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184. Stresses the need for the Member States to take joint diplomatic action wherever there are reports of children being recruited into military units or armed groups;

185. Notes that emergency provision for children in conflict-affected fragile States rarely extends to appropriate education and calls on the Commission to support education activities, including the implementation of the Minimum Standards outlined by the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies, both in emergencies and in the transitional phase from crisis to development;

186. Stresses that the lack of a final settlement of frozen conflicts creates a situation in which the rule of law is neglected and human rights violations are committed in the areas concerned, and that this constitutes a major impediment to ensuring that all the rights of the child are respected; calls for steps to be taken to address the specific needs of children and their families in areas of frozen conflict;

Children and democracy

187. Stresses the right of children to grow up in a free and open society where human rights and freedom of expression are respected and where death sentences are no longer imposed, particularly on under-age individuals;

188. Stresses that the position of children in non-democratic States is very precarious and calls on the Commission to give consideration to this group of people;

189. Calls on the Commission to look into the issue of raising the political awareness of children and young people in third countries where democracy is restricted, so that they can develop into politically aware citizens;

190. Calls on the Commission to stress the importance of young people being able to voice their opinions on a voluntary basis through (political) youth organisations;

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191. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Member States, the European Network of National Observatories on Childhood (ChildONEurope), the Council of Europe, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, Unicef, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

Adult learning: it is never too late to learn

P6_TA(2008)0013

European Parliament resolution of 16 January 2008 on adult learning: it is never too late to learn (2007/2114(INI))

(2009/C 41 E/05)

The European Parliament,

— having regard to the Commission's Communication 'Adult learning: It is never too late to learn' (COM(2006)0614),

— having regard to Decision No 1720/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2006 establishing an action programme in the field of lifelong learning⁽¹⁾,

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 327, 24.11.2006, p. 45.

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- having regard to the recommendation 2006/962/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning ⁽¹⁾,
 - having regard to its resolution of 23 March 2006 on demographic challenges and solidarity between the generations ⁽²⁾,
 - having regard to the Presidency conclusions of the Lisbon European Council of 23 and 24 March 2000,
 - having regard to Articles 149 and 150 of the EC Treaty,
 - having regard to its position at first reading of 25 September 2007 on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning the production and development of statistics on education and lifelong learning ⁽³⁾,
 - having regard to its position at first reading of 24 October 2007 on the proposal for a recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning ⁽⁴⁾,
 - having regard to its resolution of 27 September 2007 on efficiency and equity in European education and training systems ⁽⁵⁾,
 - having regard to its resolutions of 13 March 2007 on a Roadmap for equality between women and men (2006-2010) ⁽⁶⁾ and of 27 September 2007 on equality between women and men in the European Union — 2007 ⁽⁷⁾,
 - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Culture and Education and the opinions of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs and the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (A6-0502/2007),
- A. whereas adult learning is becoming a political priority and needs concrete and adequate programmes, visibility, access, resources and evaluation methods,
- B. whereas education and training are critical factors for achieving the Lisbon Strategy's objectives of raising economic growth, competitiveness and social inclusion,
- C. whereas an additional 4 million adults would need to participate in lifelong learning in order to achieve the participation rate of the benchmark agreed by the Member States within the framework of the 'Education and Training 2010' process,
- D. whereas an efficient adult learning system with clear priorities and monitored implementation, integrated into lifelong learning strategies, can support the linguistic, social and cultural integration of excluded groups, such as immigrants and the Roma, many of whom are also early school-leavers,
- E. whereas investing in adult education increases social and cultural returns in terms of greater individual well-being and fulfilment and active citizenship,
- F. whereas the essential contribution of adult learning, through the acquisition of key competences, is essential to employability and mobility in the labour market and to social inclusion,
- G. whereas reliable data are required to observe, compare and evaluate the multiplicity of adult learning options so as to develop policies,
- H. whereas information about and access to adult learning systems vary widely from Member State to Member State,

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 394, 30.12.2006, p. 10.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 292 E, 1.12.2006, p. 131.

