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OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: Council conclusions on skills and competences for the green transition

Delegations will find attached the abovementioned Council conclusions, approved by the Council (Education, Youth, Culture and Sport) at its meeting on 7 March 2023.

Council conclusions on skills and competences for the green transition

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

RECALLS the political background regarding skills and competences for the green transition as set out in the Annex to these conclusions.

UNDERLINES the European Council conclusions of 9 February 2023¹ calling for bolder, more ambitious action to be taken to further develop the skills that are required for the green and digital transitions through education, training, upskilling and reskilling to meet the challenges of labour shortages and the transformation of jobs, including in the context of demographic challenges.

WELCOMES the proposed initiative for a European Year of Skills 2023 and STRESSES the need for joint efforts on reskilling and upskilling for the green transition in a socially fair, inclusive, and just manner, and boosting the competitiveness of European companies and the resilience of European society.

RECOGNISES THAT:

1. The global environmental, climate and biodiversity challenges require an urgent global response. The green transition and the move towards sustainability, including the transition to a climate-neutral economy, is triggering the need for a fundamental transformation of our society across a wide range of sectors. Europe must lead by example, by delivering on ambitious environmental, climate and biodiversity goals, enhancing growth, competitiveness and quality job creation, while protecting the environment and ensuring a just transition to a more resource-efficient and circular economy.

¹ European Council conclusions adopted at the Special meeting of 9 February 2023 (EUCO 1/23).

2. To maintain its competitive advantage in technologies for the green transition and for sustainable development, the European Union needs to significantly increase the large-scale development, deployment, and demonstration of new technologies across sectors and across the single market, building new innovative value chains. New ‘green jobs’ will be created, while some jobs will be replaced and others redefined, requiring changed skill sets.
3. It is key to build on the engagement in and awareness of the green transition and sustainable development in society at large. A fundamental element in facilitating the green transition and sustainable development is the acquisition of key competences in a lifelong learning perspective, including from early years, which should be considered in the framework of all levels and types of education, training and learning pathways. A whole-institution approach to sustainability, incorporating all areas of activity, is important. Building on the Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on learning for the green transition and sustainable development², efforts to support education and training systems in taking action on the development of skills and competences for the green transition are urgently needed.
4. The skills and competences and skill sets required for the green transition are diverse in nature and continue to emerge and to be defined. GreenComp³, the European sustainability competence framework, describes ‘sustainability competences’ as covering the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed by learners of all ages to live, work and act in a sustainable manner. ‘Green skills’ relate to professional skills needed by all sectors and at all levels in the labour market for the green transition, including the creation of new green jobs. They also relate to transversal skills needed to enable critical thinking, systems thinking, problem solving and innovation.

² OJ C 243, 27.6.2022, p. 1.

³ European Commission, Joint Research Centre, *GreenComp, the European sustainability competence framework*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2022.

5. The green transition can only succeed if the EU has the skilled workforce for it. As set out in the Commission communication on A Green Deal Industrial Plan for the Net-Zero Age⁴, labour shortages, as proxied by the vacancy rate, doubled between 2015 and 2021 in sectors considered key for the green transition, and green transition technical skills are in growing demand. Green skills and the upskilling and reskilling of the workforce will be urgently needed to achieve the shift to a modern, resource-efficient, and competitive economy. Policies for initial and continuing, formal and non-formal education and training and investments geared towards skills and competences for the green transition hold the key to Europe's future resilience and prosperity.
6. Initial and continuing vocational education and training (VET), higher education and adult learning have a key role to play in responding to the need to counter and adapt to climate change, halt and reverse biodiversity loss, and make the green transition a reality by equipping young people and adults with the skills and competences they need to thrive in an evolving labour market and society, and by contributing to the development of green solutions through technological and social innovation. Through transnational cooperation, for example through the European Universities alliances and the Centres of Vocational Excellence, initial and continuing VET and higher education can reinforce their contribution to the green transition and sustainable development.
7. By meeting the needs of different types of learners and the labour market, VET and higher education systems can foster employability, social inclusion, social cohesion and gender equality, facilitate reskilling and upskilling, including through flexible and agile lifelong learning opportunities, and also contribute to increasing the number of skilled workers. In this context, and depending on national circumstances, adult learning can also increase adult participation in training throughout working life, in line with the upskilling and reskilling needs for the green transition.

