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NOTE

From:	Presidency
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Reskilling and upskilling as a basis for increasing sustainability and employability, in the context of supporting economic recovery and social cohesion - Draft Council Conclusions

With a view to the examination by the Social Questions Working Party, delegations will find attached a set of draft Council Conclusions on the above subject, as prepared by the Presidency.

Due to the current situation with COVID-19 and bearing in mind that the meetings of the Social Questions Working Party are currently cancelled, delegations are invited to provide their comments in writing, by 8 April 2020. The Presidency will prepare an amended text of the draft Conclusions based on the written comments.

To ensure the smooth progress of the work, the Presidency would kindly ask delegations to be constructive and to focus in their written input on the most important points for them, so that we can successfully complete the work on the draft Conclusions without several full rounds of consultation.

‘Reskilling and upskilling as a basis for increasing sustainability and employability, in the context of supporting economic recovery and social cohesion’

Draft Council Conclusions

RECALLING that

1. The first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights states that everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market.
2. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 commit to providing inclusive and equitable quality education at all levels and to promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all, especially for those in vulnerable situations.
3. The Council Recommendation on ‘Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults’ calls on Member States to support adults with low levels of skills and qualifications to acquire a minimum level of literacy, numeracy and digital skills and/or to acquire a broader set of skills by progressing towards higher qualifications.
4. The 2019 Employment Guidelines (Integrated Guideline 6) call on Member States to promote productivity and employability, in cooperation with the social partners, through an appropriate supply of relevant knowledge, skills and competences throughout people’s working lives that respond to current and future labour market needs.
5. The Communication of the Commission on the **European Green Deal** makes clear that managing an effective and socially just transition to a sustainable Europe will require changes in skills and attitudes for people of all ages and ambitious programmes to re-skill the workforce. The Communication announces the establishment of the Just Transition Fund, the development of a dedicated European competence framework and an update of the Skills Agenda and the Youth Guarantee. The proposal for a Regulation establishing the Just Transition Fund includes upskilling and reskilling of workers among the activities eligible for support, so as to equip the workforce with the skills needed to manage the green transition.

6. The Communication of the Commission on a **New Industrial Strategy for Europe** states that a competitive European industry respecting the highest social, labour and environmental standards requires a skilled workforce, able to adapt their skill sets to radical changes. It advocates that industry, national authorities, social partners and other stakeholders should join a Pact for Skills, which will unlock public and private investments in upskilling and reskilling the workforce.
7. The Communication of the Commission on an **SME Strategy for a sustainable and digital Europe** notes that the digital and green transitions pose particular challenges to small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which lack workers with the right skills. It notes that Member States, social partners and the EU level can facilitate access to skills development opportunities for managers, employees and potential founders of SMEs, and in particular for women.

CONSIDERING that:

8. The competitiveness of EU economies and industry is being affected by climate change, globalisation, demographic challenges and digital transformation, factors which are shaping skills demands through the creation and destruction of jobs as well as by changing the nature of existing occupations. Already now, the resulting changes in skills needs have translated into skills imbalances in various sectors and several geographical areas. Such transitions affect every part of our economy, society and industry.
9. The overall functioning of the economy, including the competitiveness of different industries and economic sectors, depends on recruiting and retaining a qualified workforce. Europe will need to ensure that education and training keep pace and equip the new generation of workers with the right skills, both transferable and specific.
10. The Coronavirus pandemic has disrupted the functioning of social and economic structures, strongly affecting, amongst other things, the formal and non-formal provision of initial and continuing education and training and related services; it has also highlighted their reliance on traditional on-site delivery and their limited capacity – in terms of infrastructure and skills – to take proper advantage of communications technology;