⁽³⁾ Texts Adopted, P6_TA(2007)0400.

⁽⁴⁾ Texts Adopted, P6_TA(2007)0463.

⁽⁵⁾ Texts Adopted, P6_TA(2007)0417.

⁽⁶⁾ Texts Adopted, P6_TA(2007)0063.

⁽⁷⁾ Texts Adopted, P6_TA(2007)0423.

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- I. whereas recognition and validation of formal, non-formal and informal learning form the cornerstone of a lifelong learning strategy,
- J. whereas it is urgent to link adult learning to the European Qualifications Framework and increase its potential with regard to key competences as well as social and personal competences.

1. Welcomes the Commission proposal for an Action Plan for Adult Learning;
2. Recognises that measures should be taken at various levels in which, in addition to the Member States, the European Union must also be involved, to promote, reinforce and establish the growth of a learning culture, especially for adults;
3. Urges Member States to establish a lifelong learning culture, primarily focusing on education and training for adults, by implementing policies and actions geared to promoting the acquisition of knowledge and making it more attractive and accessible, and permanently updating qualifications;
4. Emphasises the importance of gender equality with regard to programmes relating to lifelong learning, so that both men and women can take advantage to the same extent of the possibilities offered by such learning; calls on the Commission to make use of all available tools for the monitoring of sensitive gender equality policies in the preparation of adult learning, in cooperation with the European Institute for Gender Equality;

Improving motivation for participating in adult learning

5. Urges the improved promotion of adult education in order to motivate more people to engage in such education; considers that adult education should play a key role in policies to promote a general culture of learning, through media campaigns, information, guidance and counselling services and, in particular, information, guidance and counselling services aimed at disadvantaged groups; considers that, if it is to be effective, such promotion should be accompanied by active policies on the part of the Member States which will make it easier for people to combine education with work and family life;
6. Agrees that special phone lines and websites are a very successful means by which to promote adult education;
7. Considers that promoting media literacy in both general and vocational education plays an essential role in order to overcome the digital divide between the generations;

Statistical data

8. Is of the opinion that comparable statistical data are needed to develop, review and evaluate policies in the field of adult learning so as to provide indications and orientations for the integrated Lifelong Learning Programme;
9. Considers that the European Adult Education Survey must be supported as a means of both collecting comparable information on adult education and promoting shared concepts;
10. Calls on the European Union and the Member States to encourage the exchange of good practices;

Reconciling working life, family life and lifelong learning and effective delivery

11. Recalls the objectives of the Barcelona European Council of 15 and 16 March 2002 and emphasises the progress made by the Member States towards achieving the objectives of providing nursery and kindergarten places and pre-school education, as well as establishing the 'day of child care and of care of other dependent persons'; points out, at the same time, that some Member States are far behind schedule in meeting the Barcelona objectives;

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12. Points out that reconciling family life, working life and lifelong learning calls not only for greater flexibility in managing time and space, but also for social, economic and tax incentives in order to promote access for adults to training and education programmes;

13. Emphasises the need for improved use of new technologies and observes, in this respect, that the development of Internet access and of digital-inclusion programmes designed to prevent a digital divide should be promoted and that new sources of knowledge and ways of learning, such as distance learning programmes and the provision of learning places should be encouraged and access made possible for all;

14. Emphasises the need to increase access for women to new technologies, including women who live in remote and rural areas and elderly women, thereby giving them an equal chance to compete on the labour market; further emphasises the need to support steps to reduce the gap between men and women in terms of technical and scientific qualifications;

15. Draws attention to the need to broaden the scope of public and private childcare facilities and to involve and encourage employers, who could provide company childcare facilities and scope for parents to return to work, particularly mothers, so that such parents have the opportunity to continue with lifelong learning while carrying on working; also emphasises the need for improved provision of public facilities to assist the dependent and the elderly;

Intergenerational solidarity (against 'age ghettos') and intercultural solidarity

