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Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

2011/2088(INI)

14.7.2011

OPINION

of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

for the Committee on Culture and Education

on tackling early school leaving
(2011/2088(INI))

Rapporteur: Nadja Hirsch

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SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Employment and Social Affairs calls on the Committee on Culture and Education, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions in its motion for a resolution:

1. Regrets that the percentage of early school leavers in the EU currently stands at 14.4 % and that 17.4 % of these have only completed primary school; notes that reducing early school leaving has been a target for the EU and Member States for many years but not sufficient progress has been made, with rates for early school leaving above 30 % in some Member States; notes the tremendous divergence in the percentage of early school leavers in the various Member States and the difficulty of drawing comparisons in terms of relevant contextual factors – such as migratory movements and levels of education in the family – between different regions and Member States; points out that these children are most often from low-education backgrounds or socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and are more often boys than girls; calls therefore for a stronger commitment from Member States and for closer monitoring on the part of the Commission in order to make sure that Member States are creating and implementing strategies to reduce early school leaving; warns that the possible public spending cuts in the education sector on account of the economic crisis and the budgetary austerity policies being implemented in Member States will have adverse effects in that they will further increase the numbers of early school leavers in the EU;
2. Notes that among the Roma children 20 % are not enrolled in school at all and 30 % are early school leavers; underlines that although early school leaving (ESL) is more common among boys than girls, there is a special situation in the case of the traditional Roma communities, where owing to the custom of early marriages, the school drop-out of young girls is more frequent; this ESL of young Roma girls happens at an earlier age (around 12-13 years) in comparison with boys (around 14-15 years); in the case of traditional Roma communities there is a need for supplementary positive measures in order to overcome ESL resulting from these harmful traditional practices;
3. Points out also that it is vital to bring down unemployment in the EU by meeting new occupational requirements and encouraging the recruitment of new blood to replace the old;
4. Takes the view that early school leaving translates into missed opportunities for young people and a loss of social and economic potential for the EU as a whole; highlights the fact that, in addition to current demographic changes, European countries cannot afford the enormous waste of talent, and stresses that this should be seen in the light of the fact that the labour market and Europe's level of competitiveness will both tend to favour holders of higher education qualifications; improving educational attainment will thus help to achieve the aim in that higher skill levels will make for 'smart growth', and tackling one of the main risk factors involved in unemployment and poverty will pave the way to 'inclusive growth';
5. Notes that a reduction to no more than 10 %, fulfilling the EU 2020 headline target would have an effect in reducing youth unemployment and in improving the employment rate,

since currently 52 % of school leavers are unemployed and, according to academic estimations, the number of jobs available for low-skilled or unskilled labour will decline even further in the coming years; points out that reducing the early school leaving rate by only 1% could boost the number of qualified potential employees by 500 000;

6. Stresses that investing more money in combating early school leaving can have the long-term effect of preventing young people from becoming dependent on social security;
7. Stresses the importance of combating early school leaving, not least in view of demographic trends in the EU;
8. Notes that the long-term economic and social effects of early school leaving lead to a significant risk of poverty and that fighting early school leaving is a way to prevent social exclusion among young people; therefore considers lowering the number of early school leavers to be a key measure in reaching the target, in strategies at both national and European level, of lifting at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty, and urges the Member States not to reduce the upper age limit for compulsory education;
9. Calls, therefore, on the Member States to draw up policies as quickly as possible with a view to establishing new jobs based on new skills;
10. Stresses the need to adapt education systems to meet the requirements of the labour market; points out that in a situation where it will be rare, in future, to spend one's entire working life in a single sector, pupils need to acquire a broad range of abilities, such as creativity, creative thinking, general skills and the ability to adapt quickly and flexibly to changing conditions and requirements;
11. Considers that the Commission should present to Parliament in a year's time, and on the basis of accurate indicators, a survey, assessment and evaluation of national reform programmes, as well as the results of monitoring the developments at different education levels across Member States, specifying the means established to tackle unemployment, such as apprenticeship, work-study programmes, professional mentoring, etc, and including employment projections by sector and skill level, and should also submit regular progress reports; urges the Commission to conduct research into the influence of the respective national school systems on the early leaving rate; calls for the assessment to be based on the specific national, regional, and local features of early school leaving;
12. Believes that, while respecting the principle of subsidiarity, a European framework for comprehensive strategies to tackle early school leaving could provide a useful guide for Member States in ascertaining the correct approach to upgrading existing policies and developing their National Reform Programmes;
13. Notes that the problem of early school leaving varies from country to country and also within regions, and that there is therefore no 'one size fits all' solution to it;
14. Stresses the importance, in order to combat early school leaving effectively, of exchange of experience and best practice at national and European level; therefore urges the Commission to encourage cooperation between the Member States and to support their strategies through the exchange of experience, expertise and good practices; supports the

