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NOTE

From: Presidency
To: Delegations

Subject: Developing adult skills
- Presidency steering note

Delegations will find attached the Presidency steering note on the above subject, with a view to the lunch debate at the EPSCO Council on 15 March 2019.

EPSCO lunch debate

Developing adult skills - a priority in the context of socio-economic changes in the EU

Structural changes induced by rapid technological developments such as digitalisation, automation, robotics and artificial intelligence, as well as the constantly growing demand for different skills in the labour market, present considerable challenges for education and vocational training systems and for workers.

Meanwhile, social developments such as demographic ageing and migration bring their own challenges. All citizens, including the elderly, need to be equipped with the knowledge and skills they need in order to live independently and to continue to contribute to society.

In a rapidly changing economy, people can no longer rely on their initial education and training alone. They must constantly update and renew their knowledge in order to succeed in the labour market and prepare for career transitions. Education and vocational training systems must therefore provide innovative opportunities, responses and solutions.

Rapid technological change and digitalisation create new services and goods, changing and even replacing what went before. Europeans who do not have the necessary skills in order to benefit from innovation risk being excluded.

Adult learning has a key role in addressing all these challenges. Strong policies and systems are needed in order to allow everyone access to a sufficiently wide range of ways to upgrade adult skills and related support services such as guidance and counselling.

According to forecasts, the demand for medium and high skills will grow in Europe. We already face skills shortages in key sectors and there is a lack of basic literacy, numeracy and digital skills. The Upskilling Pathways Recommendation adopted by the Council in 2016 was very timely and sustained efforts are needed for its successful implementation. The need for skills will grow more acute in several EU countries over the next few years. Measures to adapt education and training systems as well as policies in several other areas are needed to meet this skills challenge, and thereby to ensure competitiveness, to boost innovation and to support cohesion in European economies. Investment in skills anticipation and matching systems, in particular, should be increased.

There is a growing need to retrain and update the skills of the adult population, including disadvantaged groups, in order to enable them to stay in or re-enter the labour market. Measures taken should address the specific needs of workers at all levels.

Against this background, Ministers are invited to consider the following issues:

- 1. In what areas is European cooperation necessary in order to strengthen adult learning with a view to meeting the needs of the rapidly changing labour markets?*
- 2. How could national funding systems be developed to support the massive upskilling and reskilling needs of the adult population? How can European funding best complement funding at the national level?*
- 3. Who are the key partners in bringing these efforts forward?*