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(Resolutions, recommendations and opinions)

RESOLUTIONS

COUNCIL

Council Resolution on a renewed European agenda for adult learning

(2011/C 372/01)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

WHEREAS:

The *Europe 2020* strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth acknowledges lifelong learning and skills development as key elements in response to the current economic crisis, to demographic ageing and to the broader economic and social strategy of the European Union.

The crisis has highlighted the major role which adult learning ⁽¹⁾ can play in achieving the *Europe 2020* goals, by enabling adults — in particular the low-skilled and older workers — to improve their ability to adapt to changes in the labour market and society. Adult learning provides a means of up-skilling or reskilling those affected by unemployment, restructuring and career transitions, as well as makes an important contribution to social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development.

AND HAVING REGARD TO:

1. The European Parliament Resolution of 16 January 2008 on adult learning: *It is never too late to learn*, which urges Member States to promote the acquisition of knowledge and to develop a culture of lifelong learning, notably by implementing gender equal policies designed to make adult education more attractive, more accessible and more effective.
2. The Council conclusions of May 2008 ⁽²⁾ on adult learning, which established for the first time a set of common priorities to be addressed in the adult-learning sector, paved the way towards intensified European cooperation between the various stakeholders, and proposed a series of specific measures for the period 2008-10 (hereafter referred to as the 'Action Plan') aimed at increasing participation in, and raising the quality of, adult learning.

⁽¹⁾ For the purposes of this text, the term *adult learning* covers the entire range of formal, non-formal and informal learning activities — both general and vocational — undertaken by adults after leaving initial education and training.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 140, 6.6.2008, p. 10.

3. The Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, of 21 November 2008 on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong-learning strategies, which highlighted the importance of guidance as a continuous process that enables citizens at any age and at any point in their lives to identify their capacities, competences and interests, to make educational, training and occupational decisions and to manage their life paths in learning, work and other settings.

4. The Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 ⁽³⁾, which established a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020') which is fully consistent with the *Europe 2020* strategy and whose four objectives — relating to lifelong learning and mobility, quality and efficiency, equity, social cohesion and active citizenship, as well as creativity and innovation — are equally relevant for adult learning.

5. The 2010 joint progress report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the 'Education & Training 2010' work programme ⁽⁴⁾, which stressed that in adult learning it is also important for provision to cover the full range of key competences, and noted that there is a major challenge to ensure that all learners benefit from innovative methodologies, including those in adult learning.

6. The *Europe 2020* flagship initiatives:

— *An Agenda for New Skills and Jobs*, which calls on Member States to ensure that people acquire the skills needed for further learning and the labour market through general, vocational and higher education, as well as through adult learning,

⁽³⁾ OJ C 119, 28.5.2009, p. 2.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ C 117, 6.5.2010, p. 1.

- *The European Platform against Poverty*, which proposes the development of innovative education for deprived communities in order to enable those experiencing poverty and social exclusion to live in dignity and to take an active part in society,
 - *Innovation Union*, which promotes excellence in education and skills development in order to ensure future growth from innovation in products, services and business models in a Europe faced with an ageing population and strong competitive pressures.
7. The Council conclusions of 11 May 2010 on the social dimension of education and training ⁽¹⁾, which noted that expanding access to adult education can create new possibilities for active inclusion and enhanced social participation.
 8. The Council Decision of 21 October 2010 on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States ⁽²⁾, which seeks to promote effective incentives for lifelong learning of those within and outside employment, '*ensuring every adult the chance to retrain or to move one step up in their qualification*'.
 9. The Council conclusions of 18-19 November 2010 on enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training (VET) ⁽³⁾, which actively encouraged greater individual participation in continuing VET, increased investment in human resources development, in-company training and work-based learning, and closer collaboration between training institutions and employers, particularly in the training of low-skilled workers.