Council Recommendation which suggests a common European framework for effective and efficient policies against early school leaving, including the idea that Member States should adopt comprehensive national strategies against early school leaving by 2012;

15. Urges the Member States to carry out an in-depth analysis of the problem of early school leaving, while taking due account of data protection, in order to identify the root causes at national, regional and local level, and to develop appropriate packages of measures for prevention, intervention and compensation, including specialised establishments or school support services for recognised disabilities; believes that strategies to tackle early school leaving must be based on an analysis of the specific national, regional, and local dimensions of the phenomenon and that these data should serve to focus research on the reasons for the exceptionally high drop-out rates among given categories of pupils and in the regions, localities, and schools most affected;
16. Recalls that comprehensive strategies to combat school leaving should comprise a mix of policies, coordination among different policy sectors and integration of measures into all policies concerning young people and children;
17. Calls on the Member States to organise programmes to tackle addictions and social pathologies and prevention programmes to deal with the correlation between family situation and early school leaving;
18. Urges Member States, assisted by the Commission, to act effectively to record the phenomenon of NEET and tackle it;
19. Advocates flexible, needs-based forms of learning at schools and stresses that this challenge must be addressed in particular by primary schools and in the early years of secondary schooling by means of early intervention, stronger bonds to be fostered with schools, and other measures; takes the view that teaching staff, educational psychologists, educational social workers and all relevant stakeholders should be qualified for this purpose and benefit from a high standard of training throughout their careers so as to enable them to reorient their practice and hence gear it to the new requirements and to be actively involved in the planning, organising, performing and evaluating of strategies to help people who are at risk of early school leaving or those who have already dropped out; therefore points out that education and vocational training institutions must exchange experiences and tried and tested practice and develop effective means of support for pupils in danger of dropping out;
20. Proposes expanding the possibility of company traineeships in parallel with continuing school education;
21. Believes that in a lifelong learning context, the role of the family should be considered to be as vital as that of teachers;
22. Calls for actors outside school to set up networks so as to enable schools to support pupils more effectively and tackle the problems that put children in difficulty;
23. Emphasises that the Member States should further improve their education and training systems in order to better match the needs of the individual and those of the labour

market, including by tackling the problems of basic skills (literacy and numeracy), promoting vocational education and training and measures to ease the transition between education and the labour market;

24. Encourages the Member States to provide extracurricular and out-of-school activities for pupils with learning difficulties to develop key skills in view of the clear need for these skills in the labour market;
25. Stresses that it must be ensured that decisions concerning education policy are taken at national, regional or local level;
26. Notes that all children have equal dignity from the point of view of learning and have the right to a basic education; stresses therefore that pupils' personal situations, e.g. gender, family circumstances, minority or migrant background, a disability and their own learning difficulties (e.g. dyslexia, dysgraphia and dyscalculia) must be taken into account and that these pupils must be given targeted encouragement and educational assistance adapted to their specific needs from the outset, in order to avoid the reproduction of social exclusion and the risk of poverty by enhancing their chances for entering the labour market; stresses that children with no identity papers must be enabled to attend school; recognises that reforms in the fields of integration policy and education policy respectively cannot be considered as separate; proposes, against this background, desegregation policies to change the social make-up of 'disadvantaged' schools and supports forms of positive discrimination such as priority education zones and programmes providing targeted support for schools in disadvantaged areas; also points out that, as many studies show, educational establishments which have greater problems as regards coexistence and integration among pupils also have higher drop-out rates and therefore advocates the need for an inclusive school climate; notes, furthermore, that ineffective policies on work-life balance increase the instances of early school leaving and academic failure in general and that it is necessary to intensify efforts to improve work-life balance policies;
27. Draws attention, in this regard, to the OECD's PISA studies which establish that students in educational systems with a lesser degree of vertical and horizontal differentiation are less likely to repeat a year or to be expelled; highlights the OECD's finding that students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds suffer most from having to repeat a school year or from being expelled; highlights the OECD's finding that early selection of students for different educational pathways increases socio-economic inequality in terms of educational opportunities without effecting any improvement in average performance in the educational systems in question;
28. Draws attention, in this regard, to the OECD's finding that the comparative performance of school systems in the PISA studies is negatively affected by the practices of moving students from one school to another on account of poor results, behavioural problems or specific learning difficulties and of streaming students in all subjects on the basis of ability;
29. Points out in this regard that, according to the OECD, socio-economically disadvantaged students are often at a double disadvantage because they attend schools affected by various types of social-economic disadvantage, in which there are fewer and less well-qualified teachers;

