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DRAFT REPORT

on a new skills agenda for Europe
(2017/2002(INI))

Committee on Employment and Social Affairs
Committee on Culture and Education

Rapporteurs: Martina Dlabajová, Momchil Nekov

(Joint committee procedure – Rule 55 of the Rules of Procedure)

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on a new skills agenda for Europe (2017/2002(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Articles 165 and 166 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU),
- having regard to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, and in particular Articles 14 and 15 thereof,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (‘ET 2020’)¹,
- having regard to the Council recommendation of 19 December 2016 on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults²,
- having regard to the Council recommendation of 15 February 2016 on the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market³,
- having regard to the Council recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee⁴,
- having regard to the Council recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning⁵,
- having regard to the Council recommendation of 28 June 2011 on policies to reduce early school leaving⁶,
- having regard to the Council resolution of 15 November 2007 on the new skills for new jobs⁷,
- having regard to the Council conclusions on reducing early school leaving and promoting success in school⁸,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 17 February 2014 on investing in education and training – a response to ‘Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes’ and the ‘2013 Annual Growth Survey’⁹,
- having regard to the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of

¹ OJ C 119, 28.5.2009, p. 2.

² OJ C 484, 24.12.2016, p. 1.

³ OJ C 67, 20.2.2016, p. 1.

⁴ OJ C 120, 26.4.2013, p. 1.

⁵ OJ C 398, 22.12.2012, p. 1.

⁶ OJ C 191, 1.7.2011, p. 1.

⁷ OJ C 290, 4.12.2007, p. 1.

⁸ OJ C 417, 15.12.2015, p. 36.

⁹ OJ C 64, 5.3.2013, p. 5.

- 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF-LLL)¹,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 20 November 2012 entitled Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes (COM(2012)0669),
 - having regard to its resolution of 12 April 2016 on Erasmus+ and other tools to foster mobility in VET – a lifelong learning approach²,
 - having regard to its resolution of 19 January 2016 on skills policies for fighting youth unemployment³,
 - having regard to its resolution of 10 September 2015 on creating a competitive EU labour market for the 21st century: matching skills and qualifications with demand and job opportunities, as a way to recover from the crisis⁴,
 - having regard to the Council conclusions on the European Pact for gender equality for the period 2011 - 2020⁵,
 - having regard to the Draft Council conclusions of 20 February 2017 on Enhancing the Skills of Women and Men in the EU Labour⁶,
 - having regard to Rule 52 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the joint deliberations of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs and the Committee on Culture and Education under Rule 55 of the Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs and the Committee on Culture and Education (A8-0000/2017),
- A. whereas skills have a strategic importance for growth, innovation and social cohesion and the complexity of jobs is increasing across all sectors and occupations and there is inflation in relative skills demand, even for low-skilled jobs;
- B. whereas many low-skilled jobs now require greater literacy, numeracy and other basic skills and even low-skilled jobs within the service sector increasingly include more demanding non-routine tasks (EC, 2016b);
- C. whereas by 2025, 49 % of all job openings (including both new and replacement jobs) in the EU will require high-level qualifications, 40 % – medium-level qualifications, while only 11 % – low-level or no qualifications⁷;

¹ OJ C 111, 6.5.2008, p. 1.

² Texts adopted, P8_TA(2016)0107.

³ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2016)0008.

⁴ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2015)0321.

⁵ https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/lsa/119628.pdf

⁶ <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-6268-2017-INIT/en/pdf>

⁷ Cedefop, forthcoming in EC, 2016b.

- D. whereas a European skills and jobs survey has revealed that about 45% of the EU's adult workers believe that their skills can either be better developed or utilised at work;
- E. whereas skills mismatches is a worrying phenomenon affecting individuals and businesses, creating skill gaps and skill shortages and is one of the causes of unemployment¹;
- F. whereas, currently, almost 23 % of the population aged 20-64 have a low level of education (pre-primary, primary or lower secondary education); whereas low-qualified people have fewer employment opportunities and are also more vulnerable to being in insecure jobs and are twice as likely as highly qualified people to experience long-term unemployment (EC, 2016a);
- G. whereas equality between women and men is a fundamental principle of the European Union enshrined in the Treaties and is one of the objectives and responsibilities of the Union; whereas, furthermore, mainstreaming the principle of equality between women and men in all its activities is a specific mission of the Union;
- H. whereas, at EU level, NEETs (not in employment, education or training) are considered to be one of the most problematic groups in the context of youth unemployment; whereas women are 1.4 times more likely to become NEET than men on average;
- I. whereas according to the latest PIAAC study by the OECD, about 70 million Europeans lack basic skills such as reading, writing and numeracy, which represents an obstacle to those people finding a decent job and living standard;
- J. whereas access to learning and training opportunities must be a right for everyone at every stage of life so that they can acquire transversal skills such as, numeracy, digital and media literacy, critical thinking, social skills and relevant life skills;
- K. whereas, nowadays, our education systems are facing a significant challenge as a result of the digital transformation, which is impacting teaching and learning processes;
- L. whereas entrepreneurship skills need to be understood in a broader sense, as a sense of initiative, participation in social actions and an entrepreneurial mind-set and should therefore be further emphasised in the Skills Agenda as a life skill which benefits individuals in their personal and professional life;

