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INFORMATION NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Permanent Representatives Committee/Council
Subject:	Proposal for a DECISION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on a European Year of Skills 2023 - Outcome of the European Parliament's first reading (Brussels, 29 to 30 March 2023)

I. INTRODUCTION

In accordance with the provisions of Article 294 of the TFEU and the Joint declaration on practical arrangements for the codecision procedure¹, a number of informal contacts have taken place between the Council, the European Parliament and the Commission with a view to reaching an agreement on this file at first reading.

In this context, the Chair of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL), Dragoş PÎSLARU (RE, RO), presented on behalf of EMPL a compromise amendment (amendment number 72) to the abovementioned proposal for a Decision, for which Loucas FOURLAS (EPP, CY) had prepared a draft report. This amendment had been agreed during the informal contacts referred to above. No other amendments were tabled.

¹ OJ C 145, 30.6.2007, p. 5.

II. VOTE

When it voted on 30 March 2023, the plenary adopted the compromise amendment (amendment number 72) to the abovementioned proposal for a Decision. The Commission's proposal as thus amended constitutes the Parliament's first-reading position which is contained in its legislative resolution as set out in the Annex hereto².

The Parliament's position reflects what had been previously agreed between the institutions. The Council should therefore be in a position to approve the Parliament's position.

The act would then be adopted in the wording which corresponds to the Parliament's position.

² The version of the Parliament's position in the legislative resolution has been marked up to indicate the changes made by the amendments to the Commission's proposal. Additions to the Commission's text are highlighted in ***bold and italics***. The symbol "■" indicates deleted text.

P9_TA(2023)0089

European Year of Skills 2023

European Parliament legislative resolution of 30 March 2023 on the proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on a European Year of Skills 2023 (COM(2022)0526 – C9-0344/2022 – 2022/0326(COD))

(Ordinary legislative procedure: first reading)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Commission proposal to Parliament and the Council (COM(2022)0526),
 - having regard to Article 294(2) and Article 149 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, pursuant to which the Commission submitted the proposal to Parliament (C9-0344/2022),
 - having regard to Article 294(3) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
 - having regard to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee of 15 December 2022¹,
 - after consulting the Committee of the Regions,
 - having regard to the provisional agreement approved by the committee responsible under Rule 74(4) of its Rules of Procedure and the undertaking given by the Council representative by letter of 17 March 2023 to approve Parliament's position, in accordance with Article 294(4) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
 - having regard to Rule 59 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the letter from the Committee on Culture and Education,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (A9-0028/2023),
1. Adopts its position at first reading hereinafter set out;
 2. Calls on the Commission to refer the matter to Parliament again if it replaces, substantially amends or intends to substantially amend its proposal;

¹ OJ C 100, 16.3.2023, p. 123.

3. Instructs its President to forward its position to the Council, the Commission and the national parliaments.

Position of the European Parliament adopted at first reading on 30 March 2023 with a view to the adoption of Decision (EU) 2023/... of the European Parliament and of the Council on a European Year of Skills ■

(Text with EEA relevance)

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular Article 149 thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the European Commission,

After transmission of the draft legislative act to the national parliaments,

Having regard to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee⁴,

After consulting the Committee of the Regions,

Acting in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure⁵,

⁴ OJ C 100, 16.3.2023, p. 123.

⁵ Position of the European Parliament of 30 March 2023.

Whereas:

- (1) A skilled workforce is crucial to ensuring socially fair and just green and digital transitions, and to strengthening the Union's sustainable competitiveness and resilience in the face of adverse external shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or the fallout of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. More **adequate** and better-**matched** skills open up new opportunities and empower individuals to fully participate in the labour market, society and democracy, to harness and benefit from the opportunities of the green and digital transitions, and to exercise their rights.

