Adult learning: it is never too late to learn

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By unanimously adopting Mme Doris PACK'S (PPE-DE, DE) own-initiative report on Adult learning, the Committee on Culture and Education welcomes the action plan proposed by the Commission. The Committee calls on Member States to, first of all, establish a lifelong learning culture focusing on adults, promoting the acquisition of knowledge and making it more attractive and accessible, taking into the consideration the gender dimension.

MEPs also insisted on the following points:

- **Improve motivation:** MEPs call for measures aimed at improving training and education programmes for adults in order to motivate a greater number of people to take part in these activities. These measures include improving access to courses, especially through new technology (websites or media specialised in the general or professional education of adults);

- **Statistics:** it is also important to improve statistics on policies in the area of adult learning in order to provide guidelines for the integrated Lifelong Learning Programme;

- **Reconciliation of family life, working life and lifelong learning:** MEPs call not only for greater flexibility in managing time and space, but also for social, economic and tax incentives in order to promote access for adults to training and education programmes. They also draw attention to the need to broaden the scope of public and private childcare facilities and to the measures aimed at providing this type of service within companies;

- **Combat the "ghetto des ages":** to improve transmission and exchange of the knowledge, skills and experience of adults between generations, MEPs propose mentoring schemes to support various entrepreneurial and craft activities within the system of knowledge sharing and best practices. They also support the development of volunteering programmes aimed at promoting inter-generation solidarity and recognition of experience and qualifications;

- **Language learning:** MEPs reiterate the importance of providing greater support for language courses, especially those aimed at immigrants, and of encouraging the learning of foreign languages among the population as a whole. They support the idea of establishing "Skills audits" for immigrants, the low-skilled and the disabled, which contribute to reducing racism, xenophobia, discrimination and exclusion;

- **Improving access to and quality of education:** MEPs consider that access to higher education should embrace a wider public, including older people. Education systems should, therefore, be adapted and made more flexible and infrastructure measures and provision of personnel resources must be promoted. They also encourage the establishment of university degree programmes leading to a diploma in adult education as well as actions aimed at increasing competence transfer and mobility in adult learning;

- **Promoting employment perspectives:** MEPs underline the importance of adult learning in order to achieve the goal of creating better jobs in Europe. They believe that businesses should forecast new competences and labour market requirements so that the provision of adult education reflects the demand for skills. For MEPs, lifelong learning should also increase the adaptability of workers as well as their geographical and vocational mobility. MEPs highlight the fact that a low level of qualification,

which is the current situation of a third of the European workforce (72 million workers), implies a high risk of unemployment. It is therefore vital to promote equal access for all citizens to lifelong learning programmes and combat the fact that those with the lowest levels of initial education (some women, immigrants, older people, people in rural areas, and the disabled) are the least likely to take part in training programmes. Therefore, MEPs call for lifelong learning services to be put in place at all levels and for assurance that all Member States adopt the financial and legal provisions to offer all employees and all job seekers the chance to access lifelong learning;

- **Ensure financing of training programmes:** in financial terms, MEPs call for the practice of financing and organising training by employers for their employees to become widespread. They call for increased cooperation and greater efficiency of existing legislative measures in this area as well as improvement of the institutional framework, networks and bodies involved in adult learning, using local, regional, national or European (public or private) financial resources. They ask, in particular, that financial incentives be offered to allow people free access to training and education. Finally, they encourage employers, in the context of corporate social responsibility, to finance vocational training programmes which promote lifelong learning, particularly for female staff.