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The Employment Council Scrutinising the Skills Agenda and its Resources

The new strategy for skills in Europe has been welcomed by most employment and social affairs ministers in their recent Council meeting. During a roundtable discussion on 13 October, they collectively recognised the importance of providing young people with appropriate skills for the jobs of the future. The skills agenda in Europe consists of several horizontal proposals focusing on areas such as skills development, recognition of qualifications across member states, support for education and vocational training, etc.

The discussion focused around two central issues: (1) various aspects of the agenda that relate to employment based on three themes selected by the Slovak Presidency, namely the (a) cooperation between stakeholders, (b) the appropriateness of skills and (c) the specific measures involving young people and (2) to adopt the opinion of the Employment Committee on this agenda. Most member states hinted at the initiatives introduced in their respective countries to tackle youth unemployment specifically. Poland, for example, underlined some major changes in professional training, while Spain and Italy emphasised their efforts to develop dual training. Other member states mentioned some important challenges, such as the massive arrival of refugees in Sweden or the “brain drain” in Greece. The European Commission assured that it would soon publish its skills profiling tool for nationals from third countries, but did not specify when.

At the end of their discussion, the 28 employment and social affairs ministers unanimously adopted the opinion from the Employment Committee in support of the European Commission’s agenda. The committee reinforced the priorities identified, with respect to the focus on people with poor skills in particular. One of the points most criticised, especially by France and, to a lesser extent, Luxembourg, involved the lack of resources in the agenda, especially regarding the name chosen for the skills guarantee. The latter, one of the flagship instruments in the agenda, was supposed to help poorly skilled adults acquire some minimal level of reading and writing, arithmetic and digital skills to help them progress towards a second cycle of secondary education qualifications. The committee stated that the name of this instrument could provoke exaggerated expectations given that there is currently a lack of resources available for responding to this challenge. The committee finally concluded that the agenda should be supported by other measures mentioned in the guidelines, for instance investments in education training systems, access to lifelong learning or learning in the workplace.

The opinion can be consulted [here](#).