WELCOMES THE FACT THAT

Work has been initiated on all priority areas of the 2008-10 Action Plan, albeit at different speeds in each country:

- Adult-learning reforms are increasingly anchored in overall developments in education and training, notably the development of national qualifications frameworks and lifelong-learning strategies.
- Quality assurance has been raised as an important issue in adult learning and strides are being made in developing the professional profile and training of adult-learning professionals, the accreditation of adult-learning providers and improved guidance services for adults.
- Outreach and learning opportunities are increasingly being targeted at those with the lowest levels of qualifications, thus giving them better prospects of integration into work and society.

- Non-formal and informal learning, which represent much of adult learning, are increasingly being recognised and validated but take-up of validation opportunities is often still too low.
- A start has been made on improving monitoring of the adult-learning sector.

NEVERTHELESS RECOGNISES THAT:

In order to face both the short and long-term consequences of the economic crisis, there is a need for adults regularly to enhance their personal and professional skills and competences. Given the current instability in the labour market and the need to reduce the risk of social exclusion, this applies particularly to the low-skilled and the low-qualified. However, all adults — including the highly qualified — can benefit significantly from lifelong learning.

Yet there is a growing consensus that adult learning is currently the weakest link in developing national lifelong-learning systems. Participation in adult learning has continued to fall, from 9,8 % of the 25-64 year-old population in 2005 to only 9,1 % in 2010, thus making the increased 'ET2020' target of 15 % by 2020 an even greater challenge. Obstacles such as low motivation and a lack of care facilities to help women and men combine family and work responsibilities with learning therefore need attention.

As in other sectors, adult learning should embrace the shift to policy based on learning outcomes in which the autonomous learner is central, regardless of where he/she learns — at work, at home, in the local community, in voluntary activities, or in education and training institutions — and develop the multi-faceted model of governance that this requires.

In order to achieve an adult-learning sector capable of supporting the *Europe 2020* strategy, much more remains to be done in relation to effective and efficient financing; in relation to the provision of second-chance opportunities and the acquisition of basic skills such as literacy and numeracy, but also digital skills; in relation to targeted learning for migrants, early school leavers and young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs), as well as for people with disabilities and older adults; and in relation to cooperation with employers, social partners and civil society.

Implementing the Action Plan has also highlighted the difficulty of adequately monitoring the adult-learning sector, due to a lack of sufficient statistical data and evaluation of policy measures. Evidence-based policy-making in the field of adult learning calls for comprehensive and comparable data on all key aspects of adult learning, for effective monitoring systems and cooperation between the different agencies, as well as for high-quality research activities.

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 135, 26.5.2010, p. 2.

⁽²⁾ OJ L 308, 24.11.2010, p. 46.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 324, 1.12.2010, p. 5.

CONSIDERS THAT:

Lifelong learning covers learning from pre-school age to post-retirement⁽¹⁾. Adult learning is a vital component of the lifelong-learning continuum, covering the entire range of formal, non-formal and informal learning activities, general and vocational, undertaken by adults after leaving initial education and training.

In order to build on the achievements of the 2008-10 Action Plan, while complementing existing policy initiatives in the areas of school education, higher education (Bologna process) and VET (Copenhagen process), there is a need for a renewed 'European Agenda for Adult Learning' aimed at enabling all adults to develop and enhance their skills and competences throughout their lives.

Adult learning can make a significant contribution to meeting the *Europe 2020* goals of reducing early leaving from education and training to below 10 %. Particular attention should accordingly be paid to improving provision for the high number of low-skilled Europeans targeted in *Europe 2020*, starting with literacy, numeracy and second-chance measures as a precursor to up-skilling for work and life in general. Acquiring basic skills as a foundation for developing key competences for lifelong learning⁽²⁾, addressing the problem of early school leaving⁽³⁾ and tackling issues such as the education and social inclusion of migrants, Roma and disadvantaged groups require concerted action in both school and adult education.

At the same time, the substantial contribution which adult learning can make to economic development — by strengthening productivity, competitiveness, creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship — should be recognised and supported.

