



Recent years in the EU have revealed new challenges facing the entire European project and individual Member States. The global financial and economic crisis that hit several countries in Europe and revealed weaknesses of EU and the Member States and caused severe consequences that the Community is still dealing with. High levels of unemployment, especially among the younger generation, have caused governments to actively look for solutions.

We are confronted not just with an employment crisis but also a skills crisis. In spite of the high number of jobseekers, many employers are unable to fill vacancies because they cannot find people with the right skills. Indeed, the evidence from the recent PIAAC survey on adult skills as well as the results of the PISA 2012 student survey show Europe's skills gap to be a determining factor in current unemployment rates. In addition, forecasts<sup>1</sup> show that in 2025 44% of employed people in the EU will be in a highly-skilled job while only 11% of jobs are expected to be low-skilled ones. Clearly, action is urgently needed in order to bring our skills set up to scratch. Education and training systems must reform and innovate, both to raise quality and to better match the requirements of the labour market.

Education systems play a key role in grooming young people for the labour market. In general, countries that have a strong vocational education sector show lower youth unemployment rates than countries that predominantly have a general education system. In countries with a strong apprenticeship system like Germany, Austria or the Netherlands, young people show a smoother transition from school to work.

Of course, in talking about youth unemployment we cannot ignore the logical connection between education and the skills that youngsters acquire in the course of their training. Discussion on this issue has existed in the public domain for a long time. The quality of education and practical skills that graduates can apply in their subsequent working life are among the most discussed topics regarding youth. Other issues include the relationship between businesses and educational institutions, the good functioning of the dual education system, opportunities for apprenticeships and last but not least the motivation of young people to find a job and objectively evaluate the value of their labour. The dual vocational education system comprises both elements of teaching in colleges (theory) and work in companies (application).

In a large number of countries, an insufficient commitment to the issues of young people and a non-systematic approach to youth policies and the needs of young people has inevitably led to serious problems. Only in recent years with the maturation of problems such as youth unemployment and a growing disinterest of young people in public processes, including political apathy, have national governments begun to realise that the problems of young people must be approached systematically and clearly built on the foundations of defined programmes and a clear vision. This includes the development of policies and methods for adapting the education systems in Member States to the needs of students, and giving them opportunity to combine work with education.

We will need more initiatives in order to address the skills gap, a large and growing issue. Today's globalised and technology-driven economy presents serious challenges. But it also offers opportunities and rewards skills. By strategically investing in people and training them in the skills employers in their communities are looking for, we can help drive down unemployment while building the foundation for the prosperity we all seek.

In this regard:

**We, the European People's Party (EPP),**

- Considering the fact that young people along with their skills and abilities are a valuable asset for Europe;
- Realising that despite the high unemployment rate, some sectors in the economy still face problems recruiting personnel with the right set of skills;
- Noting that only slightly more than 20% of graduates from higher education institutions have a degree in a science, technology, engineering and mathematics field (STEM), a situation which is insufficient to meet the demands of the labour market;
- Noting that according to projections by the European Commission, by 2020 we will have 900 000 open vacancies in ICT- sector because lack of skilled employees;
- Highlighting that not only intellect and education but also motivation and self-discipline are prerequisites for creating highly professional staff;
- Recognising that vocational skills are a valuable asset for both the individual and companies, but that in some countries vocational education is typically seen as a secondrate choice for those students who are not able to pursue a higher level of education; and
- Realising that higher education needs to be more demanding and that graduates need to be able to compete with the best and brightest graduates from other parts of the world in order to be successful in a global economy;

**Call on the European Commission and Member States to:**

- Place education as a fundamental and priority area of development;
- Develop a strategy for educational cooperation at an EU level and encourage crossborder cooperation ;
- Establish uniform criteria for the validation of skills of students and graduates from different levels of education;
- Increase the share of vocational education, and support enterprises willing to provide vocational education and training since it is important to raise the level of excellence in these programmes and to secure the supply of good trainee or apprenticeship places;
- Support the idea of lifelong learning and increase permeability between vocational training and university education;
- Attach particular importance to economic education and political participation of young people;
- Support programmes that aim to provide digital skills to young people;
- Create incentives to promote excellence in higher education;
- Develop initiatives to boost enrolment in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects; and
- Encourage cross-boarder mobility among young people and a lively exchange of knowledge within Europe. The Erasmus+ programme is an invaluable asset in this respect, offering mobility not just to students but also to young people in apprenticeships, and to young entrepreneurs.

<sup>1</sup> CEDEFOP, "Roads to recovery: three skill and labour market scenarios for 2025", Briefing Note, June 2013. The data refer to the baseline scenario.

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**If you have any question  
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