RESOLUTION

on overcoming the impact of the economic crisis on youth unemployment in the EU and Eastern Partnership countries
Resolution by the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly on overcoming the impact of the economic crisis on youth unemployment in the EU and Eastern Partnership countries

The Euronest Parliamentary Assembly,

– having regard to the development of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) since 2004 and, in particular, to the Commission’s progress reports on its implementation,

– having regard to the Joint Communication of the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of 18 November 2015 entitled ‘Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy’ and to the Council Conclusions on the Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy of 14 December 2015,

– having regard to the Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit adopted in Riga on 22 May 2015,

– having regard to the Joint Working Document of the Staff of the Commission and of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of 15 December 2016 entitled ‘Eastern Partnership – focusing on key priorities and deliverables’,

– having regard to the Eastern Partnership Youth Policy Analytic Report published by the Commission in December 2015,

– having regard to the Commission communication of 4 October 2016 entitled ‘The Youth Guarantee and Youth Employment Initiative three years on’ (COM(2016) 0646),

– having regard to the European Parliament resolution of 19 January 2016 on skills policies for fighting youth unemployment¹,

– having regard to the Erasmus Impact Study published by the Commission in September 2014,

– having regard to the new assistance package of EUR 79.8 million to boost socio-economic development and SMEs, youth employability and connectivity in the Eastern Partnership countries, announced by the Commission on 19 September 2016,

– having regard to the outcome of the 2nd Eastern Partnership Youth Forum, held in Riga on 10 and 11 February 2015, with a focus on youth employment and cross-sectorial cooperation in the area of youth,

– having regard to its resolution of 28 May 2013 on combating poverty and social exclusion in the Eastern Partner countries²;

¹ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2016)0008.
²

– having regard to the Yerevan Ministerial Communiqué, adopted by the Ministerial Conference of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) held in Yerevan on 14 and 15 May 2015,

– having regard to the 1960 UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (CADE),

– having regard to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular Goal 8 which calls on governments and other actors to ‘promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all’,

– having regard to the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalisation,

A. whereas today we have the largest youth generation in human history, with 1.8 billion young people living on the planet, of whom approximately 85 % live in emerging and developing economies or fragile states;

B. whereas of the additional one billion young people who will enter the job market in the next decade, only 40 % are expected to be able to obtain jobs that currently exist, and whereas the global economy will therefore need to create 600 million new jobs over the next 10 years – five million jobs each month – simply to keep pace with projected youth employment rates;

C. whereas young people have been hit particularly hard by the financial and economic crisis of the past ten years; whereas the global youth unemployment rate is on the rise, having reached a historical peak of over 13 % in 2016 (from 12.9 % in 2015), at which level it is expected to remain in 2017; whereas, as a result, the number of unemployed young people worldwide rose by half a million in 2016, reaching 71 million, and is likely to remain at this level for 2017;

D. whereas the SDGs will not be achieved unless the challenges that young people seeking employment face in every region of the world are addressed;

E. whereas more than 4.2 million young people (i.e. those aged between 15 and 24) in the EU were unemployed in August 2016, and long-term youth unemployment still remains too high in some Member States;

F. whereas World Bank research shows that, unlike in other regions, the effects of the crisis on unemployment on Europe and Central Asia have been prolonged and that unemployment levels have not reached pre-crisis levels;

G. whereas youth unemployment rates in the Eastern Partnership countries differ

considerably, oscillating between 5 % and 33 % in 2015, owing to differences in the respective national labour markets;

H. whereas for young people the lack of viable employment opportunities is often the primary factor discouraging them from actively searching for jobs; whereas with youth unemployment rates remaining persistently high, and with the transition from education to work becoming increasingly difficult, a growing proportion of young people (more than 6.6 million people aged 15-24 in 2015) fall into the category of those not in education, employment or training (NEETs), a position which carries with it the risks of deteriorating skills, underemployment and distress;

I. whereas the lack of relevant skills for available jobs and the education and training mismatch are important factors behind youth unemployment; whereas young people today – despite being more educated and skilled than previous generations – continue to face significant structural hurdles in obtaining quality employment, as judged by EU and national standards; whereas the youth employment crisis in Europe cannot be solved without efficient and sustainable job creation;

J. whereas effective guidance programmes have a positive impact on economic and social outcomes; whereas young jobseekers and graduates should make more use of career guidance and information services, which in turn should be better prepared to meet the expectations of young people entering the labour market;

