Youth on the move: a framework for improving Europe's education and training systems

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The Committee on Culture and Education adopted the own-initiative report by Milan ZVER (EPP, SI) on Youth on the Move (YoM): - a framework for improving Europe's education and training systems.

Recalling that young people are particularly affected by the crisis and that the youth unemployment rate exceeds 20%, Members point out that the crisis has highlighted the need to set in place quality education and vocational training systems. This is why they put forward a series of recommendations designed to improve education and vocational training systems with young people specifically in mind.

General remarks and financial support: Members point out that **investing in education is without doubt essential for sustainable growth and development** and that, even in times of economic crisis, financing youth programmes and education should not be regarded as a cost to be met now, but rather as an investment in the future of Europe. In this context, Members regret that the national schedules drawn up by Member States as a further contribution to meeting the educational objectives of the 'EU 2020' strategy are, according to the Commission, inadequate. For Members, one of the goals of higher education must be to ensure employability, but it must also nurture their creativity and innovativeness.

Welcoming the YoM, Members call on the Commission, , in its proposal for a new multiannual financial framework (MFF), to increase progressively investment in mobility and youth programmes, such as Lifelong Learning (Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci, Comenius, Grundtvig), Marie Curie, Erasmus Mundus and Youth in Action, in their present form, as well as in the European Voluntary Service. They also call for these programmes to be promoted more effectively and for their target population groups to be made more aware of the opportunities they provide.

Members consider that **no young person who has had problems in his or her educational career for whatever reason must be lost to working life**. Such young people must instead receive targeted support. They point out that access to education must not be contingent on the social or financial status of a young person’s parents and the importance of horizontal mobility at all levels of education, both at school and during vocational training. In this regard, mobility should be made more attractive and that financial support should be widespread and sufficient.

Taking the view that education and training must be a priority for the European Union and that this objective should be reflected in the next MFF, Members call for the educational programmes aimed at promoting mobility to be extended beyond 2013 and asks the Commission to increase the funding allocated to such programmes when future framework programmes are drawn up. The Member States should make greater investment in education and training systems at all levels and support financially the implementation of mobility programmes. Members propose that Member States target **a total investment of at least 2% of GDP in higher education**.

Youth and mobility: from a general point of view, Members call for the active involvement of young people at all stages of EU programmes, from framing to implementation. In this context, they ask the Commission to come up with a Green Paper on Youth Participation. On the issue of **early school-leaving**, Members call for action to be taken at an early age in order to reduce early school-leaving to below 10%, as agreed under the EU 2020 Strategy. They stress that this issue must be addressed in a multifaceted way in combination with social measures to enhance education and training in disadvantaged areas.

As regards **mobility,** several measures are proposed to promote the mobility of young people from European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) countries but also of teachers and of workers in the field of youth and education. Particular attention should be paid to those who are most at risk, to categories of young people with fewer opportunities and to those seeking a 'second chance' to get back into education. They call on the Commission to urgently take measures to encourage mobility generally, and more particularly for young people who are disabled or young people with children.

Members stress the importance of recognising skills obtained through any form of learning, including, non-formal and informal learning. They emphasise the importance of the transmission of knowledge and skills from generation to generation. They remind Member States to introduce the learning of the 'mother tongue plus two' languages at an early stage in life and in early childhood education.

They also urge the Member States to promote mobility in the context of training and employment by:

- increasing awareness and making information easily accessible to all those young people interested;
- highlighting the added value of mobility at the early stages of education;
- ensuring that learning outcomes from mobility experiences between Member States are validated; and
- reducing administrative burdens and stimulating cooperation between the relevant authorities across the Member States.

They call on the Commission to facilitate learning and employment mobility by:

- strengthening the EU's education and youth programmes, such as Erasmus, Leonardo and Youth in Action;
- enhancing the implementation of existing European instruments and tools, such as the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and Europass; and
- developing the new tools that it has already examined, such as the Youth on the Move website, the Youth on the Move card, the European skills passport and the pilot project 'Your first EURES job'.

European higher education and the Bologna process: Members stress the importance of beginning a new, more constructive dialogue between all stakeholders within the Bologna process. They call on the Commission to widen the focus of the Modernisation Agenda for Universities, and renew the priorities to meet new challenges, such as the social dimension of higher education. The report draws attention to the need to find a balance between higher education systems, on the one hand, and the needs of the economy and society in general, on the other, and to interlink them through appropriate curricula that equip people with the competences and skills needed for the society and economy of the future.

