Resolution on the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience

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The European Parliament adopted by 606 votes to 12, with 72 abstentions, the resolution on the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience.

Education, training and skills policies are the competence of the Member States. However, the EU plays an important role in supporting, coordinating and complementing the actions of the Member States in these areas.

Parliament welcomed the Commission communication which places skills at the heart of the EU policy agenda and ensures that the right to quality and inclusive training and lifelong learning for all and in all areas and sectors, enshrined in the European Pillar of Social Rights' very first principle, becomes a reality across the EU by 2025.

VET and apprenticeships

Stressing the importance of apprenticeships and vocational educational and training (VET), Parliament called on the Commission and the Member States to use the EU resources for the promotion of VET and encourage employers to create paid internship and apprenticeship programmes for students of vocational schools and to organise competitions and industry tournaments for them.

It recalled that modernising vocational, education and training systems (VET) is key, especially in the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, to preparing young people and adults for the green and digital transitions, and to ensuring that core age and older workers maintain and develop the skills required to safeguard employability and extend working life.

Skills gap

Parliament considered that the mutual recognition of learning outcomes, diplomas, training, professional qualifications and skills acquired in another Member State must be improved and will help to overcome skills shortages and skills mismatches. It also emphasised the importance of addressing skills shortages and mismatches by facilitating the mobility of learners and cross-border recognition of qualifications through a better use of tools such as the European Qualifications Framework, Europass CV, the European Credit Transfer System (ECVET), Skills Panorama, ESCO or EURES. Members welcomed the Commission communication on achieving the European Education Area by 2025.

The resolution noted that many citizens gain valuable skills and experience outside the system of formal education or training as is for example the case of informal carers providing care to persons with disabilities or the elderly. According to Parliament, these informal skills should be recognised, as they can help the informal carers to increase their possibilities on the labour market.

In order to increase the attractiveness of the EU, Parliament called for the unblocking of the current Blue Card proposal in order to provide European companies with the competences necessary for them to remain or become competitive.

Digital divide

The resolution stressed that the COVID-19 pandemic has accentuated the importance of both basic and advanced digital skills and resilient education systems, and their ability to adjust between in-person, distance and online and hybrid methods of teaching. The pandemic has also changed the skills demand on the labour market, thus increasing the digital skills gap. Parliament highlighted the need for every citizen to have at least basic digital skills and for highly skilled specialists to be trained and equipped with advanced digital skills and innovative and entrepreneurial thinking.

Teleworking

Parliament noted that in the context of increasing teleworking, the Commission and Member States must make skills fostering this new way of work central to their strategies. It underlined that tele-education and tele-schools pose challenges to both educators and recipients of education alike, and that the skills needed to deliver tele-education and the training of trainers and educators are a short-term priority for Europe at this time.

It called for immediate and bold European, national, regional and local measures, evaluation mechanisms and resources to put digital skills at the heart of education and training policies, while safeguarding a high level of reading and mathematical skills among learners, making digital skills, IT tools and internet access available for all. Digital skills of teachers and trainers should be improved to allow for online and distance learning, as well as blended learning.

Gender gap

Parliament highlighted the importance of education and skills development to address gender bias and support gender equality. Increased efforts are needed at both the national and European level to break this gender imbalance and to ensure that women can access quality lifelong learning and training, including after periods of absence for care reasons.

Funding

The resolution expressed support for the Commissions planned actions as set out in the Skills Agenda and the Digital Education Plan 2021-2027. Parliament expects the 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework and Next Generation EU to provide for significantly increased resources for skills development. It emphasised the potential opportunities offered by the Erasmus + programme, especially in the adult education field, and the need to boost its 2021-2027 budget. Reskilling and upskilling should be promoted in their recovery and resilience plans. The resolution noted that the main source of EU education funding is the European Social Fund+, and stressed importance of ensuring that these funds remain available for this purpose, especially in times of crisis.