- (2) Across the Union, employers report that it is difficult to find workers with the necessary skills. The European Labour Authority, in its report entitled ‘Report on labour shortages and surpluses’, and the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity, in its report entitled ‘Cybersecurity skills development in the EU’, identified that 28 occupations were classified as having skills shortages in 2021, including in the healthcare, hospitality, construction and service sectors, and identified shortages of IT and security specialists, in particular cybersecurity experts, and workers with a science, technology, engineering and mathematics background. Increasingly, the biggest constraint to the successful green and digital transitions is the lack of workers with the right skills. ***Labour shortages can, in some cases, also be the result of unattractive jobs and poor working conditions. Tackling those issues, by means of offers of quality jobs and retention policies, is important for a well-functioning labour market.*** In many Member States, demographic ageing is expected to accelerate over the coming decade as ‘baby boom’ cohorts retire, reinforcing the need to make use of the full potential of all working-age adults, ***whatever their origin***, through continuous investments in their skills as well as activating more people, in particular women and young people, especially those not in ***employment***, education ■ or training (NEETs), ***who face specific challenges that hinder their participation in the labour market. Efficient and comprehensive skills strategies, increased access to the education and training opportunities of disadvantaged groups, and combating stereotypes, in particular gender stereotypes, would help to increase employment and to reduce skills shortages. In order to ensure a socially fair and inclusive transition, such measures can be complemented with solutions for persons who are not able to reskill and upskill.***

- (3) The availability of skilled staff and experienced managers, ***who play an essential role in the Union's sustainable growth***, also remains the most serious problem for a quarter of the Union's 25 million small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), constituting the backbone of the Union's economy ***and prosperity***, representing 99 % of all businesses and employing 83 million people. The Commission communication of 10 March 2020 entitled 'An SME strategy for a sustainable and digital Europe' recognises the essential role of SMEs in the Union's competitiveness and prosperity.

- (4) ***The lack of an adequately skilled workforce and the low rate of participation of working-age adults in training activities reduce opportunities in the labour market and result in social and economic inequalities that represent*** a significant challenge for the Union. ***The lack of an adequately skilled workforce and the low rate of participation in training activities also indicate*** considerable untapped potential of reskilling and upskilling to help mitigate increasing labour shortages in sectors such as manufacturing and services, and in particular in economic activities related to hospitality and manufacturing of computer and electronic equipment, and the care sector. However, participation in adult learning in the Union has stagnated over the last decade and 21 Member States fell short of the 2020 Union target. For many working-age adults, such as those in atypical forms of work, employees of SMEs, unemployed, inactive or low-qualified persons, skills development opportunities are too often out of reach. Increasing the reskilling and upskilling opportunities for those groups and ***for*** all working-age adults would contribute to reaching the Union employment target of 78 % for adults between 20 and 64 years old for whom the employment rate in 2021 was at 73,1 %. ***Further efforts are needed to provide effective support to adults with a low level of skills and to unemployed persons in accordance with the Council recommendations of 19 December 2016 on upskilling pathways: new opportunities for adults⁶ and of 15 February 2016 on the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market⁷.***

⁶ OJ C 484, 24.12.2016, p. 1.

⁷ OJ C 67, 20.2.2016, p. 1.

- (5) Principle No 1 of the European Pillar of Social Rights (the ‘Pillar’) 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 successfully manage transitions in the labour market. Principle No 4 of the Pillar refers to active support for employment, to uphold everyone’s right to timely and tailor-made assistance to improve their employment or self-employment prospects, including the right to receive support for training and re-qualification. Principle No 5 of the Pillar on secure and adaptable employment states that, regardless of the type and duration of the employment relationship, workers have the right to fair and equal treatment regarding working conditions, access to social protection and training. Article 14(1) of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (the ‘Charter’) states that everyone has the right to education and access to vocational and continuing training.

- (6) Principle No 3 of the Pillar underlines that regardless of gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, everyone has the right to equal treatment and opportunities, including employment, **education and training**. The European Year of Skills should be implemented in a manner that is inclusive and actively promotes equality for all. The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, adopted by the Commission in its communication of 4 March 2021, points out that by increasing participation of groups which are currently **underrepresented, it is possible to** achieve more inclusive employment growth.
- (7) The Commission communication of 1 July 2020 entitled ‘European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience’ (the ‘European Skills Agenda’) calls for a skills revolution to ensure the recovery of the economy, to strengthen Europe’s global competitiveness **and social fairness** and to turn the green and digital transitions into opportunities for all. The European Skills Agenda aims to foster collective action on skills, to ensure that training content is aligned with the evolving labour market needs, and to better match training opportunities with people’s aspirations in order to encourage the uptake of such training opportunities across the working-age population. The European Parliament welcomed the objectives and actions of the European Skills Agenda in its resolution of 11 February 2021⁸.