K. whereas small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are among the most important generators of youth employment, accounting for well over 80 % of all jobs and thereby performing an important service for the labour market as a whole, as they play a crucial role in the transition towards a new, sustainable economy;

L. whereas any policies relating to skills, competencies and education must first and foremost be rights-based, give young people a choice and empower them; whereas for such policies to be successful it is therefore of the utmost importance that young people themselves are key stakeholders, along with educational institutions and businesses or training providers;

M. whereas early integration, investment in education and training, emphasis on practical skills and a dual vocational training system combining work experience and studying have been key instruments allowing certain Member States to be more resilient than others to rising youth unemployment during the crisis;

N. whereas the European Training Foundation plays a key role in facilitating the reforms of vocational education, training and employment systems in the Eastern Partnership countries;

O. whereas particular attention needs to be paid to NEETs, as individuals belonging to this group frequently drift between temporary jobs, unemployment and/or inactivity, even during periods of strong economic growth; whereas the EU Youth Employment Initiative, which was set up by decision of the European Council in February 2013 and which is partly funded through the European Social Fund, has proven to be a successful EU instrument for combating youth unemployment, in particular among the NEET
target group;

P. whereas the European NEET rate is particularly high among young women, and whereas particular attention must therefore be given to the gender perspective;

Q. whereas, according to the Commission’s 2014 Erasmus Impact study, young graduates who have obtained skills and experience abroad through the Erasmus programme have much better opportunities and improved skills by comparison with those who have not spent time abroad; whereas the Leonardo programme targeting apprentices has met with similar success;

R. whereas a spin-off of the Erasmus programme, Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs, gives young people interested in entrepreneurship the chance to learn and acquire experience by working with experienced entrepreneurs running small businesses in other participating countries;

S. whereas the sustainable creation of quality jobs could be achieved through investment in, for example, green jobs, renewable energies, sustainable housing, energy efficiency, research and development, IT and other innovative sectors with the capacity to employ large numbers of young people;

T. whereas delays in access to the labour market and long periods of unemployment adversely affect the career prospects, pay, health and social mobility of young people;

U. whereas young people are an asset to the European economy and should be supported in their efforts to acquire the skills required by the labour market, in anticipation of tomorrow’s needs, including coding and e-skills, which are indispensable for economic activity in the 21st century;

V. whereas high unemployment and idleness, particularly among young people, remains one of the most formidable challenges facing the Eastern European countries, limiting their prospects for better living standards and economic growth;

W. whereas high unemployment force young jobseekers to work involuntarily in unpopular informal, part-time or low-paid jobs;

X. whereas young people who are faced with the prospect of unemployment, poverty or vulnerable forms of employment tend to look abroad for better education and job opportunities; whereas youth migration hinders the social cohesion and economic growth of the Eastern Partnership countries and the EU Member States;

Y. whereas wide disparities exist between young males and females across most labour market indicators, especially during the transition to adulthood; whereas such disparities may represent inequalities in opportunity and reflect deep-rooted socio-economic and cultural discrimination tending to disadvantage women disproportionately;

Z. whereas young persons with migrant backgrounds show lower rates of employment, education and training;
1. Stresses that sustainable economic, education and youth employment systems are essential priorities of the EU and Eastern European countries, and that the partners are committed to taking concrete initiatives to promote integration and employability in the labour market, particularly in the field of youth employment; reiterates that partner parliaments have repeatedly ranked employment, education and training among the highest political priorities for the Member States and the Eastern Partnership countries;

2. Welcomes, in this regard, the initiatives of the EU and of the Eastern European Partners to put in place youth strategies and legislation addressing the areas of education and training, employment, entrepreneurship, social inclusion and active participation in civil society; calls on the EU and the Eastern Partners to enhance the implementation of existing youth strategies and legislation; encourages both parties to set quality targets and benchmarks for inclusive education systems that ensure equality, non-discrimination and civic competences;

3. Calls on the EU and the Eastern European Partners to develop a rights-based approach to combat youth unemployment, focusing on quality employment and on the involvement of young people as stakeholders in policy-making;

4. Calls on the EU and the Eastern European Partners to engage vigorously in exchanging experiences in job creation, the involvement of young people in policies directed at them, the protection of economic, social and human rights at work, and in addressing youth unemployment;

