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**NOTE**

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From: General Secretariat of the Council  
To: Permanent Representatives Committee

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Subject: Draft Council conclusions on the implementation of the Council  
Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults  
- Adoption

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The Education Committee has prepared the above draft conclusions with a view to their adoption at the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council on 22-23 May 2019. The text now meets with the agreement of all delegations.

The Permanent Representatives Committee is accordingly invited to forward the text to the Council for adoption and subsequent publication in the Official Journal.

**Draft**

**Council conclusions on the implementation of the Council Recommendation on  
Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults**

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

1. RECALLING the political background to this issue as set out in Annex to these conclusions, and in particular that:
  - (a) the social dimension of education as stated in 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 allow full participation in society and successful transitions in the labour market<sup>1</sup>;
  - (b) the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. As noted in the Commission's Reflection Paper 'Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030', 'everything is changing for everyone. Education, science, technology, research and innovation are a prerequisite for achieving a sustainable EU economy that meets the UN Sustainable Development Goals';
  - (c) the Council on 22 May 2018 adopted Conclusions on moving towards a vision of a European Education Area<sup>2</sup>, in which it set out that a European Education Area should be underpinned by the lifelong learning continuum, and stressed that initiatives under a European Education Area should include all levels and types of education and training, including adult education and vocational education and training.

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<sup>1</sup> Doc. 13129/17.

<sup>2</sup> OJ C 195, 7.6.2018, p. 7.

- (d) the ageing population in Europe, increased longevity in society and the need to foster intergenerational cooperation, the accelerating changes in the labour market, emerging forms of work and the penetration of digital technologies in all aspects of daily life result in a growing demand for new skills and a higher level of skills, knowledge and competences; this gives added urgency to the need to upskill or reskill all people who have not mastered basic skills or have not gained a qualification to ensure their employability and active citizenship;
- (e) in the light of the major transformations now taking place in labour markets, inclusive and quality education and training - delivered at all stages of life - have become even more crucial, and the Union faces an upskilling and reskilling imperative requiring strategic approaches towards lifelong learning and skills development; some data suggest that as soon as 2022, 54 % of all employees will require significant upskilling and reskilling<sup>3</sup>;
- (f) the Education and Training 2020 (ET2020) adult learning benchmark has been stagnant in the Union for the last decade: in 2017, 10.9 % of adults had recently undertaken some form of recent learning activity, against the 2020 benchmark of 15 %<sup>4</sup>;
- (g) the Country Specific Recommendations within the European Semester have identified upskilling, reskilling and lifelong learning as a key challenge to be addressed in the future for various Member States;

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<sup>3</sup> World Economic Forum: Future of Jobs report, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Labour Force Survey, 2018.

- (h) in 2017, 61 million adults aged 25 to 64 in the Union had stopped their formal education before they had completed upper secondary education<sup>5</sup>; at the same time the share of early leavers from education and training in 2017 was 10.6 % and is now close to reaching the target set for 2020, namely less than 10 %, however rates between countries vary greatly; 43 % of the Union population has an insufficient level of digital skills and 17 % has none at all<sup>6</sup>; and around 20 % of the adult population in countries participating in the OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC)<sup>7</sup> struggles with basic skills like literacy and numeracy. Provision for these adults therefore requires urgent attention;
- i) there is no one-size-fits-all; employed, unemployed and inactive people and the many different sub-groups all have specific needs; assessing and validating legally residing migrants' and refugees' skills and competences and their upskilling and reskilling will accelerate their entry to the labour market and their smooth integration into their new communities;
- (j) investment in upskilling and reskilling can have a strong economic impact including a higher productivity and economic growth; a more skilled and competent population able to stimulate innovation and technological progress<sup>8</sup>; growth in tax revenues and reduced public expenditure due to individuals' improved health, social and civic engagement, and lower levels of involvement in criminal activities<sup>9</sup>;

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<sup>5</sup> Labour Force Survey, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Digital Inclusion and Skills Report, European Commission, 2017 data.

