Employment: qualifications and mobility, programme of action

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The committee adopted the report by Regina BASTOS (EPP-ED, P) welcoming the proposed new Action Plan, although it regretted the absence of a clear timetable for implementation. The report underlined the strategic role that local authorities could play in helping to bring the world of work and education systems closer together. Although MEPs felt that reducing regional imbalances was a priority, they nevertheless supported measures seeking to encourage geographical mobility, provided that this was based on a voluntary decision by the workers concerned. They also felt that teleworking was a way of ensuring that workers did not have to accept geographical mobility against their will, but stressed that such workers must be given adequate social protection. MEPs underlined the need to extend, update and simplify coordination in the field of social security by speeding up the revision of Regulation 1408/71. They welcomed the recent efforts aimed at solving the problem of supplementary pensions, which was still a barrier to cross-border mobility. They also endorsed the Commission's decision to create a European health insurance card and called for the proposal to be submitted in time for it to be implemented in 2004. The Commission was also urged to enforce existing Community legislation on the mutual recognition of qualifications more rigorously. The report also called on the Commission to: - modernise the EURES system and integrate it into the Member States' employment services; - encourage Member States to take practical steps to enable innovative enterprises to be set up and job creation projects to be implemented, especially in the services and environment sectors; - focus on training for women in occupations where they are currently under-represented and on other gender mainstreaming measures; - take steps to guarantee the economic, social and political integration of non-EU labour migrants; - ensure that CEECs, aided by Commission programmes, can set up their own innovation and research facilities to ensure that they do not lose highly skilled workers.