Skills policies for fighting youth unemployment

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The European Parliament adopted by 604 votes to 67, with 44 abstentions, a resolution on skills policies for fighting youth unemployment.

Parliament recalled that the lack of relevant skills for available jobs and an education and training mismatch are important factors causing youth unemployment. It stated that there are, on one hand, 24 million unemployed people in Europe, including 7.5 million young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) and on the other 2 million unfilled vacancies in the EU. In parallel, there are many overqualified youth unemployed whose skills do not match the demand of the labour market. Therefore, there is a need to build up strong partnerships between local authorities, education and employment services – both mainstream and specialised – and social partners and the business community to support the creation, implementation and monitoring of short- and medium-term sustainable, **inclusive and quality employment strategies and action plans**.

Co-operation, participation, partnerships: Parliament called for closer and structural co-operation and interaction between schooling and vocational education, public administration, business, civil society, especially student and youth organisations, with a view to better matching skills to labour market needs. It welcomed the tools for skills development and the forecasting of skill needs proposed by the Commission and highlighted the fact that skills development should encourage the development of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) skills, which are widely useful in an economy.

However, Parliament also stressed that more **ambitious action and investment** is needed. In this regard, it called on the Member States, regional governments and local authorities to adopt skills development and anticipation strategies. It highlighted the essential role of competent and supportive teachers and trainers in reducing early school leaving and stressed the importance of investing in lifelong learning development for teachers. It is strongly opposed to any cutbacks in education budgets.

Better use of EU funds: Parliament called for greater financial resources to be used to spread information on European financing instruments and to broaden, in universities and businesses, the knowledge and skills that are necessary for seeking funds, studying and managing funding projects. In order to guarantee that EU funds are used properly, it is paramount that a supervisory and monitoring system be implemented in order to ascertain how those funds are being used. It called in particular for an **EU award for the best projects in combating youth unemployment**, which could be linked to the pan-European contest ‘European youth award’ and to the ‘European prize’, or youth employment in the social economy’. Member States are called upon to act, as soon as possible, on education- and labour market-related country-specific recommendations in the European Semester and other Commission recommendations.

SMEs and entrepreneurship: recalling the key role of enterprises, including SMEs, social and solidarity economy actors and micro-enterprises in training for working-life skills and job creation for young people, Members encouraged including in curricula the development in a safe environment of the **vocational skills needed in starting and managing businesses** as well as fostering transversal entrepreneurship competence. Parliament stressed that entrepreneurial skills can also be acquired through skills development programmes organised outside of the general education system and that these programmes may include coaching and mentoring activities supplied by experienced trainers. It also stressed the need to ease existing administrative and financial requirements when starting and managing businesses, through the simplification of procedures, easier access to credit, venture capital and microfinance for start-ups.

Member States are urged to take part in the Erasmus Programme for Young Entrepreneurs and to promote it among young people who wish to engage in business projects.

Parliament called for the creation of favourable conditions for the social economy in order to combine job creation for young people and social capital development and also called for effective support of socially responsible, green and sustainable entrepreneurial projects.

Skills for employability: Parliament stressed the urgent need to improve the qualifications and motivation of advisors working at public employment agencies, so that they can proactively respond to the needs of young job seekers, help them to gain additional qualifications and identify the skills they need for the job market. It called on the Member States to examine best practices in the school career guidance system where pupils are monitored from an early school stage to the first steps in the labour market. It also encouraged the Member States and all relevant stakeholders to share good practices in this regard and to further develop monitoring and forecasting tools.

Parliament pointed out the **lack of high-quality career guidance** in the Member States and the need to improve the quality of career guidance in schools and to provide ongoing professional training for careers advisors. Member States are called upon to examine **best practices in the school career guidance system** where pupils are monitored from an early school stage to the first steps in the labour market.

In addition, Member States are encouraged to promote and support opportunities for **professional mobility among young apprentices** to enable them to develop their skills through contact with other training systems and other types of business. Emphasis is given to the importance of developing 'soft skills' and to promoting non-formal and informal learning and training and studies, which adopt innovative approaches.

The importance of volunteering and grassroots sport in equipping young people with entrepreneurial spirit is highlighted.

Internships and apprenticeships: the importance of internships and apprenticeships is highlighted. Members recalled that high-quality traineeships and apprenticeships reflecting actual needs should lead to employment and that traineeships should prepare trainees for a job. They condemned any abuses including false traineeship which undermines workers' acquisition of social security rights and called for dissuasive measures to prevent abuses of traineeship status.

The resolution emphasised that societal and communication skills could help young people's confidence. It pointed out the advantages of a flexible, student-focused approach to education which makes it possible to change or adapt the direction of study in line with the student's needs and does not bind them to their initial choice.

Overall, Parliament encouraged the Member States to **urgently incorporate new technologies in the learning process**, and to intensify and improve ICT and digital skills training. Measures need to be developed to encourage girls to engage in STEM subjects and establish quality career guidance to support them in continuing their professional careers in this field.

Parliament recalled that education and skills policies should be aimed not only at fulfilling labour market needs but also at equipping individuals with the **necessary transversal competences to develop as active and responsible citizens**.

Certification: the resolution noted that despite high youth unemployment rates in some Member States and unfilled job vacancies in others, intra-EU labour mobility remains low. It recalled therefore the importance of the mobility of workers for a competitive labour market, and stressed the need to **reduce**

the linguistic and cultural barriers that are liable to restrain it by providing sector-specific language courses and training on intercultural communication for the unemployed.

Parliament emphasised the importance of addressing skills shortages and mismatches by promoting and facilitating mobility for learners, as well as **cross-border recognition of qualifications**, through a better use of all EU tools and programmes, such as Erasmus+, the European Qualifications Framework, the European Skills Passport, the Youth Guarantee, the Europass CV, the Entrepreneurial Skills Pass, EURES, Knowledge Alliances, the European Alliance for Apprenticeships, the European Credit Transfer System, the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) and the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET).

It encouraged the optimal use of existing EU funding such as the Erasmus+ programme. It also called on the Member States to rapidly and effectively implement the Operational Programmes of the Youth Employment Initiative.

Equal opportunities: Parliament stressed that prevention and lifelong support and counselling from the earliest stage possible for disadvantaged groups are of the utmost importance for providing productive and highly-skilled workforce for the labour market. It reiterated the importance of universal access to education for all and pointed out that while women represent the majority (60%) of university graduates in the European Union, their employment rate and promotion trajectories do not reflect their full potential. Specific measures are provided for them as well as for disabled persons.

New generation, new opportunities, new challenges: lastly, Parliament noted that young people, raised in an era of rapid technological progress have not only potential, talents and skills, but also values and priorities that differ from those of previous generations.

It is therefore necessary to:

- put in place programmes and initiatives that would overcome the gap between generations;
- propose more flexible education and training systems;
- provide that recruitment and employment services staff should be well trained and equipped with skills that would give them an understanding of the new generation;
- ensure equal access and training to digital tools to all.