



PRESS RELEASE

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EDUCATION COUNCIL: EUROPEAN SOCIAL PARTNERS WORK TOGETHER ON LIFELONG LEARNING IN EUROPE TO RESOLVE LABOUR MARKET PROBLEMS

On the eve of the EU Education Council on 19 May, the European social partners met the troika of Education Ministers and the European Commissioner for Education. On that occasion, they presented their evaluation report of four years' joint work to promote the lifelong development of competences and qualifications in Europe. Developing lifelong learning is a crucial priority in finding solutions to labour market problems. This joint work has helped to identify concrete ways to modernise education and training systems.

In Europe, 80 million people are considered low-skilled. Europe's population is ageing and companies face more and more skills shortages. To be fit for future jobs, workers need higher skill levels, and up-to-date and adaptable competences. In order to respond to these challenges, alleviate obstacles to companies' competitiveness and raise the employability of workers, the European social partners decided in 2002 to coordinate their actions in the field of lifelong learning. What is at stake? The development of competences is essential if Europe is to become the most competitive, knowledge-based economy and society in the world.

Therefore, to tackle labour markets problems and boost workers' adaptability, the European social partners adopted a framework of actions on lifelong learning, highlighting four priorities for action and identifying practical tools for the social partners to use at national, sectoral and company levels. They monitored progress annually and conducted a comprehensive evaluation of this work in 2006.

The report analyses the impact of more than 350 selected social partners' initiatives, 108 of them aimed at identifying skills needs, 89 at finding ways to validate competences, 53 at informing and guiding companies or workers and 100 at mobilising resources efficiently. Among the initiatives analysed, over 70 concern companies' good practice examples and 280 comprise social partners' initiatives at sectoral or national levels.

Through their coordination process, the social partners have achieved greater focus and efficiency in their actions in each Member State. Competence

development has been enhanced as a shared interest for employers and employees and the joint work has helped find concrete solutions to modernise education and training systems. In order to continue contributing to the European growth and jobs strategy, the European social partners will build on this work in the framework of their work programme 2006-2008.

The framework of actions on lifelong learning, the three annual progress reports and the evaluation report (short version at annex) are available on the European social partners' websites.

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