Developing skills for life and skills for jobs

1. Welcomes the Commission communication entitled 'A New Skills Agenda for Europe – Working together to strengthen human capital, employability and competitiveness' adopted in June 2016;
2. Agrees with the focus on the need to upgrade the European education and training systems in line with the fast changing economic and societal environment; notes that, while skills needs are dynamic, the main focus of the skills package is the immediate needs of the labour market; highlights in this respect the importance of a pan-European

¹ <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/assisting-eu-countries-skills-matching>

skills needs forecasting tool and lifelong learning with a view to adapting to new situations in the labour market;

3. Calls on the Member States to include leadership, management, entrepreneurial and financial education, business start-up advice and communication technologies in their education programmes, and to prioritise the further development of vocational training and education (VET) programmes, including enhancing European craftsmanship;
4. Encourages Member States to go beyond promoting the ‘right occupational skills’ and to also focus on those aspects of education that are more work-based and more practical, and that foster an entrepreneurial mind-set and creativity, allow people to think critically and to fully participate in the democratic process and social life;
5. Encourages Member States to better match the skills with the jobs in the labour market and in particular to put in place dual systems¹ which help people to be flexible in their education paths and later in the labour market;
6. Recalls, in this respect, the need for enhanced cooperation among the Member States to learn from best practices which lead to lower unemployment rates, like alternance training²;

The role of education in tackling unemployment, social exclusion and poverty

7. Insists that education is not only a key factor in enhancing employability, but also in combating social exclusion and therefore believes that investing in skills and competences is crucial to tackling the high unemployment rate, especially among NEETs; recalls that a genuine estimation of future skills needs is paramount in this respect;
8. Regrets that whilst there is increased recognition of the potential of quality early education and care in reducing early school leaving and in laying a solid foundation for further learning, the Skills Agenda lacks a forward-looking regard into the earlier phases of education;
9. Insists on the need for immediate action to reverse the unacceptable situation of 70 million Europeans lacking basic skills;

Strengthening connections between education and employment

10. Stresses the need to strive for a more flexible and individual approach to career development and lifelong education and training across one’s personal career path, and recognises the role that both public and private parties can play in providing this, while recognising that guidance and counselling which address individual needs and focus on

¹ A dual education system combines apprenticeships in a company with vocational education at a vocational school in one course.

² Educational training combining periods in any educational institution or training centre and in the work place. The alternance scheme can take place on a weekly, monthly or yearly basis. Depending on the country and the applicable status, participants may be contractually linked to the employer and/or receive remuneration. According to the CEDEFOP terminology, the German dual system is an example of alternance training. (Terminology of European education and training policy, CEDEFOP)

the evaluation and expansion of individual skills must be a core element of education and skills policies from an early stage;

11. Stresses that skills development must be a shared responsibility between education providers and employers; insists that the industry/employers should be involved in providing and training people with the necessary skills in order for businesses to be competitive and at the same time boost people's self-confidence;
12. Recognises the importance of fostering work-based learning apprenticeships as one of the tools to further facilitate the integration of individuals into the labour market;
13. Asks for concrete measures to be put in place in order to facilitate the transition of young people from education to work by ensuring quality internships and apprenticeships, giving young people the possibility of putting their talents into practice and have a set of rights and access to social protection;
14. Believes that, in order to anticipate future skills needs, social partners, and education and training providers must be strongly involved at all levels, in particular in designing, implementing and evaluating vocational qualification programmes, which provide an effective transition from formal education to work-based learning;

The key role of non-formal learning and informal education

15. Insists on the importance of validating non-formal and informal learning to reach out and empower learners; recognises that this is particularly evident for disadvantaged groups, such as low-skilled adults who are in need of priority access to validation arrangements;
16. Regrets that employers and formal education providers do not sufficiently recognise the value and relevance of skills, competences and knowledge acquired through non-formal and informal learning;
17. Recognises that the lack of comparability and coherence between the validation approaches of EU countries represents an additional barrier;
18. Insists on the need to refocus on the role of non-formal education, which is key for the empowerment of people and especially those who are low skilled and who have limited opportunities to access formal education;
19. Stresses that non-formal learning, including volunteering, has a crucial role to play in stimulating the development of life skills such as team work, creativity and a sense of initiative while reinforcing self-esteem and motivation to learn;
20. Asks for validation and recognition arrangements to be put in place by 2018 to ensure that the upskilling pathways are a success¹;