⁸ OJ C 465, 17.11.2021, p. 110.

- (8) On 25 June 2021, the European Council welcomed, in its conclusions, the Union headline targets of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, in line with the Porto Declaration of 8 May 2021, thereby **welcoming** the ambition of ensuring, by 2030, an employment rate of at least 78 % and that at least 60 % of all adults participate in training every year.
- (9) On 14 September 2022, the Commission President announced in her State of the Union address that the Commission would propose to make 2023 the European Year of Skills. She pointed to the problem of labour shortages in certain sectors and underlined the importance of investments in professional education and upskilling. She also underlined that attracting the right skills to the Union has to be part of the solution, supported by the speeding up and facilitating of the recognition of qualifications of third-country nationals. By means of the European Year of Skills, the Commission seeks to increase the momentum and foster the implementation of the many actions that it has already taken to strengthen reskilling and upskilling in the Union in order to address labour market shortages. ***The European Year of Skills is intended, by means of reskilling and upskilling, to support the sustainable growth of the Union's social market economy, with the aim of boosting its competitiveness and of contributing to the creation of quality jobs.***

- (10) On 15 September 2021, the Commission President announced in her State of the Union address the launch of a structured dialogue at top level to strengthen commitments on digital skills and education. Member States appointed national coordinators for that process. The European Year of Skills builds on that structured dialogue process, expanding its focus in line with the objectives of this Decision.
- (11) The European Year of Skills follows the European Year of Youth 2022 which sought to empower, honour, support and engage with young people, including those with fewer opportunities, in a post-COVID-19 pandemic perspective, with a view to having a long-term positive impact on young people. The European Year of Youth 2022 emphasised the importance of skills in order to find good quality employment for young people ***and to expand their employment opportunities.***

- (12) *By promoting a mindset of reskilling and upskilling throughout the Union, the European Year of Skills can have a broader positive impact on society and democracy, as a better skilled workforce also means more active and engaged citizens. Reskilling and upskilling equips workers with the skills needed to benefit from better quality job opportunities, to enhance their well-being at work and to progress in their personal and professional development, whilst boosting the competitiveness of the economy and contributing to the creation of quality jobs.*
- (13) *As employers, workers, the representatives of employers and workers, national, European and international social partners, chambers of commerce, and other stakeholders know best what skills are needed in their industrial ecosystems, strengthening their collective action on skills development has to be part of the solution. Social dialogue thus plays an important role in anticipating skills needs in the labour market.* The Pact for Skills, launched by the Commission in 2020 as the first action under the European Skills Agenda, brings together employers, the social partners, education and training providers, public employment services and other key skills stakeholders, both private and public. So far, more than 700 organisations have signed up to the Pact for Skills and 12 large-scale partnerships in strategic sectors have been set up within its remit, with pledges to promote six million training opportunities. *Members of the Pact for Skills benefit from dedicated services to deliver tangible results.* The regional *and local dimensions are* also important, in particular in border regions, where finding workers with the right skills requires targeted measures in order to support effective cross-border labour markets. Similarly, disadvantaged and remote *areas*, including the outermost *regions*, face particular challenges as access to the labour market and reskilling and upskilling opportunities are limited.

- (14) *The Council Resolution of 26 February 2021 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030)*⁹ establishes as one of the strategic priorities of the framework *‘Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality for all’*, as well as concrete actions aimed to acquire or update skills, namely reskilling and upskilling, throughout working life.
- (15) The Council recommendations of 16 June 2022 on individual learning accounts¹⁰ and on European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability¹¹ help people to **embark on and continue** their **learning pathways** in a more flexible and targeted way. The Council Resolution of 29 November 2021 on a new European agenda for adult learning 2021-2030¹² promotes **formal, non-formal and informal learning opportunities capable of providing all the necessary knowledge, skills and competences to create an inclusive, sustainable, socially just and more resilient Union. It emphasises adult learning as an important part of lifelong learning. Learning, quality career** guidance and opportunities for skills self-assessment are among the measures **needed to** support people **on their learning pathways**.