In this context, there is also a considerable need to step up efforts to achieve the target set within the *Europe 2020* strategy of ensuring that at least 40 % of young adults complete tertiary or equivalent education. Meeting this challenge would contribute to developing a competitive economy based on knowledge and innovation which makes full use of its resources and human capital.

THEREFORE CALLS FOR:

The adoption of a renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning which will continue, complement and consolidate work in the field of adult learning under the four strategic objectives identified by the Council in the 'ET2020' strategic framework. While initially focusing on the period 2012-14 (see the Annex hereto), this Agenda should be seen in the context of a longer term vision for adult learning which — in the period up to 2020 — will endeavour to raise the sector's profile in general and, more specifically, to:

- (i) enhance the possibilities for adults, regardless of gender and their personal and family circumstances, to access high-quality learning opportunities at any time in their lives, in order to promote personal and professional development, empowerment, adaptability, employability and active participation in society;
- (ii) develop a new approach to adult education and training which focuses on learning outcomes and learner responsibility and autonomy;
- (iii) foster greater awareness among adults that learning is a lifelong endeavour which they should pursue at regular intervals during their lives, and particularly during periods of unemployment or career transition;
- (iv) encourage the development of effective lifelong guidance systems, as well as integrated systems for the validation of non-formal and informal learning;
- (v) ensure the comprehensive provision of high-quality formal and non-formal education and training for adults aimed at acquiring key competences or leading to qualifications at all levels of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), supported by civil society and the social partners, as well as by local authorities;
- (vi) ensure flexible arrangements adapted to different training needs of adults, including in-company training and workplace-based learning;
- (vii) foster greater awareness among employers that adult learning contributes to promoting productivity, competitiveness, creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship, and is an important factor in enhancing the employability and labour market mobility of their employees;
- (viii) encourage higher education institutions to embrace less traditional groups of learners, such as adult learners, as a means of displaying social responsibility and greater openness towards the community at large, as well as responding to demographic challenges and to the demands of an ageing society;
- (ix) promote the role of social partners and civil society in articulating training needs and developing learning opportunities for adults, as well as optimise the involvement of central, regional and local authorities;
- (x) promote a balanced allocation of education and training resources throughout the life cycle on the basis of shared responsibilities and strong public commitment, particularly to second-chance opportunities and the development of basic skills;

⁽¹⁾ Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 on lifelong learning (OJ C 163, 9.7.2002, p. 1).

⁽²⁾ OJ L 394, 30.12.2006, p. 10.

⁽³⁾ As emphasised in the June 2011 Council Recommendation (OJ C 191, 1.7.2011, p. 1).

- (xi) involve social partners and raise their awareness of the benefits, also to them, of learning in the workplace, including basic skills provision;
- (xii) make well-developed learning provision for seniors, in order to promote active, autonomous, and healthy ageing, and which uses their knowledge, experience, social and cultural capital for the benefit of society as a whole;
- (xiii) make a strong commitment to promoting adult learning as a means of fostering solidarity between different age groups (for example, by means of an 'intergenerational pact') and between cultures and people of all backgrounds.

ACCORDINGLY INVITES THE MEMBER STATES TO:

1. Focus their efforts over the period 2012-14 on the priority areas detailed in the Annex hereto, thereby contributing to implementation of the four priorities of the 'ET 2020' strategic framework, in accordance with national contexts and legislation.
2. Ensure effective liaison with the relevant ministries and stakeholders, the social partners, businesses, relevant non-governmental organisations and civil society organisations, with a view to improving coherence between policies on adult learning and broader socio-economic policies.
3. Actively cooperate at EU level in order to support the successful implementation of the abovementioned priority areas, notably by:
 - (i) making full use of the lifelong-learning tools agreed at EU level to promote adult participation in learning;
 - (ii) using the opportunities provided by the Lifelong Learning Programme — in particular under *Grundtvig* and *Leonardo da Vinci* — and its successor programme from 2014, as well as the structural funds and other instruments, where appropriate, in order to co-finance supporting initiatives;
 - (iii) using the open method of coordination, with the support of the Commission and through the relevant European networks, to promote mutual learning and the exchange of good practices and experience in the field of adult learning;
 - (iv) designating a national coordinator, in order to facilitate cooperation with the other Member States and the Commission in implementing the adult-learning agenda.