11. For individuals, their skills are a pathway to active citizenship, employability and prosperity. Given increasingly frequent job changes and flexible working patterns, there is a continuous need to learn, upskill and reskill. It is estimated that half of the current workforce will need to update their skills within the next five years.
12. The country reports produced in the framework of the European Semester provide a detailed picture of the skills challenges in the Member States, and Country Specific Recommendations regularly include suggestions to respond to these challenges, with particular reference to the need to upskill and reskill the workforce, raise the skill level of low qualified workers, and increase the labour market relevance of education and training.
13. Effective lifelong guidance policies and systems help individuals identify their skills, engage in skills validation processes and embark on the most appropriate learning pathways to further develop their skills.
14. In the context of the shortage of skilled labour in many sectors and/or regions, and the double need to increase the competitiveness of enterprises and the employability of workers, it is necessary to consider how to increase the participation of both individuals and employers in skills development.
15. Lifelong learning is a joint responsibility shared by the public sector, employers and individuals. The public sector has a particular role in providing education and training and in offering financial and non-financial support for skills development and recognition. Employers have a key role in upskilling and reskilling their employees when needs for new skills arise. While support from the public sector and employers is crucial, individuals need to acknowledge their responsibility in engaging in their own lifelong learning pathways
16. The demand for public employment services (PES) in supporting reskilling, upskilling and lifelong learning activities as well as in managing transitions is increasing. Better identification of skills is key to broaden the customer base and to improve and extend support and services. PES and private employment services should support employers looking for ways to increase the skills of their workforce and individuals wishing to increase their employability and career prospects.

17. Skills forecasting plays a vital part in planning education and training, which depends on cooperation and networking between employers, social partners, other relevant organisations, education and training providers and those preparing the forecasts.
18. The recently published 2018 update of the European Inventory of validation of non-formal and informal learning has shown that the provision of validation opportunities has increased, but progress is needed to make validation available and accessible to all potential beneficiaries;

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES, in accordance with their competences, and taking into account national circumstances, while respecting the role and autonomy of the social partners:

19. TO STRENGTHEN work-based learning, and improve skills monitoring and forecasting;
20. TO PROMOTE and IMPLEMENT accessible initiatives to **reskill and upskill** the workforce, to ensure their employability and productivity and keep the European economy sustainable and competitive in the context of a dynamic labour market and the current significant changes to business processes, especially due to digitalisation, automation, as well as environmental challenges and health crises;
21. TO SUPPORT individuals as they take responsibility for their continuous skills development, by providing targeted high-quality careers guidance, access of diverse target groups to services that are personalised and relevant to the individual, appropriate provision of learning pathways and skills validation opportunities, effective tools for personalised skills assessment, direct financial incentives or indirect aid such as paid leave;
22. TO ENHANCE systematic data collection and analysis for skills anticipation and ensure the link with the Europass platform on skills and qualifications; in this context, it is important TO CONTINUE WITH implementation of the tools required for anticipating future labour market needs;

23. TO INCREASE capacities of public employment services as they are a major actor in matching skills demand and supply;
24. TO IDENTIFY possible models for financing lifelong learning and the development of skills at individual level, since sustainable funding is especially important in the context of shortage of skilled labour;
25. TO PROMOTE the active participation of all stakeholders, including companies, administrations, social partners, chambers of commerce, industry and skilled crafts, education and training providers, youth and civil society organisations in actions to identify and address skills challenges;
26. TO TAKE ACTION to mitigate the impact of the disruption of education and training provision caused by the Coronavirus pandemic on learners of all ages, providers of education and training and related services, and society and the economy at large;
27. TO PROMOTE the further diversification of the delivery modes of formal and non-formal education and training, upskilling and reskilling initiatives, guidance and validation services, by mainstreaming the use of on-line provision as a complement and alternative to on-site provision;
28. TO TAKE FURTHER ACTIONS in response to the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, in particular by making validation arrangements more comprehensive and accessible, building upon the results of its forthcoming evaluation;
29. TO APPLY AND FURTHER DEVELOP different initiatives from ‘Skills Agenda for Europe’ with joint efforts of various public bodies of Member States, the social partners, industry and other interested parties to ensure that such actions produce the best possible outcomes.