30. Notes that boys more often leave school early and that we are at risk of creating a lower class of young, unemployed men with little or no education and poor chances of becoming a part of the labour market and society in general; urges the Member States to give special attention to boys who have difficulties adapting to the school environment and discourages Member States from lowering the compulsory school age;
31. Stresses that the highest re-integration rates are achieved by programmes addressing the individual needs of early school leavers; calls on the institutions to respect the needs and rights of the individuals in developing programmes for them;
32. Stresses the need to bear in mind that more boys than girls leave school early, and that more measures therefore need to be put in place for boys in this regard, in order to improve their chances on the labour market;
33. Urges that special individual careers advice be given to early school leavers to facilitate their entry into the world of work, and that they be enabled by means of specially tailored measures to obtain work-related skills and qualifications, as well as to develop social competencies later in order to improve their employment possibilities and social inclusion and benefit from retraining opportunities and course equivalence arrangements; stresses that pupils from undocumented families must have the right to attend school;
34. Emphasises the need to organise activities at local level to encourage people to return to school and to promote a positive environment for people who left school early and intend to return;
35. Bearing in mind that instances of short-lived and insecure employment are higher among persons with little education, calls on the Commission to ensure that efforts to enable early school leavers to return to the labour market invariably go hand in hand with additional training programmes to improve their future employment prospects;
36. Points out that investment in retraining and in the modernisation of vocational training courses is essential in order to help early school leavers integrate into the labour market;
37. Highlights the need for members of the educational community, in collaboration with pupils' parents and academic specialists, to take action and launch initiatives with a view to drastically reducing intimidation, violence and social and race-based racism at school, which lead to the marginalisation of pupils, thereby creating the conditions for early school leaving;
38. Urges Member States to spread the institution of second-chance schools, both strengthening the content of their curricula and their material and technical equipment, and boosting the capacity of the teaching staff available, given that these schools are emerging as an important tool for the reintegration of persons who have slipped through the meshes of the formal educational system;
39. Highlights the need to upgrade the skills provided in technical vocational training and more effectively to match the specialisations offered with labour market requirements, since linking education and employment is an integral part of tackling early school leaving;

40. Notes that an effective policy to tackle the phenomenon of early school leaving should include all levels of education, be followed up and be drawn up on the basis of local, regional, social and individual criteria in three areas, namely prevention, intervention and compensation;
41. Advocates in the context of the 2012 EU budget the proposed 'Pilot Project on Youth' with the objective of a guarantee to integrate young people, and in particular early school leavers, into the labour market;
42. Stresses the need to analyse the phenomenon of repeating a school year and its impact on leaving school early, highlighting the importance of individual programmes for individual pupils;
43. Considers that, to combat early school leaving, education policies must be linked to policies aimed at promoting economic recovery and hence at creating permanent jobs and averting any dropping-out of education, short-lived and insecure employment, and acceleration of the brain drain;
44. Advocates the targeted, efficient and coherent deployment of the Structural Funds, especially the European Social Fund, for the full implementation of the Youth strategies, in particular for early school leavers to promote social inclusion under specific programmes in each Member State, in order to ensure quality education for all and to avoid early-school leaving and truancy;
45. Recommends that training in NITC (new information and communications technologies), as well as in language technologies, should begin at an early age, given that these are particularly useful means of communication which young people have the ability to master quickly;
46. Stresses that also early school leavers should be given access to EU funds and mobility programmes regardless of their status as 'out of formal education'; calls on the Commission and the Member States to monitor whether these programmes are also taken up by early school leavers and the organisations working with them;

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

Date adopted	13.7.2011
Result of final vote	+: 46 -: 3 0: 0
Members present for the final vote	Regina Bastos, Edit Bauer, Pervenche Berès, Mara Bizzotto, Philippe Boulland, David Casa, Alejandro Cercas, Ole Christensen, Derek Roland Clark, Sergio Gaetano Cofferati, Marije Cornelissen, Karima Delli, Proinsias De Rossa, Frank Engel, Sari Essayah, Ilda Figueiredo, Thomas Händel, Roger Helmer, Nadja Hirsch, Stephen Hughes, Danuta Jazłowiecka, Martin Kastler, Ádám Kósa, Patrick Le Hyaric, Olle Ludvigsson, Elizabeth Lynne, Thomas Mann, Elisabeth Morin-Chartier, Csaba Óry, Siiri Oviir, Rovana Plumb, Sylvana Rapti, Licia Ronzulli, Elisabeth Schroedter, Joanna Katarzyna Skrzydlewska, Jutta Steinruck, Traian Ungureanu
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Georges Bach, Raffaele Baldassarre, Jürgen Creutzmann, Kinga Göncz, Teresa Jiménez-Becerril Barrio, Antigoni Papadopoulou, Evelyn Regner, Emilie Turunen, Peter van Dalen, Cecilia Wikström
Substitute(s) under Rule 187(2) present for the final vote	Ashley Fox, Marit Paulsen