⁹ OJ C 66, 26.2.2021, p. 1.

¹⁰ OJ C 243, 27.6.2022, p. 26.

¹¹ OJ C 243, 27.6.2022, p. 10.

¹² OJ C 504, 14.12.2021, p. 9.

- (16) The strengthened active labour market policies promoted ***in the Commission recommendation of 4 March 2021 on*** an effective active support to employment following the COVID-19 crisis (***EASE***)¹³ aim to support transitions into new employment amid the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and the better matching of skills in the labour market, supported by employment services with a sufficient administrative capacity.
- (17) The Council recommendation of 24 November 2020 on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience¹⁴ supports the modernisation of VET systems to equip young people and adults with the knowledge, skills and competences they need to thrive in the evolving labour market and ***in*** society, to manage the recovery and the just transitions to the green and digital economy, in times of demographic change and throughout all economic cycles. It promotes VET as a ***potential*** driver for innovation and growth, which is agile in adapting to labour market changes **■** , providing skills for occupations in high demand ***and fostering inclusiveness and equal opportunities. It is essential to increase the attractiveness of VET by means of communication and outreach campaigns, centres of vocational excellence, special ecosystems for VET, and skills competitions, such as Euroskills.***

¹³ OJ L 80, 8.3.2021, p. 1.

¹⁴ OJ C 417, 2.12.2020, p. 1.

- (18) Skills for the green transition and the reskilling and upskilling of the workforce will be needed in the context of the shift to a modern, resource-efficient, **circular, inclusive, resilient** and competitive economy, as set out in the Commission communication of 11 December 2019 entitled ‘the European Green Deal’, setting the path towards Union climate neutrality by 2050. The Commission communication of 14 July 2021 entitled ‘Fit for 55: delivering the EU’s 2030 Climate Target on the way to climate neutrality’ recognises that the green transition can only succeed if the Union has the skilled workforce that it needs in order to stay competitive, and points to the flagship actions of the European Skills Agenda to equip people with the skills that are needed for the green and digital transitions.
- (19) *The ongoing green and digital transitions of Union industry and the related labour market needs require investment in developing strong VET systems across the Union, promoting problem-solving skills and competences for new technologies, such as smart production and machinery, advanced robotics, cloud computing, artificial intelligence, data processing and the Internet of Things.*

- (20) *Use of digital tools and technologies is increasing in all parts of life and can create a digital divide. Digital skills are essential for participation in the labour market, but also for quality of life and active ageing. In the Union, more than 90 % of professional roles require a basic level of digital knowledge, while around 42 % of citizens in the Union, including 37 % of workers, lack basic digital skills. Decision (EU) 2022/2481 of the European Parliament and of the Council¹⁵ establishes the objective of ensuring that at least 80 % of the Union population have at least basic digital skills by 2030, and sets the target of 20 million employed information and communication technology (ICT) specialists by 2030, with the aim of achieving gender convergence* ■ . *The Commission communication of 17 January 2018 on the Digital Education Action Plan also stresses the lack of capacity of specialised education and training programmes to train additional ICT experts. Moreover, in its communication of 30 September 2020 on the Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027, the Commission emphasises that technological means should be used to ease the accessibility and strengthen the flexibility of learning opportunities, including reskilling and upskilling.*

¹⁵ *Decision (EU) 2022/2481 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 December 2022 establishing the Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030 (OJ L 323, 19.12.2022, p. 4).*

- (21) The Commission communication of 5 May 2021 entitled ‘Updating the 2020 New Industrial Strategy: Building a stronger Single Market for Europe’s recovery’ calls for decisive action to make lifelong learning a reality for all and ensure that education and training keep pace with and help deliver the green and digital transitions. It underlines that a skilled workforce is key to ensuring that those transitions are successful, supporting the competitiveness of the Union’s industry and the creation of quality jobs. It also recognises the importance of strong partnerships between the Union, Member States, the social partners and other relevant stakeholders and cooperation between, and within, industrial ecosystems. The *Commission communication of 9 December 2021 entitled ‘Building an economy that works for people: an action plan for the social economy’ stresses that the social economy can play a decisive role as it is an important proponent of socially fair and inclusive green and digital transitions and a key driver of social innovation, including in the field of reskilling and upskilling.*