CALLS UPON THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION:

30. TO KEEP the need for appropriate levels of relevant skills in the labour force high on the agenda of the Union;
31. TO REINFORCE AND UPDATE the ‘Skills Agenda for Europe’ to support Member States with putting in place labour market-relevant education and training and accessible upskilling and reskilling opportunities for both active and unemployed workers;
32. In the context of the New Industrial Strategy for Europe, TO CO-DESIGN AND CO-CREATE solutions with industry itself, as well as with social partners and other stakeholders;
33. TO PROMOTE A STRONG FOCUS in relevant EU funding mechanisms, especially within the European Social Fund, on skills anticipation, development, and recognition;
34. TO EXPLORE models and future funding perspectives to foster employment, social investments, social inclusion, accessibility, promote up- and reskilling opportunities of the workforce, lifelong learning and high quality education and training for all, including digital literacy and skills.
35. TO SUPPORT Member States with mainstreaming on-line provision of education and training, upskilling and reskilling opportunities and related services.

INVITES THE EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE:

36. TO USE the available information in their work on skills needs and matching and on available vocational education and training and adult learning;
37. TO CONTINUE with thematic and country-specific multilateral surveillance, where appropriate, on Member States’ performance and policies concerning skills development, lifelong learning, upskilling and reskilling; in this context, drawing on the expertise of the education and training field is crucial.

INVITES THE SOCIAL PARTNERS with full respect for their autonomy, to take the possible steps:

38. TO STRENGTHEN dialogue at the national and sectoral level, taking into account industrial relations and education and training practices in individual Member States, on the possibility of further developing public and private investment, and incentives and tools for implementing the upskilling/reskilling of workers, including a focus on worker commitment and efforts to work with micro, small- and medium-sized enterprises that may lack the capacity needed to support the development of skills within the enterprise itself;
39. TO CONTINUE WORKING on tailor-made approaches to lifelong learning, career guidance/career development in the work place; such approaches might be in particular tailor-made for specific occupations and/or sectors;
40. TO FURTHER ENGAGE in skills anticipation, development and recognition and TO PROMOTE a culture that encourages participation in lifelong learning at the workplace.

References:**1. EU Interinstitutional**

- European Pillar of Social Rights

https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/social-summit-european-pillar-social-rights-booklet_en.pdf

2. Council

- Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults, OJ C484, 24.12.2016, pp. 1-6
- Council conclusions on the Future of Work: Making it e-Easy (15506/17)
- Council conclusions on Future of Work: a Lifecycle Approach (10134/18)
- Council conclusions on Inclusive Labour Markets: Improving the employment of people in a vulnerable position in the labour market (14945/19)
- Council Decision EU 2019/1181 of 8 July 2019 on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States, OJ L 185, 11.7.2019, pp. 44-45
- [EMCO Key messages, endorsed by the Council (6528/20)]

3. European Commission

- Communications from the Commission to the European parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions:
 - The European Green Deal (COM(2019) 640 final)
 - A Strong Social Europe for Just Transitions (COM(2020) 14 final)
 - A New Industrial Strategy for Europe (COM(2020) 102 final)
 - An SME Strategy for a digital and sustainable Europe (COM(2020)103 final)
 - A New Skills Agenda for Europe (COM (2016) 381 final)
 - [Updated Skills Agenda for Europe (COM(2020) xxx final)]

- Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and the Council establishing the Just Transition Fund (COM(2020)22 final)
- 2020 European Semester: Country Reports (6395/1/20)

4. Other Union publications

Eurofound:

(2020) Game-changing technologies: Transforming production and employment in Europe

https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef19047en.pdf

Cedefop:

(2020) Empowering adults through upskilling and reskilling pathways

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/3081>

[European Economic and Social Committee:

SOC/629 Sustainable funding for lifelong learning and development of skills

EESC-2019-04762-00-02-PA-TRA]

Joint Research Center:

(2019) The changing nature of work and skills in the digital age

<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/508a476f-de75-11e9-9c4e-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

5. Other/Lifelong Learning Platform

(2019) position paper on 21st century learning environments

<http://lllplatform.eu/lll/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/LLLP-Position-paper-21CLE.pdf>