Adult learning: it is never too late to learn

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drawn up by Doris **PACK** (EPP-ED, DE) on adult learning by 609 votes in favour to 39 against with 16 abstentions. It welcomes the Action Plan for Adult Learning, and calls on Member States to 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.

Parliament also considers 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:** comparable statistical data are needed to develop, review and evaluate policies in the field of adult learning so as to provide indications and orientations for the integrated Lifelong Learning Programme. The European Adult Education Survey must be supported as a means of both collecting comparable information on adult education and promoting shared concepts;

-**reconciliation of family life, working life and lifelong learning**: MEPs point out that reconciling family life, working life and lifelong learning calls 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. The development of Internet access and of digital-inclusion programmes designed to prevent a digital divide should be promoted and new sources of knowledge and ways of learning, such as distance learning programmes and the provision of learning places, should be encouraged and access made possible for all. Parliament also draws attention to the need to broaden the scope of childcare facilities and to encourage employers, who could provide company childcare facilities and scope for parents to return to work, so that such parents have the opportunity to continue with lifelong learning while carrying on working;

-**intergenerational solidarity**: 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 adults with work experience and older people, for which purpose education systems should be adapted and made more flexible. Appropriate infrastructure measures and provision of personnel resources must be promoted;

-**promoting employment perspectives**: MEPs underline the importance of adult learning in order to achieve the goal of creating better jobs in Europe as well as improve quality of life and promote individual

development, personal fulfilment and active citizenship. They believe that enterprises should forecast new competences and labour market requirements so that the provision of adult education reflects the demand for skills. The content of education must be tailored to vocational and practical requirements. Parliament points out that lifelong learning does not just increase workers" employability, it also increases their adaptability as well as their geographical and vocational mobility, which is important for the functioning of the internal market. 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. They must be offered different, suitable programmes and methods. Parliament calls for lifelong learning services to be put in place at all levels. It stresses the importance of the European Social Fund (ESF) and other structural funds in order to achieve the goal of lifelong learning and regrets that in some Member States, insufficient priority and funding are being dedicated to increasing access to adult learning opportunities, especially for older and lower-skilled workers.

-financing: Parliament calls on investors to focus attention on developing programmes, skills and qualifications that allow women to obtain a grounding in managerial and entrepreneurial skills and to improve their qualifications with a view to advancement to executive positions. It also calls for the practice of financing training by employers for their employees to become widespread and supported by tax concessions. It is essential that financial incentives be offered to allow people free access to training and education and the ensuing benefits. Such financial incentives could take the form of tax incentives, allowances, grants, co-financing, or reductions in taxation or social security costs for employers establishing appropriate working conditions for adult learning.