16. Recalls that demographic change will present Member States with a complex set of inter-related challenges and that our societies will have to develop new forms of solidarity between cultures and between generations;

17. Proposes, therefore, the improved transmission and exchange of the knowledge, skills and experience of adults, in particular between the generations, in the form of mentoring schemes to support various entrepreneurial and craft activities; also considers it important that such mentors are linked by a network through which they can share and exchange information;

18. Underlines the importance of a 'family learning approach', where parents are motivated to return to learning because they want to help their own children to achieve at school;

19. Supports the development of volunteering programmes in terms of the role they play in inter-generation solidarity and recognition of experience and qualifications;

20. Highlights the need, within the framework of mobility and social cohesion, to provide, especially for immigrants, flexible opportunities for education and training programmes as well as suitable conditions for realizing such programmes;

Importance of language learning and specific needs of groups at risk

21. Sees the establishment of national and local centres for the support of immigrants as a key tool by which to make useful information available and provide clarification on questions relating to migrants' full integration in society;

22. Reiterates the importance of providing greater support for language courses — especially those aimed at immigrants — and of encouraging the learning of foreign languages among the population as a whole;

23. Supports the idea of establishing 'Skills audits' for immigrants, the low-skilled and the disabled; believes that as well as bringing economic benefits, such skills audits can also contribute to reducing racism, xenophobia, discrimination and exclusion;

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Access to higher education

24. Considers that access to higher education should embrace a wider public, including adults with work experience and older people, for which purpose education systems should be adapted and made more flexible; and that appropriate infrastructure measures and provision of personnel resources must be promoted;

25. Points out that the modernisation of secondary school systems is necessary in order to make them more competitive, flexible, accessible and efficient;

Improving quality, teaching and variety of provision

26. Stresses the need for high-quality staff working in the field of adult education; believes that support should be provided for specific programmes for adult educators and encourages the establishment of university degree programmes leading to a diploma in adult education;

27. Supports actions aimed at increasing competence transfer and mobility in adult learning, such as:

- (a) the implementation and enlargement of the European Qualifications Framework and Europass;
- (b) the recognition and validation of basic skills, key competences, formal, non-formal and informal qualifications and education in order to ensure transparency as to learning outcomes, thereby facilitating the recognition of learning achievements and the transition between different learning pathways;

Employment perspectives

28. Agrees with the view that lifelong learning plays an important role first and foremost for enhancing social inclusion and employability, but also in the individual's personal development and in overcoming the mismatches in the labour market and achieving the Lisbon goal of a higher participation rate for those over 50 years of age, as well as for competitiveness;

29. Underlines the importance of adult learning in order to achieve the goal of creating better jobs in Europe as well as improve quality of life and promote individual development, personal fulfilment and active citizenship; draws attention to the importance of enterprises forecasting new competences and labour market requirements so that the provision of adult education reflects the demand for skills; points out that the content of education must be tailored to vocational and practical requirements; underlines the importance of the role of social partnership in this respect;

30. Points out that lifelong learning does not just increase workers' employability, it also increases their adaptability as well as their geographical and vocational mobility, which is important for the functioning of the internal market; highlights the value of promoting the learning of second (and third) languages in facilitating greater worker mobility;

31. Highlights the fact that a low level of qualification, which is the current situation of a third of the European workforce (72 million workers), implies a high risk of unemployment, and that by training the individual will continue to possess or acquire the competences necessary to gain employment and improve the quality of his or her work; stresses the importance of recognising and validating skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning, which provides a basis for the development of lifelong learning both in the national vocational qualifications frameworks and in the European Qualifications Framework;

32. Stresses the importance of all citizens having equal access and opportunities to take part in lifelong learning programmes; regrets in this context the fact that those with the lowest levels of initial education, women, immigrants, older people, people in rural areas and the disabled are the least likely to participate, and considers they must be offered different, suitable programmes and methods; in this context, takes the view that special emphasis should be placed on education and training in new technologies for workers and the unemployed, and calls on the Member States to support the use of new information and communications technologies for educational purposes, as they play a key role in ensuring equal opportunities for everybody, facilitating participation in lifelong learning, and to ensure that those with the lowest levels of education receive particular promotion and funding;