AND INVITES THE COMMISSION TO:

Work with and support Member States in developing and implementing the renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning outlined above and, specifically, in carrying out the priorities for the period 2012-14 detailed in Annex I, notably by:

- (i) ensuring complementarity and coherence between the policy initiatives undertaken in accordance with this Resolution and those developed in the context of other relevant policy processes within the 'ET2020' strategic framework, the Copenhagen process, the Bologna process, the EU modernisation agenda for higher education, and initiatives such as those on literacy and early school-leaving which require a concerted approach involving school education and adult learning, and promoting the adult-learning dimension within each of these;
- (ii) establishing close ongoing liaison with the national coordinators designated in the Member States and the other participating countries;
- (iii) enabling Member States and organisations supporting adult learning to share information on their policies and practices, and on their evaluation of both, through the organisation of peer-learning activities and reviews, conferences, workshops and other appropriate instruments, and, within available resources, improving data collection on adult learning as part of the updated coherent framework of indicators and benchmarks scheduled for 2013;
- (iv) strengthening the knowledge base on adult learning in Europe by commissioning studies and reinforcing the capacity of existing research structures relevant for analysing adult-learning issues, including cooperation with Eurydice and Cedefop and other relevant institutions and making full use of their information and research capacities;
- (v) pursuing and intensifying cooperation with relevant international organisations such as the OECD (in particular by exploiting the results of the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competences — PIAAC), the UN (in particular Unesco) and the Council of Europe, as well as other relevant regional or worldwide initiatives such as the Europe-Asia lifelong-learning 'hub' (ASEM);
- (vi) harnessing the funds available at European level to support the implementation of this agenda for adult learning;
- (vii) reporting on implementation of the agenda as part of the 'ET 2020' joint progress report.

ANNEX

EUROPEAN AGENDA FOR ADULT LEARNING

Priority areas for the period 2012-14

Taking into account the specific circumstances within each Member State, and in accordance with national priorities, Member States are invited, where appropriate with the support of the Commission, to focus on those areas outlined below which are most relevant to their particular needs.

1. Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality

In order to increase and widen the participation of adults in lifelong learning, in response to the agreed EU target of 15 % adult-learning participation, as well as to help boost to 40 % the proportion of young adults with tertiary and equivalent education qualifications, Member States are invited to focus on:

- Stimulating demand, and developing comprehensive and easily accessible information and guidance systems, complemented by effective outreach strategies aimed at raising awareness and motivation among potential learners, with specific focus on disadvantaged groups, early school leavers, young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs), low-qualified adults, particularly those with literacy difficulties, and followed up with second-chance opportunities leading to a recognised EQF level qualification.
- Promoting the engagement of employers in workplace-based learning, with a view to developing both job-specific skills and broader skills, including by means of more flexible work schedules.
- Promoting flexible learning pathways for adults, including broader access to higher education for those lacking mainstream access qualifications and diversifying the spectrum of adult learning-opportunities offered by higher education institutions.
- Putting in place fully functional systems for validating non-formal and informal learning and promoting their use by adults of all ages and at all qualification levels, as well as by enterprises and other organisations.

2. Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training

In order to build a strong adult-learning sector, Member States are invited to focus on:

- Developing quality assurance for adult-learning providers, for example by means of accreditation systems, taking into account already existing quality frameworks/standards in other sectors.
- Improving the quality of adult education staff, for instance by defining competence profiles, establishing effective systems for initial training and professional development, and facilitating the mobility of teachers, trainers and other adult education staff.
- Ensuring a viable and transparent system for the funding of adult learning, based on shared responsibility with a high level of public commitment to the sector and support for those who cannot pay, balanced distribution of funds across the lifelong-learning continuum, appropriate contribution to funding from all stakeholders and the exploration of innovative means for more effective and efficient financing.
- Developing mechanisms for ensuring that educational provision better reflects labour market needs and that it provides possibilities for acquiring qualifications and developing new skills which increase people's capacity to adapt to the new requirements of a changing environment.
- Intensifying cooperation and partnership between all stakeholders relevant for adult learning, notably public authorities, the different providers of adult-learning opportunities, social partners and civil society organisations, especially at the regional and local level in the context of developing 'learning regions' and local learning centres.

3. Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship through adult learning

In order to develop the capacity of the adult-learning sector to promote social cohesion and to provide people who need it with a *second-chance* route to learning and life opportunities, as well as to contribute to reducing the share of early leavers from education and training to below 10 %, Member States are invited to focus on:

- Improving adult literacy and numeracy skills, developing digital literacy and providing opportunities for adults to develop the basic skills and forms of literacy needed for participating actively in modern society (such as economic and financial literacy, civic, cultural, political and environmental awareness, learning for healthy living, consumer and media awareness).

- Increasing the supply of and encouraging individuals' engagement in adult learning as a means of strengthening social inclusion and active participation in the community and society, and improving access to adult learning for migrants, Roma and disadvantaged groups, as well as learning provision for refugees and people seeking asylum, including host country-language learning, where appropriate.
- Enhancing learning opportunities for older adults in the context of active ageing, including volunteering and the promotion of innovative forms of intergenerational learning and initiatives to exploit the knowledge, skills and competences of older people for the benefit of society as a whole.
- Addressing the learning needs of people with disabilities and people in specific situations of exclusion from learning, such as those in hospitals, care homes and prisons, and providing them with adequate guidance support.

4. Enhancing the creativity and innovation of adults and their learning environments

In order to develop new pedagogies and creative learning environments in adult learning, as well as to promote adult learning as a means of enhancing the creativity and innovative capacity of citizens, Member States are invited to focus on:

- Promoting the acquisition of transversal key competences, such as learning to learn, a sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, and cultural awareness and expression, in particular by applying the European Key Competence Framework within the adult-learning sector.
- Enhancing the role of cultural organisations (such as museums, libraries, etc.), civil society, sporting organisations and other bodies as creative and innovative settings for non-formal and informal adult learning.
- Making better use of ICT in the context of adult learning, as a means of widening access and improving the quality of provision, e.g. by exploiting new opportunities for distance learning and the creation of e-learning tools and platforms in order to reach new target groups, in particular those with special needs or who live in remote areas.

In order to underpin the above priority areas in line with the four strategic objectives of the 'ET2020' framework, Member States are further invited to contribute to improving the collection, comparability and analysis of information and data on adult learning at European, national, regional and local levels:

5. Improving the knowledge base on adult learning and monitoring the adult-learning sector

Member States are invited to focus on:

- Participating actively in and implementing key messages resulting from major international surveys and studies such as the Adult Education Survey (AES), the Continuing Vocational Training Survey (CVTS) and the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC).
 - Stepping up efforts to collect sufficient baseline data on, for instance, participation, providers, financing, the outcomes and wider benefits of learning for adults and society, and extending the data coverage to the age-range beyond 64 in keeping with the prolongation of working life.
 - Strengthening the monitoring and impact assessment of the development and performance of the adult-learning sector at European, national, regional and local level, making better use of existing instruments where possible.
 - Intensifying research and in-depth analysis of issues relating to adult learning, extending the range of research to include new fields and encouraging more inter-disciplinary and prospective analysis.
 - Reporting on adult-learning policies as part of the joint progress report on 'ET2020'.
-