Fostering and adapting vocational training as a tool for employees' success and a building block for the EU economy in the new industry 4.0

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The European Parliament adopted by 508 votes to 12, with 76 abstentions, a resolution on fostering and adapting vocational training as a tool for employees’ success and a building block for the EU economy in the new industry 4.0.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4.0 Revolution), which encompasses the full digitalisation of service provision and production processes, is shaping today’s labour and education markets and societies, creating both challenges and opportunities for workers and companies such as the disappearance of some tasks and occupations and the creation of others, the dynamic reallocation of job tasks, a redesign of job content. Additional business investment is needed to develop strong vocational education and training (VET) across the EU and to promote the skills needed to work with new technologies.

The importance of vocational education and training (VET)

Parliament stressed the importance of lifelong learning and vocational education and training (VET), including upskilling and reskilling, for harnessing the full potential of individuals, as well as for the sustainable development of the Union. In this respect, it advocated paying particular attention to the specific needs of the most vulnerable or disadvantaged groups. It reiterated its call to the Commission and the Member States to establish a European Vocational Education and Training Area.

Members stressed the importance of enabling all **adults** to benefit from learning and training opportunities, and of helping employers to provide such training. They stressed the need for the **active participation of young people and older people** in the vocational learning process. They stressed the importance of effective **social dialogue** and the role of collective agreements in guaranteeing the provision of VET for all workers.

To address skills shortages, **decent working conditions** and retention mechanisms should be provided to ensure a well-functioning labour market in the future.

The resolution stressed the importance of improving the quality of employment in sectors and companies where poor working conditions prevail, in order to tackle the issue of brain drain. It advocated banning the practice of unpaid internships and proposing a common legal framework to ensure fair remuneration for internships and apprenticeships.

Developing strategies

Parliament stressed the need to develop strategies and **create vocational education and training opportunities for all**, especially for young people who are not in work, education or training or who have dropped out of school, older workers, adults with low skills and jobseekers, people living in remote and rural areas and those with disabilities and learning difficulties. It drew attention to the need to individualise vocational education and training for adults, particularly for those with few qualifications or skills.

Parliament recommended, *inter alia*, the following:

- improving the **validation and formal recognition of skills and competences** in cooperation with the social partners, in particular skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal education and experience, such as long-term care or volunteering, as well as skills and competences acquired in third countries;

- creating a **new learning culture** focusing on the acquisition of skills such as customer service, interpersonal skills including teamwork and communication, problem solving, management including time management, critical thinking, learning to learn, sustainability skills and digital skills including cyber security;

- further developing **dual training systems** that combine high-quality apprenticeships in companies with vocational education;

- improving cooperation between VET institutions and companies in order to remedy the shortage of VET teachers;

- combatting poverty and inequality by supporting measures aimed at **disadvantaged and low-skilled groups**, with an emphasis on education and training that enable the development of social, scientific and professional skills, in particular basic digital skills;

- creating incentives for **mentoring** to enable the sharing of skills and experience, including between generations;

- developing, in cooperation with VET stakeholders, including the social partners and the relevant regional and local authorities, curricula focusing on the occupations required to **meet the challenges of the ecological and digital transitions**;

- **simplifying administrative procedures** related to VET and assist certain enterprises, such as SMEs and social economy organisations, for example through consultancy services, in identifying training needs and applying for financial support.

Members drew attention to the opportunities and challenges presented by the growing number of third-country nationals in the EU, particularly as a result of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

They stressed the importance of supporting the **retraining and professional development of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees**, as well as facilitating their access to quality jobs and information on working conditions and social protection.

Artificial intelligence

Parliament called on firms to use methods for **predicting** the impact of artificial intelligence on jobs, such as supervised machine learning, for the purpose, among other things, of identifying the occupations where changes are most likely and to adapt to them in optimal time.

Educational institutions and employers should be responsible for **preparing students, apprentices and workers for the presence of artificial intelligence** in the workplace and for developing, in particular, critical thinking skills in this regard. The resolution underlined the importance of cooperation between educational institutions and employers in order to enhance digital competences and knowledge about tools using artificial intelligence and algorithmic management.