Fostering digital, STEM and entrepreneurial skills

21. Insists on the need to incorporate new technologies in the teaching and learning process

¹ Council Recommendation of 19 December 2016.

in order to equip people with the right set of skills, competences and knowledge;

22. Welcomes the Commission's proposal to urge Member States to draw up comprehensive national strategies for digital skills; points out however that in order for these strategies to be effective, there is a need for strong pedagogical leadership from teachers at all levels of education;
23. Stresses the need to include elements of entrepreneurial learning at all levels of education, since instilling entrepreneurial spirit among the young at an early stage is an effective way of combating youth unemployment;
24. Urges active dialogue and cooperation between the university community and the world of work aimed at developing educational programmes which equip young people with the requisite skills and competences;

Modernising VET and focus on the value of work-based learning

25. Reiterates the importance of vocational education and training (VET) for enhancing employability and clearing the pathway to professional qualifications for young people; calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure that VET is made more relevant and is tailored to labour market needs by making them an integral part of the education system, and to guarantee high qualification standards and quality assurance in this regard;
26. Highlights the need to investigate the possibility for inter-sectorial mobility not only in the VET teacher profession but also among schools as a whole;
27. Stresses the need to increase the attractiveness of VET by making sure that young people and their families have access to information on VET options;

Boosting lifelong learning opportunities for all

28. Stresses that the upskilling of all teachers would be the prerequisite for the delivery of the Skills Agenda and that further efforts and analyses have to be made in attracting talents to this profession;
29. Emphasises the need to invest and support the professional development of teachers of all educational sectors and to establish lifelong career guidance services;

The implementation of the New Skills Agenda: challenges and recommendations

30. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to continue to make VET education and training more visible and to enhance its attractiveness; calls on the Commission to encourage Member States to set further targets to encourage work-based learning in VET programmes;
31. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to continue to focus on digital skills, in particular the digital transformation of the economy and re-shaping the way people work and do business, and takes note of the Commission's intention to focus on the positive aspects of this transformation via the EU e-skills strategy;

32. Calls for entrepreneurship education to be part of the curriculum in the Member States in order to develop an individual entrepreneurial mind-set in citizens;
33. Calls on the Commission in addition to develop a pan-European skill needs forecasting tool, which would make it possible to estimate future skill needs and adapt them better to the jobs available on the labour market;
34. Is of the opinion that the proposed 'up-skilling pathways' will make a tangible difference only if lessons are learned from the implementation of the Youth Guarantee;
35. Believes that equipping people with a minimum set of skills is not enough and that it is crucial to ensure that every individual is encouraged to acquire advanced skills and competences in order to better adapt to the future;
36. Regrets the lack of dedicated funding for the implementation of the proposals, which might be an important obstacle to taking actions that make a real difference at national level;
37. Calls on the Commission and Member States to make funding available in order to bridge the existing technological gap between educational institutions which are well equipped and those which are not, as part of the national strategies for digital skills;
38. Calls on the Member States to foster cooperation and reinforce synergies between formal, non-formal and informal education providers with a view to reaching a wider group of low-skilled people in order to better take into account their specific needs;
39. Welcomes the proposed revision of the key competences framework which offers a valuable reference and provides common understanding for the development of transversal skills; therefore calls on the Commission to establish a link with the 2012 Council recommendation on validating non-formal and informal learning as well as reinforcing its impact on a national level, including in curricula and teacher training;
40. Asks the Commission to leave more flexibility to Member States to broaden their skills offer and to not only focus on basic skills in the framework of the upskilling pathways, in the context of concrete needs at local, regional and sectorial level (for example intercultural, health, family skills);
41. Calls on the Commission to establish a European Year of Adult Learning, which will help to raise awareness of the value of adult education across Europe;
42. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

The New Skills Agenda for Europe is a long awaited initiative, which put rightly the focus on

the need to upgrade the European education and training systems in line with the fast changing economic and societal environment. However, the skills' package put' emphasis mainly on the immediate needs of the labour market, whilst the labour market is dynamic and there is also the need to better estimate the future skills' needs. It is essential, therefore, to move towards a pan-European skills' forecasting tool. The report highlights the importance to go beyond the "right occupational skills" and to focus also on those aspects of education that are able to foster entrepreneurial mind-set and creativity, to allow people to think critically, to take informed decisions and to fully participate in the democratic and social life.