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33. Underlines the importance of adult learning including language and vocational skills in order to integrate migrants, increase their employability and improve their participation in the labour market as well as strengthening their social inclusion;

34. Stresses the importance of actively involving the social partners and other stakeholders, including social NGOs, as it is only through functional social partnerships that employers and employees are able to act on the same level; considers that in Member States without a developed structure of social partnership its creation should be given support;

35. Underlines the importance of the European Social Fund (ESF) and other structural funds in order to achieve the goal of lifelong learning for all and urges the monitoring of the Structural Funds to ensure that more is allocated to those who need lifelong learning the most; regrets that in some Member States insufficient priority and funding are being dedicated to increasing access to adult learning opportunities, especially for older and lower-skilled workers; calls on the Member States to use the Structural Funds more actively, and in particular the ESF; calls on the Commission to reinforce the specific programmes in this area;

36. Stresses that improving the delivery of adult learning, the provision of information and making it easier to combine work with family life are essential to raise participation and are stimulating if they are combined with incentives; points out that measures to promote effective delivery include the availability of learning sites, facilitating learning at the workplace by adjusting working hours, providing childcare facilities locally, distance learning services for the disabled or vulnerable in remote areas, information and guidance on lifelong learning measures and on job opportunities, tailored programmes and availability of flexible teaching arrangements; stresses that such measures must also be generally recognised and should contribute to professional advancement;

37. Urges the Member States to take appropriate measures to tackle the low employment rates of older workers, in particular those who have had atypical career paths or lack ICT skills, and to put in place the necessary conditions to provide lifelong learning services at every level to facilitate progress in employment, whether it be first time entry, a return to employment or the wish to prolong working life; considers it no less important to encourage companies, and create incentives to this effect, to employ or appoint older employees for longer, since as a rule they are highly competent, experienced, reliable and highly trained;

38. Calls on the Member States to ensure that workers who are obliged to change their job after an accident at work or illness can participate in continuing training and improve their career prospects;

39. Encourages the Member States to provide economic and other incentives both to enable workers to stay longer in work and to encourage employers to hire and keep older workers, by providing lifelong learning opportunities and by improving working conditions and quality in work;

40. Calls on the Commission to ensure that each Member State takes the legal and financial steps necessary to offer and provide access to lifelong learning for all employees and jobseekers;

Financing

41. Calls on investors to focus attention on developing programmes, skills and qualifications that allow women to obtain a grounding in managerial and entrepreneurial skills and to improve their qualifications with a view to advancement to executive positions;

42. Calls for the practice of financing and organising training by employers for their employees to become widespread and supported by tax concessions, since the qualifications and skills of employees are a key aspect of innovation, productivity and competitiveness;

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43. Considers that adult education should achieve high skill levels in all sectors by means of high-quality educational and cultural activities and training models, so as to ensure that individuals' knowledge and skills match the changes in what is required of workers and the changes in the organisation of work and in working methods;

44. Urges coordination, cooperation, efficiency and transparency between legislative measures and the institutional frameworks, networks and partnerships of bodies or associations involved in adult learning, using local, regional, national, European (public or private) financial resources;

45. Considers it essential that financial incentives be offered to allow people free access to training and education and the ensuing benefits; points out that such financial incentives could take the form of tax incentives, allowances, grants, co-financing, or reductions in taxation or social security costs for employers establishing appropriate working conditions for adult learning;

46. Appreciates the importance of in-house training and stresses that high priority must be given to small and medium-sized enterprises and micro-businesses and new enterprises, as they are the least able to afford to train their staff;

47. Encourages employers, in the context of corporate social responsibility, to finance vocational training programmes which promote lifelong learning, particularly for female staff, with a view to extending their active working life and enhancing women's opportunities for participation in the labour market and professional development;

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48. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the governments and parliaments of the Member States.