- (22) Attracting skilled third-country nationals can contribute to tackling the Union's skills and labour shortages. Directive (EU) 2021/1883 of the European Parliament and of the Council¹⁶ is a key achievement for attracting highly skilled talent into the labour market. ***In its communication of 23 September 2020 on a New Pact on Migration and Asylum, the Commission*** also places a strong emphasis on labour migration and on the integration of third-country nationals. In that context, the Commission communication of 27 April 2022 entitled 'Attracting skills and talent to the EU' aims to reinforce the legal framework and Union action in this area. It proposes to recast Council Directive 2003/109/EC¹⁷ and Directive 2011/98/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council¹⁸, with a view to simplifying the procedures for the admission of third-country workers of all skill levels to the Union ***and to improving their rights and their protection from labour exploitation.*** The Commission will continue to roll out an EU Talent Pool to facilitate labour matching with third-country nationals and is working towards the launch of tailor-made talent partnerships with specific key partner countries, in order to boost international labour mobility and the development of talent in a mutually beneficial and circular way. In addition, the Union continues to be the leading contributor to global funding for education focusing especially on teacher training, girls' education and VET. This work, under the umbrella of the Commission's and High Representative's Joint communication of 1 December 2021 on the Global Gateway, is complementary with the objectives of this Decision.

¹⁶ Directive (EU) 2021/1883 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 October 2021 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purpose of highly qualified employment, and repealing Council Directive 2009/50/EC (OJ L 382, 28.10.2021, p. 1).

¹⁷ Council Directive 2003/109/EC of 25 November 2003 concerning the status of third-country nationals who are long-term residents (OJ L 16, 23.1.2004, p. 44).

¹⁸ Directive 2011/98/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on a single application procedure for a single permit for third-country nationals to reside and work in the territory of a Member State and on a common set of rights for third-country workers legally residing in a Member State (OJ L 343, 23.12.2011, p. 1).

- (23) Trust in, and the transparency of, qualifications, whether acquired in the Union or in a third country, are key in facilitating their recognition. Union ■ tools, such as the European Qualifications Framework, Europass, ESCO, EU Skills Profile Tool for Third-Country Nationals, European Digital Credentials for Learning, ***the EURES portal and relevant Union competence frameworks*** are a starting point to help to increase the transparency and comparability of ***skills and*** qualifications. For well-functioning labour markets, skills must be understood and valued, whether acquired in formal, non-formal or informal settings. ***Further strengthening*** skills identification and documentation, as well as guidance to make skills visible, are crucial steps ***towards the better transparency and portability of all skills, including transversal skills, such as language skills, critical thinking, entrepreneurship, creativity, intercultural competences, team work and media literacy.***

- (24) ***In many Member States***, public and private investments in reskilling and upskilling are insufficient. ***Many employers***, in particular SMEs, do not provide or fund training for their staff, and individuals in atypical work have less or no access to employer-sponsored training. Such inequalities ***may*** undermine individuals' welfare and health, reduce economic competitiveness, result in missed opportunities and barriers to innovation, and risk leaving people behind in the green and digital transitions to more sustainable economic activities. ***Dedicating resources in order to ensure that employees are able to work with the latest technologies is important for the competitiveness of undertakings.*** An enabling framework unlocking and incentivising employers' financial investments in skills and giving visibility to the economic value of reskilling ***and*** upskilling ***is needed.*** ***For example, the SME Relief Package aims to facilitate access to finance and skills.*** ***Moreover, Directive (EU) 2019/1152 of the European Parliament and of the Council¹⁹ provides that Member States are to ensure that where an employer is required by Union or national law or by collective agreements to provide training to enable workers to carry out the work for which they are employed, such training is to be provided to workers free of cost, to count as working time and, where possible, to take place during working hours.***

¹⁹ ***Directive (EU) 2019/1152 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on transparent and predictable working conditions in the European Union (OJ L 186, 11.7.2019, p. 105).***

- (25) In the past, the Union witnessed significant increases in the public investments in initial education and training. However, to date, this has not been matched with corresponding increases in investments ***and the development of a holistic approach*** to support continuing skills development throughout the entire working life. The Council conclusions of 8 June 2020 invite Member States to explore possible models for public and private financing of lifelong learning and the development of skills on an individual level, and call on the Commission to support Member States in those efforts.