5. Calls on the EU to step up cooperation with the international financial institutions and with relevant international organisations on private sector development, and on initiatives that promote inclusive growth and employment and that improve living conditions for citizens, as called for in the 2015 Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy;

6. Stresses that reducing the rate of early school dropout rates would provide both the European economy and the economy of the Eastern European Partners with thousands more qualified employees annually;

7. Stresses the need to combat early school dropout phenomenon, which can be the first step on the road to lifelong poverty, leading to so-called ‘early scarring’ and contributing to unemployment;

8. Stresses that the problem of age discrimination against applicants for social benefits, including unemployment benefits, should be addressed;

9. Stresses the need to promote policies to improve the transition from informal employment to quality jobs, as well as the need to develop strategies for the transition from education and training to work;

10. Stresses the importance of providing support for young parents, especially young mothers, so as to ensure that they can earn a living wage and can continue to learn and work according to their abilities while fulfilling their caring responsibilities; stresses that early support and investment are key to avoiding lifelong income loss;
11. Believes that promoting more and equal opportunities for young people, furthering social inclusion, gender equality and solidarity, and fighting all forms of discrimination, in particular on grounds of gender, race or ethnic origin and disability, are central to achieving the objective of reducing youth unemployment;

12. Believes that the parliaments of the Eastern Partnership countries and the European Parliament should be involved in the strategic approach to developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating relevant initiatives aimed at supporting youth employment at all levels, and that the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly could provide valuable input to this effort;

13. Calls on the Member States to strengthen their exchange with the Eastern Partnership countries of positive experiences in creating job opportunities for young people;

14. Encourages the Eastern Partners to participate in a range of EU youth programmes, including: Erasmus+, the Youth Employment Initiative and the Youth Guarantee, EU4Youth, bilateral and regional programmes for vocational education and training (VET) and the Creative Europe programme, as well as international youth programmes such as Solution for Youth Employment (S4YE); believes that young learners and apprentices who have obtained skills and experience abroad have much better opportunities and improved skills by comparison with those who have not spent time abroad;

15. Calls for an increase in funding for such EU youth programmes, including the European Youth Guarantee, ensuring the added value and quality of the training and jobs offered; asks that consideration be given to extending the age limit for participating in such programmes, given the reality that many graduates and labour market entrants are in their late twenties;

16. Calls on the governments of the Eastern Partnership countries to ensure that their education systems (general, professional and higher) prepare students adequately for their professional careers, and to guarantee close cooperation between representatives of the education sector, social services, employers and students;

17. Calls on the governments of the Eastern Partnership countries and the Member States to ensure that girls and young women are encouraged to pursue science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects and to increase the representation of women in STEM areas;

18. Stresses that, as education and training are of crucial importance in fostering inclusion and equality, emphasis should also be placed on the recognition of non-formal learning and informal learning skills acquired via the mobility programmes implemented in line with the European or national qualifications frameworks; encourages the Member States to promote and support opportunities for professional mobility among young apprentices so as to enable them to develop their skills through contact with other training systems;

19. Stresses that a smooth transition from education to employment should be promoted by linking theoretical education with practical training, and by providing high-quality
internships as stipulated in the European Quality Charter on Internships and Apprenticeships, as well as through the recognition of qualifications gained during formal and non-formal education, or during volunteering experiences;

20. Emphasises that the setting-up of bilateral Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTA) with Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova provides crucial tools for modern, transparent and predictable approximation in the trade and regulatory fields, as well as for foreign direct investment, leading to job creation and long-term growth; acknowledges at the same time that the Eastern Partnership countries may follow different paths in order to enhance their respective economic and trade relations with the EU and with their neighbours;

21. Welcomes, in this regard, the fact that the Association Agreements, including bilateral DCFTAs, between the EU and Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, respectively, commit the EU and the Eastern Partners to enhance people-to-people contacts, including through cooperation and exchanges in the fields of science and technology, business, youth, education and culture; reiterates that collaboration is critical to any effort to restore growth and support entrepreneurship, investment and job creation in the region; urges the Member States and the Eastern Partnership countries to explore the possibilities of creating mixed employment and fellowship programmes for young people in promising economic sectors in the region;

22. Stresses that, in the framework of freedom of movement within the Eastern Partnership, labour mobility should remain a choice for young people and not become an obligation to earn a living abroad; stresses that mobility poses various challenges; stresses that young people should also have employment opportunities in their own regions and countries;