In order to achieve the ambitious goals of the Agenda, there is a need to adopt a holistic approach to education and skills development providing citizens with the key set of competences for lifelong learning, defined as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for personal fulfilment and development, active citizenship and employment. Moreover, there is an increasing recognition of the potential of quality early education and care in reducing disadvantages and laying a good foundation for further learning and in this sense the Skills Agenda lacks a forward-looking regard into the earlier basis of participation. Member States should be encouraged to reform and improve their systems towards the Barcelona objective of having at least 33 % of children under 3 participating in early childhood education and care programmes.

With this pattern of inequalities in the earlier and fundamental basic educational system, it is not surprising that according to the latest PIAAC study by OECD, about 70 millions of Europeans lack basic skills such as reading, writing and numeracy, which represent an obstacle to their ability to find a decent job and living standard. Access to learning and training opportunities must be a right for everyone, at every stage of life, to acquire transversal skills such as numeracy, digital and media literacy, critical thinking, social skills and other relevant life skills. In this sense, the Skills Agenda is a step in the right direction encouraging shared commitment between education providers and employers toward a common vision on the crucial importance of lifelong learning policies.

Stronger emphasis is needed in the Agenda on the important role of non-formal and informal learning in reaching out to and empowering learners. Significant progress has been made in the last few years in the context of the Council recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning by 2018. However, the provision of real access, recognition and sustainable financial support remains a great challenge. This is particularly evident for disadvantaged groups, such as low-skills adults who are in need of priority access to validation. There is a need to work on overcoming the lack of awareness on the importance of validation among employers and formal education providers that still do not sufficiently recognise the value and relevance of skills, competences and knowledge acquired through non-formal and informal learning. Fostering cooperation between formal, non-formal and informal education providers is required with a view to reaching out to a wider group of low-skilled people in order to better take into account their specific needs. If we want the "upskilling pathways" to be a success, we need to ensure that validation arrangements are put in place by 2018.

The recalls the Commission's proposal to urge member States to draw up comprehensive national strategies for digital skills and its proposed e-skills strategy. People should be equipped with more specific digital competences, as well as to be able to use digital technologies in an innovative and creative way. However, in order for this strategies to be effective, there is a need to give first the right skills' and competences to teachers and educators to demonstrate

pedagogical leadership at all level of education. Moreover, it is essential to make available funding in order to bridge the existing technological gap between educational institutions which are well equipped and the ones which are not, as part of the national strategies for digital skills.

It is right to focus on basic skills, which are an essential prerequisite for personal and professional fulfilment, but further emphases is needed on STEM-related and entrepreneurial skills, which should be predominantly focused in early childhood and primary education because the earlier people acquire these skills, the better chances they will have to succeed in their education and professional pathways. When it comes to entrepreneurship skills, they need to be understood in its broader sense, as a sense of initiative, participation in social actions and entrepreneurial mind-set and therefore to be further emphasised in the Skills Agenda as life skill, which benefits individuals in their personal and professional life.

The report underlines the necessity to modernise European VET systems as well as to put the spotlight on dual vocational systems and the value of work based learning. It calls on the Commission to encourage Member States to set further targets to increase work-based learning in VET programmes in Member States. It underlines the need to foster cooperation between Member States to learn from best practices which lead to lower unemployment rates. Special attention is given to teachers who are the core of education system. Further efforts have to be invested on attracting and motivating of young people and educators to join and work in the education system who are more open for innovative methodological approach. Investing and supporting the professional development of teachers is crucial in achieving good results in term of education and skills development. The upskilling of all teachers would be the prerequisite for the delivery of the Skills Agenda.

The report also stresses that the proposed “up-skilling pathways” will make a tangible difference only if lessons are learned from the implementation of the Youth Guarantee. Furthermore, equipping people with minimum set of skills is not enough and it is crucial to ensure that every individual is encouraged to acquire advanced skills and competences in order to better adapt to the future.

It is regrettable that there is no dedicated funding for the implementation of the Agenda which might be an important obstacle for actions on national level to make real difference.

The report also advocates more explicit links between the Skills Agenda, the European Semester and ET 2020 with regard to the education and employment targets. It also pays attention to the fact that equality between women and men is a fundamental principle of the European Union enshrined in Treaties and one of the objectives and tasks of the Union and therefore needs to be better taken into account when designing education and skills policies.

Finally, the report recommends the establishment of European Year of Adult Learning, which will help to raise awareness of the value of adult education across Europe.