- (26) Significant Union financial support is available for reskilling and upskilling, for instance through the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), the European Regional Development Fund, the Just Transition Fund, the InvestEU programme, the Digital Europe Programme, Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, the Programme for Environment and Climate Action (LIFE), the Modernisation Fund and the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument - Global Europe. The ESF+ remains the main Union funding tool by which to invest in more and better skills of the workforce, in particular by supporting institutions and services to assess and anticipate skills needs and challenges, supporting reskilling and upskilling opportunities for workers offered by the public and private sectors. ***The Reinforced Youth Guarantee aims to ensure that all young people receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education.*** Reforms and investments included in Member States' national recovery and resilience plans under the RRF have a prominent skills dimension, often linked with active labour market policies, in particular youth employment support. In the national recovery and resilience plans endorsed by the Commission and the Council to date, around 20 % of the social expenditure is dedicated to employment and skills.

- (27) The Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe (REACT-EU) was the first instrument of the NextGenerationEU recovery package to make payments for the recovery of Member States. It helped to create jobs and invest in skills in the regions most in need. Workers that lose their jobs due to large-scale restructuring events may also benefit from support through the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund for Displaced Workers to find new jobs, for instance through further education and training and tailored career guidance and advice.
- (28) Regulation (EU) 2021/1056 of the European Parliament and of the Council²⁰ establishing the Just Transition Fund recognises that the reskilling and upskilling of workers and jobseekers is an instrument needed to ensure a fair and inclusive green transition and to mitigate adverse consequences of that transition. The Council recommendation of 16 June 2022 on ensuring a fair transition towards climate neutrality²¹ sets out specific guidance to help Member States to devise and implement policy packages on relevant employment and social aspects, including reskilling and upskilling policies. Furthermore, the Council recommendation of 16 June 2022 on learning for the green transition and sustainable development²² promotes policies and programmes to ensure that learners of all ages acquire the knowledge and skills to benefit from a changing labour market, live sustainably and take action for a sustainable future.

²⁰ Regulation (EU) 2021/1056 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the Just Transition Fund (OJ L 231, 30.6.2021, p. 1).

²¹ OJ C 243, 27.6.2022, p. 35.

²² OJ C 243, 27.6.2022, p. 1.

- (29) The InvestEU Programme (InvestEU), under its social investment and skills window, supports demand for, and the supply of, skills, improving final recipients' skills sets or skills utilisation and fostering skills-investment markets. InvestEU also supports general investments in education, training and related services. In addition, the just transition scheme under InvestEU supports investments, including those aimed at supporting the reskilling and upskilling of workers, in regions that are subject to an approved just transition plan, in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2021/1056, and projects that benefit those regions, provided that they are key to the green and digital transitions of those territories.
- (30) Tailor-made expertise through the Commission's Technical Support Instrument can help Member States undertake reforms linked to national or regional strategies on skills, translating temporary Union funding into durable improvements in the available reskilling and upskilling opportunities. Mutual learning, facilitated by the Commission, can also support the process.

- (31) The *Commission communication of 3 March 2021 entitled ‘Union of Equality: Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030’* aims to ensure the full participation of persons with disabilities in society, on an equal basis with others in the Union and in third countries, ***supporting the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities***. Within the proposed strategy, the Commission commits to make sure that persons with disabilities can take part in training and learn new skills, as a fundamental requisite for employment and independence.
- (32) At Union level, the necessary financial allocation for the implementation of this Decision would be identified within the budget of the contributing programmes in accordance with the multiannual financial frameworks 2014-2020 and 2021-2027. Without prejudice to the powers of the European Parliament and the Council as budgetary authority, the aim should be to provide funding for the implementation of this Decision of at least EUR 9,3 million for operational expenses. ***The financial support to the European Year of Skills should be provided by relevant Union programmes and instruments, subject to the availability of funding, and in accordance with the applicable rules. The financing of the European Year of Skills should not be to the detriment of the financing of projects in current Union programmes and should aim to secure a long-lasting legacy of the European Year of Skills.***

