Resolution on the Youth Opportunities Initiative

2012/2617(RSP) - 24/05/2012 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution tabled by the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs on the Youth Opportunities Initiative.

It welcomes the Commission's 'Youth Opportunities Initiative' Communication building on earlier Commission initiatives like 'Youth on the Move' and 'New skills and new jobs' and the many initiatives presented in this series of Communications, but has **serious doubts as to whether the scale of the actions proposed is proportionate to the gravity of the current youth unemployment crises** experienced in many Member States. Members note that after a lacklustre economic recovery since 2010, unemployment is on the rise again with youth unemployment over 22% in the European Union, while economic forecasts point to a renewed period of economic stagnation with unemployment levels rising further and no prospect of a job-rich recovery any time in the near future.

Parliament welcomes the Commission Communication entitled 'Towards a job-rich recovery' and urges Heads of State or Government in the EU to present as soon as possible a European Investment Plan boosting inclusive, sustainable and job-rich growth. It also welcomes the Commission's initiative to promote the Youth Guarantee initiative and to allocate EUR 4 million to Member States to help them set up Youth Guarantee schemes, which should be supported by active labour market policies helping to close the gap between education and training systems and the labour market. However, **Members have sincere doubts that this sum is ambitious enough** to help countries facing high rates of unemployment coupled with national budget constraints put in place these types of guarantees.

Parliament states that it is particularly concerned about the negative impact that the **substantial budget cuts in education in some Member States** will have on the difficult situation facing young people and on the implementation of the proposals in the Youth initiative. |It calls on the Commission to make sure that recommendations to Member States on regaining fiscal sustainability do not undermine or destroy policies and programmes aimed at promoting youth employment and social inclusion and/or preventing the marginalisation and detachment of young people from the labour market.

Whilst welcoming the sense of urgency expressed by Commission President Barroso's initiative to send 'Action teams' to Member States recording the highest youth unemployment rates, Parliament regrets that the 'Action teams' have only been mandated and set up by the Commission and suggests that in future the European Parliament and the Council be more closely involved in the process. It asks the Commission to keep Parliament duly informed about the agendas and concrete outcomes of these activities.

Members call on the Commission and Member States:

- to assess the impact of labour market reforms linked to the proposals made by the 'Action teams' on the employment rate and quality standards of employment in the Member States concerned;
- to adopt the European quality framework regulation as soon as possible in 2012 and define minimum standards supporting the provision and take-up of high-quality traineeships;
- to improve the quality and awareness, and thereby the status, of vocational education and training, which is a crucial alternative to higher education;
- ensure that a strong emphasis be put on working experience abroad for students and young people in vocational training in the "Erasmus for All" programme;

- introduce and assess new binding youth targets with particular attention to quality and youth-targeted policy strategies in line with the Europe 2020 Strategy objectives to be included in their National Reform Programmes;

- clearly incorporate youth unemployment in the European Semester by establishing it as a sub-target in the Europe 2020 strategy;

- assess the special challenges facing young people in their access to social protection and the risk of social exclusion; calls on the Commission and the Member States to promote measures to enhance their access to social protection and remuneration;

- finance mobility programmes that focus on the training and employment of young people in new areas which can enhance a job-rich recovery, particularly green jobs and jobs in the care sector for both young men and women;

- introduce **dual education systems** for all occupations not requiring higher education, including targets for companies of a certain size to offer apprenticeships and incentives to employ young people;

- develop a **more coordinated strategy** between national educational and training plans and labour market needs, not just in the short term but particularly in the medium and longer terms, so as to avoid the oversizing of certain sectors, to favour the development of new niche markets and to move resources from sectors that are losing jobs to developing sectors such as the sustainable economy.

Members deplore the fact that **four years into the crisis EUR 82 billion of the Structural Funds budget under the 2007-2013 Financial Perspective is still to be spent**. They urge the Commission to prioritise redeployment of a substantial part of the EUR 82 billion towards projects for young people, and especially towards small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), in order to boost decent employment opportunities for young people. They also call on the Commission to consider increasing co-financing rates for the eight countries facing particularly high rates of unemployment.

Lastly, Member States with low unemployment rates or having successfully introduced youth guarantees, such as Austria, are asked to actively collaborate with those Member States deeply affected by youth unemployment, by **transferring their know-how** and successful models in order to bridge the widening gap between their unemployment rates and develop together better and more inclusive youth-targeted employment policies with a positive impact on the ground.