<sup>7</sup> Austria, Belgium-FL, Czechia, Germany, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Spain, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, Slovenia, Slovakia, the UK and Hungary.

<sup>8</sup> OECD, PIAAC, 2016.

<sup>9</sup> Skills Matter, OECD, 2016.

- (k) for individuals, upskilling and reskilling can lead to enhanced employability, higher earnings, better health and wellbeing, more active citizenship and social inclusion. However, individuals and employers may have difficulties in recognising these effects and therefore underinvest in upskilling and reskilling, which calls for setting the right incentives to stimulate awareness and motivation to engage in further education and training;
- (l) in light of this, the Council on 19 December 2016 adopted the Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults ('the Recommendation')<sup>10</sup>, which calls for a strategic and coordinated approach to providing joined-up learning opportunities to the Union's 61 million<sup>11</sup> low-skilled and/or low-qualified adults and aimed to support adults with low levels of skills and qualifications to enhance their basic skills, i.e. literacy, numeracy and digital competence, and/or to acquire a broader set of skills, knowledge and competences and by progressing towards higher qualifications;
- (m) the Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways recommends Member States to offer to low-skilled and/or low-qualified adults access to upskilling opportunities built around an easily accessible pathway comprising three steps: skills assessment to identify existing skills and upskilling needs; a tailor-made offer of learning and mentoring, to enable them to update skills and fill deficits; and the opportunity to have their acquired skills, knowledge and competences validated and recognised with a view to gaining a qualification or giving access to employment.

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<sup>10</sup> OJ C 484, 24.12.2016, p.1.

<sup>11</sup> In 2017, 61.3 million people aged 25 to 64 had at most a lower secondary educational qualification (Eurostat, Labour Force Survey, 2018). In 2012, the year of the PIAAC data collection, the Labour Force Survey recorded that 70 million 25- to 64-year-olds had, at most, lower secondary qualifications. This figure has decreased every year since then, in particular because: a) the educational levels of those reaching 25 years are higher as more young people finish upper secondary education or equivalent, and b) because people of retirement age have, in general, lower levels of education, with the exception of some Eastern European countries.

2. TAKES NOTE OF the Commission Staff Working Document<sup>12</sup> taking stock of implementation measures, published in compliance with the provisions of the Recommendation.
3. NOTES the progress that has been made, and in particular that:
- (a) in some Member States, the adoption of the Recommendation was the stimulus for a national debate and a critical review of existing programmes;
  - (b) some Member States are setting in motion new policy agendas to support the upskilling and reskilling of the adult population, in line with the objectives of the Recommendation;
  - (c) although most of the reported measures focus on unemployed adults, some Member States are also focusing on support for low-skilled workers in employment, who represent a significant share of the target group;
  - (d) many Member States are taking advantage of the different forms of support offered by the Union programmes.
4. UNDERLINES its commitment to the ambition set out in the Recommendation, and CALLS UPON the Member States, in the light of the Recommendation and in accordance with national legislation, circumstances and available resources, and in close cooperation with social partners and education and training providers, where possible, to:
- (a) put in place sustainable long-term measures for adult upskilling and reskilling as part of a broader strategic approach to lifelong skills development;

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<sup>12</sup> 'Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults: taking stock of implementation measures' SWD(2019) 89 final.

- (b) adopt a coherent strategic approach to basic skills provision for low-skilled and/or low-qualified adults, built upon coordination and partnerships between all relevant actors involved as part of holistic skills strategies or action plans;
- (c) promote partnerships to take a holistic approach, engaging relevant actors, including social partners from across policy areas (social, employment and education and training) to integrate basic skills provision with other services targeted at low-skilled and/or low-qualified adults;
- (d) raise employers' – especially SMEs' – awareness of the importance of upskilling and reskilling and of available support mechanisms for adult skills development and encourage them to promote and offer training opportunities to their employees;
- (e) focus provision specifically on helping beneficiaries to acquire at least a minimum level of the three basic skills, namely literacy, numeracy and digital competence as well as other key competences that are relevant for active participation in a sustainable society and for sustainable employment;
- (f) where appropriate, ensure that such provision comprises three steps: skills assessment, a tailored and flexible learning offer and validation and recognition of skills, knowledge and competences;
- (g) offer learning opportunities that are specifically tailored to beneficiaries' individual learning needs, as identified by the skills assessment, and informed by intelligence on labour market opportunities;
- (h) provide outreach, awareness-raising, guidance and support measures, including incentives to ensure the successful take-up of the initiative;