- (33) Since the objectives of this Decision cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States, but can rather, by reason of the scale and effects of this Decision, be better achieved at Union level, the Union may adopt measures, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, as set out in Article 5 *of the Treaty on European Union*. In accordance with the principle of proportionality as set out in that Article, this Decision does not go beyond what is necessary in order to achieve those objectives.
- (34) In order to ensure swift implementation of the European Year of Skills, this Decision should enter into force as a matter of urgency on the day following that of its publication in the *Official Journal of the European Union*,

HAVE ADOPTED THIS DECISION:

Article 1
Subject matter

The *period from 9 May 2023 to 8 May 2024* shall be designated as the ‘European Year of Skills’.

Article 2

Objectives

In line with Principle Nos 1, 4 and 5 of the European Pillar of Social Rights, contributing to the objectives set out in the European Skills Agenda and the Union headline targets set by the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, the overall objective of the European Year of Skills shall be to further promote a mindset of reskilling and upskilling ***in accordance with national competences, law and practice. By further promoting the mindset of reskilling and upskilling, the European Year of Skills shall aim to boost the*** competitiveness of Union undertakings, in particular small and ***medium-sized*** enterprises (SMEs), ***and to contribute to the creation of quality jobs***, with a view to realising the full potential of the green and digital transitions in a socially fair, inclusive and just manner, ***thereby promoting equal access to skills development and reducing inequalities and segregation in education and training and contributing to continuous learning and career progression, empowering people to access quality jobs and to fully participate in the economy and society.*** More specifically, the activities of the European Year of Skills shall promote skills policies and investments to ensure that nobody is left behind in the green and digital transitions and the economic recovery and, in particular, to address labour shortages ***by closing gaps and skills mismatches for an empowered*** workforce ***and society,*** able to seize the opportunities of the green and digital transitions, by:

- (1) promoting increased, more effective and inclusive investment ***at all levels, inter alia by public and private employers, in particular by SMEs, into all forms of reskilling and upskilling, education and training*** to harness the full potential of the current and future workforce in the Union, ***including*** to support people in managing job-to-job transitions, active ageing, and benefiting from the new opportunities brought by the ongoing economic transition;
- (2) strengthening skills relevance ***and provision*** by closely cooperating with, ***and promoting cooperation among, cross-sectoral and sectoral*** social partners, public and private employment services, undertakings, ***civil society entities, not-for-profit social service providers and*** education and training providers, ***and by*** developing joined-up approaches with all branches of governments ***at Union, national, regional and local level and by facilitating the recognition of skills and qualifications;***

- (3) matching people's aspirations, **needs** and skills-set, **including the skills acquired during mobility**, with labour market **needs and** opportunities, especially those offered by the green and digital transitions, **emerging new sectors** and core sectors in need of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring that a particular focus is given to **integrate** more people **in** the labour market, in particular women and young people, especially those not in employment, education, or training (NEETs), **low-skilled persons, older workers, persons with disabilities, people from disadvantaged and diverse backgrounds, people living in remote areas and in the outermost regions, as well as displaced people from Ukraine**;
- (4) attracting people from third countries with the skills needed **in Member States**, by **promoting** learning opportunities, **including, where necessary, language education and training, skills development** and mobility, and by facilitating the recognition of qualifications.

Article 3

Types of measure

1. The types of measure to be taken to achieve the objectives set out in Article 2 shall include ■ activities at Union level **and, building on existing possibilities, at** national, regional or local level, where relevant in cooperation with third countries, **such as**:
 - (a) **online and in-person** conferences, forum discussions and further events to promote the debate on the role and contribution of skills policies to achieve competitive and sustainable ■ economic growth in light of the demographic change, **the green and digital transitions, thereby also supporting an active and engaged citizenship,** and to mobilise relevant stakeholders to ensure that access to **education, training and learning opportunities** is a reality on the ground;
 - (b) working groups, technical meetings and other events to promote discussion and mutual learning on the actions and approaches that public, private and third-sector stakeholders can take, including the preparation, publication and dissemination of good practices, guidelines and other supporting documents deriving from those events;

