EU development assistance in the field of education

2018/2081(INI) - 13/11/2018 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 402 votes to 25, with 7 abstentions, a resolution on EU development assistance in the field of education.

Aid to education accounted for 8.3% of total development aid in 2009. However, this share fell to 6.2% in 2015. For the Union and its Member States, this share has fell from 11% to 7.6% over the same period. Aid to basic education in the EU and its Member States fell by 33.9% between 2009 and 2015, more than aid to education in general (15.2%).

Parliament suggested **putting education at the centre of the EU's development policies** and those of its Member States not only because education is a fundamental right but also because it is essential to the achievement of the other sustainable development goals (SDGs).

The Union and its Member States are called upon to devote **10% of their official development assistance to education by 2024, and 15% by 2030**. In this regard, Members called for the creation of innovative funding mechanisms which leverage in order to strengthen national education systems.

Tackling the priorities: recalling the importance of mastering basic learning, including digital skills and empowering vulnerable groups to stem poverty, Members stressed that EU aid to education must above all address two priorities: **quality, inclusive basic education and providing enhanced support for the least developed countries (LDCs)**, which should receive at least 40% of the EU's education aid.

The resolution highlighted target 4.1 of the SDGs, which aims for 12 years of free and quality primary and secondary education as an essential pillar of the Africa-EU partnership. It called for particular attention to be paid to:

- **equality between girls and boys**, taking into account the objective of 85% of the new European Union programmes having gender equality as their main or significant objective by 2020;
- **education of refugee or displaced children** and support for countries affected by situations of fragility and conflict: at the end of 2017, there were more than 25.4 million refugees worldwide, of whom 7.4 million were primary school-age children, 4 million of whom had no access to any type of primary education;
- **secondary, technical and vocational education for the employability of young people and sustainable development:** the latter two should lead to decent jobs, be geared towards countries' development requirements and the needs of businesses, in coordination with them and, as far as possible, financed by them.

In response to the **phenomenon of the "brain drain"**, Member States were invited to explore good practices and experiences such as academic and professional exchanges. Members believe that **multiple-entry visas** would allow students to update their knowledge and promote circular mobility. At the same time, they called for incentives to be put in place to encourage students to work in the economic or governmental sector of their home country after their return for a minimum period.

Parliament stressed:

- efforts should be with regard to **initial and in-service teacher training** and the need for more exchange programmes between teachers from developing countries and EU Member States, for example through the Erasmus+ programme;
- **massive investments** in school infrastructure, materials and equipment, especially in rural or under-populated areas;
- the need to bolster efforts to **address the challenges of digital exclusion** through education and training in basic digital skills;
- the development of a comprehensive and integrated approach to sex education for girls and boys that addresses **health issues** such as HIV, family planning and pregnancy.

Improving the quality of aid: Parliament considered that assessing education systems and the quality of teaching and learning outcomes are a prerequisite for any improvement in the effectiveness of aid. It invited the Commission and the Member States to fund research, data aggregation and reliable, technical, non-discriminatory and independent evaluation tools.

MEPs insisted on the need to:

- ensure better donor **coordination** within local education groups to prevent duplication;
- ensure the capacity of duty bearers at all levels to **provide services for all** and to develop fair, accessible and non-discriminatory national education institutions, strategies and plans with genuine ownership, based on meaningful consultation and the strategic participation of key stakeholders;
- give priority to **sectoral budget support** where possible, subject to strict criteria, including good governance, and extensive checks, in particular to prevent corruption.

The resolution pointed out that only one third of aid for education is channelled through multilateral agencies, compared to two thirds in the health sector. It therefore called on the Commission and the Member States to increase their funding for the **Global Education Partnership** and the **Education Cannot Wait Fund**.

Members believe that the Global Partnership should be enabled, in its next post-2020 strategic plan, to extend its programming period from 3 to 6 years to allow for more stable and predictable funding, particularly needed to strengthen national education systems.