- (i) consider developing synergies between effective policies and actions to reduce early school leaving and to reduce the proportion of low-skilled and/or low-qualified adults, for example between measures under the Youth Guarantee and Upskilling Pathways;
- (j) evaluate the impact of their actions on the progress of the target group towards achievement of the skills and qualifications set out in the Recommendation.

5. INVITES the Commission to:

- (a) continue supporting the implementation of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation, including through mutual learning among Member States and relevant stakeholders, and through dedicated calls for proposals focusing in particular on assisting Member States to address the challenges identified in the stocktaking report and explore the potential of a strengthened and innovative role for the national coordinators of adult learning;
- (b) facilitate cross-sectoral cooperation and coordination at European level through links with other initiatives and through Union funding programmes, and exchange of good practices through organised mutual learning activities and via tools such as the Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe (EPALE) and/or Europass;
- (c) when formulating policy proposals, including for a post-2020 cooperation framework, take also into account the long term challenge of adult learning, and the issue of adults with outdated or low levels of skills or qualifications who need access to Upskilling Pathways;
- (d) cooperate with and draw upon the expertise of Union bodies (Cedefop, ETF) and international organisations such as the OECD, UN, and UNESCO to address the challenge of upskilling and reskilling, including through relevant research and analysis on adult learning and skills assessments (e.g. PIAAC).



Political Background

1. Commission Recommendation 2008/867/EC of 3 October 2008 on the active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market<sup>13</sup>
2. Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council of 21 November 2008 on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies<sup>14</sup>
3. Council Recommendation of 28 June 2011 on policies to reduce early school leaving<sup>15</sup>
4. Council Resolution on a renewed European Agenda for adult learning<sup>16</sup>
5. Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning<sup>17</sup>
6. Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee<sup>18</sup>
7. 2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020)<sup>19</sup>
8. Council Recommendation of 15 February 2016 on the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market<sup>20</sup>
9. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – A new skills agenda for Europe: working together to strengthen human capital, employability and competitiveness (10 June 2016)

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<sup>13</sup> OJ L 307, 18.11.2008, p.11.

<sup>14</sup> OJ C 319, 13.12.2008, p.4.

<sup>15</sup> OJ C 191, 1.7.2011, p.1.

<sup>16</sup> OJ C 372, 20.12.2011, p.1.

<sup>17</sup> OJC 398, 22.12.2012, p.1.

<sup>18</sup> OJ C 120, 26.4.2013, p.1.

<sup>19</sup> OJ C 417, 15.12.2015, p.25.

<sup>20</sup> OJ C 67, 20.2.2016, p.1.

10. Council Recommendation of 19 December 2016 on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults<sup>21</sup>
  11. Council Recommendation of 22 May 2017 on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning and repealing the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF)<sup>22</sup>
  12. Decision (EU) 2018/646 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 April 2018 on a common framework for the provision of better services for skills and qualifications (Europass) and repealing Decision No 2241/2004/EC<sup>23</sup>
  13. Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning<sup>24</sup>
  14. Council conclusions on moving towards a vision of a European Education Area<sup>25</sup>
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<sup>21</sup> OJ C 484, 24.12.2016, p.1.

<sup>22</sup> OJ 189, 15.6.2017, p.15.

<sup>23</sup> OJ L 112, 2.5.2018, p. 42.

<sup>24</sup> OJ C 189, 4.6.2018, p.1.

<sup>25</sup> OJ C 195, 7.6.2018, p.7.