SME-friendly and digitally accessible, reflecting the operational realities of the charter sector.

**European Boating Industry**

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Transparency Register #74989093163-18