- (c) initiatives **targeting**, inter alia, individuals, **employers, in particular SMEs**, chambers of commerce and industry, the social partners, public authorities, education and training providers to promote the provision, financing and uptake of reskilling and upskilling opportunities **and to maximise the benefits and potential of a skilled workforce**;
- (d) information, **comprehensive** communication and awareness-raising campaigns on Union initiatives for reskilling **and** upskilling **and continuous learning**, promoting the implementation and delivery of such initiatives on the ground and their uptake by potential beneficiaries;
- (e) increasing dialogue **with the social partners and** existing stakeholder groups and networks, including through established online platforms **at national, regional and local level and ensuring stakeholder engagement opportunities linked to the European Year of Skills**;
- (f) **promoting the design of national, sectoral and company-specific skills strategies and training, including through social dialogue and the involvement of the social partners**;

- (g) implementing and, as necessary, developing further skills intelligence tools, while promoting and disseminating their application in identifying current and future skills needs, particularly linked to the green and digital transitions, the core sectors in need of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, the energy crisis and the impact of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine;
- (h) promoting ***and continuing the implementation of*** tools and instruments for the increased transparency of qualifications, including qualifications awarded outside the Union, ***and for the validation of non-formal and informal learning***;
- (i) promoting programmes, funding opportunities, projects, actions and networks of relevance to public, private and non-governmental stakeholders involved in the design, dissemination and implementation of reskilling and upskilling opportunities, ***learning and VET***.

2. The Commission may identify other activities that could contribute to the objectives set out in Article 2 and allow references to the European Year of Skills to be used in promoting those activities insofar as they contribute to achieving those objectives. Other Union institutions and Member States may also identify such other activities and suggest them to the Commission.

Article 4

Coordination at national level

The organisation of participation in the European Year of Skills at national and regional level shall be a responsibility of the Member States. To that end, each Member State shall **designate** a national coordinator **or coordinating body, in line with national circumstances and practices, with competence in the field of labour policies and skills. The national coordinator or coordinating body shall be the contact point for cooperation at Union level** and shall **coordinate**, in a holistic manner, the **activities of the European Year of Skills in the respective Member States, enabling the involvement** of relevant **stakeholders**.

Article 5

Coordination at Union level

1. The coordination of the European Year of Skills at Union level shall have a transversal approach with a view to creating synergies between the various Union programmes and initiatives in the field of skills.
2. The Commission shall rely on the expertise and assistance of relevant Union agencies in implementing the European Year of Skills, **in particular the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, the European Labour Authority, the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, the European Training Foundation and the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity.**

3. The Commission shall convene meetings of the national coordinators ***or representatives of the coordinating bodies*** in order to coordinate the activities referred to in Article 3. Those meetings shall serve as opportunities to exchange information regarding the implementation of the European Year of Skills at Union and national level. Representatives of the European Parliament and relevant Union agencies may participate in those meetings as observers.
4. The Commission shall ***closely*** engage with ***the*** social partners, ***civil society, education and training providers***, labour market bodies, ***learners***, and representatives of organisations or bodies active in the field of skills, ***education, training and continuous learning, in order*** to assist in the implementation of the European Year of Skills at Union level.

Article 6

Cooperation at international level

For the purpose of the European Year of Skills, the Commission shall, where necessary, cooperate with third countries and competent international organisations, in particular with the ***Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development***, Unesco and the ***International Labour Organization, as well as with other international stakeholders***, while ensuring the visibility of the Union's participation.

Article 7

Monitoring and evaluation

By 31 **May 2025**, the Commission shall present a report to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the implementation, results and overall assessment of the initiatives provided for in this Decision ***and implemented in the Member States and across the Union as a whole. That report shall include ideas for further common endeavours in the field of skills in order to create a long-lasting legacy of the European Year of Skills.***

Article 8

Entry into force

This Decision shall enter into force on the day following that of its publication in the *Official Journal of the European Union*.

Done at ...,

For the European Parliament

For the Council

The President

The President