⁴ COM(2023) 62 final.

AGREES THAT:

1. Adapting initial and continuing VET, higher education and adult learning to support the green transition requires the mapping of current and future skills needs, including the identification of new job profiles and skill sets, professional needs, and skills gaps. Cooperation between education and training providers (both public and private), public authorities, research organisations, employment services, social partners, companies, and other relevant stakeholders, both nationally and regionally, is essential to identify these emerging skills needs in the labour market. Furthermore, the follow-up of learners' transition into the labour market, for example through graduate tracking, can help to provide information about, for example, job matching and the relevance of acquired skills and competences.
2. Skills intelligence tools can further support the identification of current and future skills needs. In this context, the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations' (ESCO)⁵ taxonomy of skills for the green transition can contribute to a common understanding of what skills are needed for a successful green transition in the labour market and for example facilitate the mobility of learners and workers within the EU. These tools can also help Member States and education and training providers to identify green elements that could be part of initial and continuing VET or higher education qualifications and learning opportunities, as well as adult learning.
3. Ensuring up-to-date and relevant content of initial and continuing VET, higher education and adult learning is imperative given the changes in job profiles and the emergence of new professions as a result of the green transition. VET and higher education should, when relevant and in full accordance with institutional autonomy and academic freedom, be revised accordingly, with the creation of new qualifications or the embedding of green skills into existing qualifications.

⁵ ESCO (European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations) is the European multilingual classification of Skills, Competences and Occupations.

4. The delivery of education and training should correspond to the needs of those embarking on initial education and training as well as of those individuals who need to update their skills and competences in response to the requirements of their current job or to transition to new jobs and expanding sectors. There is therefore a need for Member States as well as for VET providers and higher education institutions to explore innovative and flexible ways of delivering learning opportunities for green skills, including in STEAM fields, where feasible by developing small and tailored learning modules that can lead to, among other things, micro-credentials. Furthermore, there is also a need to develop adult learning at secondary and tertiary levels through, among other things, flexible learning pathways allowing the updating, broadening, and deepening of competences. Attention should also be paid to the validation and recognition of earlier achievements in work and acquired skills as well as, depending on the national context, certifying or accrediting relevant skills and competences. While work-based learning, including traineeships and apprenticeships, contributes to labour market transitions, finding relevant workplaces may be challenging in rapidly emerging industries as well as in companies needing to adapt to new circumstances. There is therefore a need for alternative ways to provide learning opportunities in work-based settings to help learners acquire new green skills.

5. Teachers and trainers in initial and continuing VET, higher education and adult learning have a crucial role to play in the green transition by equipping learners with up-to-date vocational, technical, and other skills and competences needed both in the emerging green industries and to meet the changing requirements in existing industries. It is therefore essential to further develop and update the knowledge, skills and competences of teachers, trainers and staff by supporting continuing professional development opportunities, valuing involvement in educational activities focused on skills and competences for the green transition in career pathways and promoting collaboration and peer learning among VET providers, higher education institutions, research organisations, companies, and other stakeholders. Furthermore, leadership within education and training organisations is crucial to enhance and support this development.
6. Targeted measures are needed in order to attract young people and adults, regardless of gender and socioeconomic background, including young people and adults from rural and remote areas such as the EU's outermost regions, to engage in learning opportunities for green skills. This includes, where appropriate and in full accordance with institutional autonomy and academic freedom, removing existing obstacles and barriers to all types of learning, such as issues related to mobility, accessibility, gender inequalities and stereotypes, guidance, outreach, financial support for individuals, support services for learners and recognition of prior learning. Participation by both women and men should be encouraged and supported to an equal extent through effective lifelong guidance systems, reinforced by initial education and further training of guidance counsellors and other guidance professionals.