23. Stresses the negative impact of ‘brain drain’, whereby well-qualified young people leave their home countries, especially in smaller countries where highly qualified employees are particularly valuable; encourages the EU and the Eastern Partners to address youth labour migration from Eastern Partnership countries to the EU jointly so as to promote circular migration and ensure options for young people to return home to find sustainable quality employment in the place of their choice;

24. Urges the EU, where necessary, to refocus its relations with the European Partners on the basis of shared common interests and the latter’s own merits, in particular as regards economic development, with an emphasis on youth employment; also urges the EU to help the Eastern Partnership countries to hasten the reform of their industrial policies with a view to promoting a transition to a competitive, knowledge-based economy;

25. Calls on the Commission to make full use of all existing tools under the European Neighbourhood Instrument, in particular those focused on youth, in support of job creation in Eastern Partner countries;

26. Notes that EU funds can serve as a remarkable tool for promoting the growth and development of people’s opportunities; calls for more funding for spreading information on EU financial instruments and for broadening, in university and business circles, the range of knowledge and skills necessary for applying for funds and drawing up and
managing projects;

27. Stresses the need to boost the role of the private sector in generating jobs; urges, therefore, the authorities of the Eastern Partnership countries to develop a set of incentives for private companies to create jobs, e.g. by easing existing administrative and financial requirements for starting and managing businesses through the simplification of procedures and by ensuring that start-ups have easier access to credit, venture capital and microfinance;

28. Stresses the need for the development of self-employment among young people, the expansion of access to soft loans and the development of entrepreneurial skills;

29. Stresses that while enterprises, including SMEs, play a key role in training young people in working-life skills, there is also a need to provide them with education in entrepreneurship in the broadest possible sense; encourages, therefore, the inclusion in school curricula of training in the vocational skills needed to be able to start and manage a business; encourages as well the fostering of transversal entrepreneurship competences, skills and knowledge, delivered effectively through hands-on and real-life experiences;

30. Calls on the governments of the Eastern Partnership countries to develop comprehensive national strategies on employment, with a strong focus on young people, as recommended by the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalisation; calls on them also to reinforce state employment agencies, as appropriate, transforming them into central bodies that can provide essential support to young people, develop a unified register of unemployed persons, and provide a comprehensive framework for the sectorial action plans proposed in the employment packages presented by the respective governments;

31. Stresses the need for the EU to consult partners on the establishment of a panel on youth employment and employability within the Eastern Partnership, as called for in the 2015 EU Neighbourhood Policy review;

32. Calls on the EU and the Member States to create new alliances with the private sector and the IFIs in support of strategies for growth, jobs and youth, in keeping with the EU Neighbourhood Policy review, and with consideration also given to partnership with the multi-stakeholder coalition Solutions for Youth Employment (SY4E) sponsored by the World Bank;

33. Stresses the EU’s work on skills forecasting, especially as regards green jobs and ICT, and believes that matching skills with available or predictable working opportunities should remain a top priority for the EU and the Eastern Partners;

34. Stresses that enhancing cooperation with regard to youth and student exchanges and the development of new scholarship and training programmes, as well as facilitating participation in the Erasmus+ programme, would ensure the development of skills and enable young people in the Eastern Partnership countries to become acquainted with the EU and vice versa, offering them better opportunities and facilitating their employment;
35. Calls on the EU and the governments of the Eastern Partnership countries to encourage, promote and reform the business environment; stresses the importance of development though entrepreneurship and SMEs; reiterates that this sector creates numerous job opportunities, including for young people;

36. Encourages the EU and the governments of the Eastern Partnership countries to harmonise the digital environment and to support efforts to implement a digital economy that serves their collaboration better; stresses that such an economy would create jobs, not least for young people;

37. Calls on the EU and the governments of the Eastern Partnership countries to promote agriculture; stresses the real importance of this sector; stresses that modernisation and diversification in rural areas are necessary if jobs are to be created and young people attracted to contributing to the development and growth of the sector;

38. Stresses that in order to assess the quality of education and provide young people with the skills (qualifications) that are required by the labour market, regular surveys and polls on the level of youth employment (including by profession) after graduation are needed, along with the definition of a set of indicators to clarify the nature of such figures;

39. Instructs its Co-Presidents to forward this resolution to the President of the European Parliament, the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the EEAS, and the governments and parliaments of the Member States and of the Eastern Partnership countries.