A number of measures have been proposed to: (i) promote and enhance cooperation between universities; (ii) emphasise the importance of the existing research and innovation funding programmes. **Members encourage universities to bring their programmes and structures more closely into line with the specific needs of the labour market**, to consider the needs of businesses when developing their curricula and to pursue new methods of cooperation with private and public companies by encouraging the creation of public-private partnerships (PPPs) and sponsorships. They also underline the importance of promoting entrepreneurship and helping young people to start their own business and of promoting and extending the Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs programme. The report recognises the value in students being offered study grants by private enterprises. Greater support should be provided for the mobility of **young researchers**.

Vocational education and training: Members call on the Member States to modernise and increase the attractiveness and quality of VET so that it can be better adapted to the current and future needs of the changing labour market. They emphasise that adapting education systems and vocational training to the future skills requirements of the labour market is one of the keys to combating youth unemployment and

therefore the transition from school, vocational education and training or higher education to employment must be better prepared and must follow on directly from education or training. They take the view that better cooperation needs to be encouraged between educational establishments, youth organisations, the various labour market sectors and employers.

The report states that mobility for the acquisition of new skills is a strong tool for improving the skills and competences, personal development and active citizenship of young people. However mobility must not lead to a lowering of social standards in the host country. It stresses the importance of supporting and further enhancing mobility in the field of VET including apprenticeships, by providing VET students and apprentices with information, counselling, guidance and hosting structures when they are abroad.

Transition from education and training to work: Members strongly stress that the smooth entrance of young people on to the labour market depends mainly on the modernisation, including in terms of their curricula, of VET institutions and universities. In this context, they highlight the importance of making university timetables more flexible for students who have already entered the workforce and want to study simultaneously.

Members reiterate their strong support for the **EU target for 40% of young people to complete tertiary** or equivalent (i.e. higher and vocational) education. They stress the importance of guidance instruments for young people to help them in their educational and professional choices. The importance of individually tailored support, in the form of advice for young people choosing a career and starting work, is required in order to achieve that objective.

Members invite tertiary education institutions to incorporate a properly paid, high-quality traineeship into study programmes where appropriate in order to enable young people to prepare themselves for working life, and especially in order to enable them to access jobs requiring high-level qualifications. They call on the Member States to **develop policies that promote the recruitment of young people**. The Commission is called upon to promote at European level initiatives to recognise traineeships as a period of employment for social security purposes, as some Member States are already doing.

Employment situation for young people: the report urges the **Member States to shift towards investment and job creation**. Members point out that austerity measures involving, for example, cut backs in the education system and job creation will not help young people and could potentially damage society and the economy in the longer term. They stress that unemployment at a young age puts the individual at a very high risk of poverty in the long term.

In this context, Members call for:

- employment and traineeship contracts to provide social rights for all from day one of the contract;
- for an EU framework laying down rights and protection arrangements for atypical and insecure jobs;
- the protection of young people against discrimination at the workplace, especially on the grounds of age and professional experience;
- measures to be taken by the Member States to provide as much information, choice and training as possible to help young people fulfil their potential;
- quality career and vocational guidance services to be further developed;
- measures to be taken to present a comprehensive overview of possible educational and training paths and later career choices;
- free, publicly-funded training places and a standardised system of training assistance to be provided for integrating particularly disadvantaged young people into the labour market;
- the creation of employment opportunities for disabled young people;
- the dramatic reduction of early school-leaving which is a known factor increasing the risk of future exclusion from both employment and society;

- the need to lay down **minimum standards for traineeships**, for example as regards income and social rights, including social protection and social security arrangements, in order to improve the quality of traineeships and ensure their educational value. Traineeships must not replace actual jobs and must be strictly limited in duration. A **legally-binding European quality framework for traineeships** covering all forms of education and training is urgently needed in order to prevent trainees from being exploited and that the Commission should present an action plan, with a timetable, incorporating an outline of how this quality framework would be implemented;
- the promotion of the EU's coordinated active labour market measures;
- the importance of non-formal and informal learning and education and voluntary work for the development of young people to be strengthened which will enable them to be actively involved in society and to take responsibility for their lives.

Members reiterate the importance of specific, verifiable objectives to reduce youth unemployment. They emphasise, therefore, that in their **National Reform Programmes the Member States should commit themselves to raising the employment rate for young people between the ages of 15 and 25 by 10% by 2014** and to increase the youth employment rate (for those not in education) to 75% by 2020/ They note that, since some 35% of all jobs that will become available between now and 2020 will require high qualifications combined with the ability to adapt and innovate, intensive efforts must be made to increase the proportion of people aged between 30 and 34 with a university degree or equivalent qualification to at least 40%.

Members stress that the ultimate goal of the YoM initiative is not only to improve European education systems and to increase youth employability, but also to **create a social environment in which every young person will be able to realise his or her potential and aspirations**.