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES, with due regard for institutional autonomy and academic freedom, and in accordance with national circumstances, to take the above issues into account when:

1. continuing to develop key competences and sustainability competences in a lifelong learning perspective, including from early years, at all levels and in all types of education, training and learning pathways⁶;
2. developing initial and continuing VET and higher education systems and education offers for the green transition, as well as adult learning, for example through micro-credentials;
3. engaging education and training providers, research organisations, employers, social partners and other relevant stakeholders in jointly identifying reskilling and upskilling needs for the green transition including public-private cooperation;
4. supporting and encouraging initial and continuing VET providers, higher education institutions, and adult learning organisations in the development and delivery of learning opportunities for the green transition, including learning opportunities in the STEAM fields;
5. supporting teachers, trainers, staff, guidance professionals and leaders to acquire and update the knowledge, skills and competences needed to contribute to the green transition and sustainable development, by promoting initial training and continuing professional development;

⁶ In accordance with the Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on learning for the green transition and sustainable development and the Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning (OJ C 189, 4.6.2018, p. 1).

6. encouraging and supporting individuals to participate in learning, upskilling or reskilling opportunities, both within formal and non-formal education, as well as in mobility for the green transition;
7. making use of available EU and national tools and funding programmes such as Erasmus+ and ESF+ to support skills and competences for the green transition, including the sharing of good practices and peer learning activities.

INVITES THE COMMISSION, with due regard for subsidiarity and national circumstances, to take account of these conclusions when:

1. promoting mutual learning and sharing of good practices on skills and competences for the green transition among Member States, social partners, education and training providers, research organisations, industries and other relevant stakeholders;
2. supporting transnational cooperation and sharing good practices linked to skills and competences for the green transition, including through Erasmus+ student and staff exchanges and cooperation between education and training institutions, such as in the European Universities alliances and the Centres of Vocational Excellence;
3. engaging education and training providers, industrial eco-systems, social partners, and all relevant stakeholders, including at regional and local levels, through the Pact for Skills, in jointly identifying reskilling and upskilling needs for the green transition;
4. further developing the evidence base for skills and competences for the green transition by working with Cedefop and other relevant organisations, without creating new reporting obligations or any additional burden for the Member States;

5. continuing efforts, together with the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks, on the development of possible indicators or EU-level targets in the area of sustainability, including greening of education and training systems;
 6. further promoting existing EU tools and programmes to support skills and competences for the green transition, in close cooperation with Member States;
 7. implementing and preparing initiatives meant to enhance Europe's competitiveness and future readiness and support Member States in achieving a successful green transition in and through education and training.
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Political background

1. Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning, OJ C 189, 4.6.2018, p. 1.
2. Council Recommendation of 24 November 2020 on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience, OJ C 417, 2.12.2020, p. 1.
3. Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030), OJ C 66, 26.2.2021, p. 1.
4. Council Resolution on a new European agenda for adult learning 2021-2030, OJ C 504, 14.12.2021, p. 9.
5. Council Recommendation of 5 April 2022 on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation, OJ C 160, 13.4.2022, p. 1.
6. Council conclusions on a European strategy empowering higher education institutions for the future of Europe, OJ C 167, 21.4.2022, p. 9.
7. Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on ensuring a fair transition towards climate neutrality, OJ C 243, 27.6.2022, p. 35.
8. Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability, OJ C 243, 27.6.2022, p. 10.
9. Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on individual learning accounts, OJ C 243, 27.6.2022, p. 26.
10. Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on learning for the green transition and sustainable development, OJ C 243, 27.6.2022, p. 1.