

**Committee of the Regions****EDUC-V-008****88th plenary session
27 and 28 January 2011****OPINION
of the
Committee of the Regions
on
YOUTH ON THE MOVE****THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

- welcomes the European Commission's flagship initiative "Youth on the Move", an ambitious strategic initiative which aims to improve young Europeans' mobility, education and integration into the world of work. For the first time, the European Commission has devised a youth policy framework which encompasses both education and employment;
- notes that education must be at the heart of youth mobility;
- would highlight the close link between poor attainment at school and socio-economic disadvantage which are key determinants to the number of young people neither employed nor in education or training. Breaking this cycle is a challenge for local and regional authorities across Europe and must be seen as a priority within this initiative;
- endorses Member States' and local and regional authorities' flexible use of the European Social Fund to assist young people. This is particularly relevant to the attainment of the Europe 2020 objectives;
- in the assessment of all the educational mobility programmes, which will give rise to legislative proposals in 2011 and a new financial framework in the post-2013 period, it is vital – as noted in the Committee of the Regions' opinion on the Green Paper on "Promoting the learning mobility of young people" – that the key contribution of local and regional authorities to promoting young people's mobility for educational purposes be taken into account.

Rapporteur

Marc Schaefer (LU/PES), Member of Vianden Municipal Council

Reference document

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - Youth on the Move (An initiative to unleash the potential of young people to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the European Union)
COM(2010) 477 final

I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

General comments

1. welcomes the European Commission's flagship initiative "Youth on the Move", an ambitious strategic initiative which aims to improve young Europeans' mobility, education and integration into the world of work. For the first time, the European Commission has devised a youth policy framework which encompasses both education and employment;
2. fully supports the objective of improving young people's knowledge, skills and experience to facilitate their entry into the labour market and exploit their potential to the full, thereby enabling the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy to be attained; nonetheless points out that education is about more than simply improving employability, and should have the broader goal of developing the person as a whole;
3. regrets that in drafting and implementing measures to facilitate mobility, the European Commission has failed to take sufficient account of the role played by local and regional authorities who, given their close involvement in this sphere, would seem best placed to help facilitate access to mobility; the same is true of the design and development of programmes for young people, since these authorities have the best understanding of the realities and situations facing young people, because they are the closest to them;
4. notes that as many young people as possible, whatever their background, economic situation or the geographical location of their region, should have access to the measures launched under this initiative; because some young people, such as those from the outermost regions or islands, do not have the same opportunities for mobility as young people from mainland Europe; the Committee stresses, however, that this approach aims to create opportunities for mobility, leaving the choice of whether the opportunity is taken up or not to young people themselves;
5. notes that young people's educational and training must help them to obtain, develop and update key professional skills and such knowledge as will encourage them to become active in society; points out at the same time that it is one of the central roles of all educational institutions to foster young people's creative and innovative potential and to give them an environment to develop intellectually and socially. All of these areas are key factors for young people becoming independent adults and integrated into society, requiring measures which enable them to combine education, studies or work with family;
6. notes that, in the current economic climate especially, it is sensible to encourage more young people to complete their education or to follow additional training which will enable them to attain such skills as improve their prospects on the labour market;

7. stresses the importance of young people's acquisition of life-skills in the non-formal education provided under the current 'Youth in Action' programme and calls for this to continue beyond 2013, since these skills complement academic education and are key to boosting the mobility and employability of young people on the labour market;
8. notes its commitment to mobility, be it educational or professional, since – aside from its important contribution to personal and professional development – mobility helps strengthen European identity, thereby enhancing economic, social and territorial cohesion within the European Union;
9. urges that educational programmes which promote mobility be extended beyond 2013 and requests that the Commission, Council and European Parliament earmark more funds for establishing future framework programmes;
10. stresses that the objectives of the "Youth on the Move" initiative will only be achieved in partnership with local and regional authorities and other youth organisations and associations;

Mobility initiatives

11. notes that education must be at the heart of youth mobility. The European Commission must, therefore, outline support measures, respecting the division of competences in the Treaties, which ensure proper access to information on mobility opportunities, improve the quality of education and protect everyone's right of access to education; it should also boost mobility-related issues such as exchange visits for secondary school pupils and the networking of bodies working in the field of mobility for students and young people;
12. notes that there are more barriers to youth mobility for those not in university education or who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, including those who do not have equal access to mobility because of the geographical location of their home region; wishes to point out that the EU should ensure that these mobility programmes are accessible under equal conditions to all young people, and thus recommends offering support to regions with specific geographical features, such as the outermost regions and islands, whose mobility policies are seriously hampered by their distance and geographical isolation from mainland Europe. In order that these groups may also derive full benefit from European mobility programmes, specific voluntary measures must be taken. These would cover not only communication measures aimed at different sections of the public, but also specially tailored financial support mechanisms which seek to reduce financial obstacles to mobility;

13. as noted in the Committee of the Regions' Opinion on the Green Paper entitled "Promoting the learning mobility of young people"¹, regional and local authorities make an important contribution to encouraging mobility for the purposes of learning. This is particularly true for information, advice and awareness-raising, as well as for most instances of quality-assurance and funding measures;
14. points out that it is often small-scale mobility projects which have a decisive impact and which contribute to consolidating a European way of thinking, thereby encouraging people to play an active role in European society and promoting democracy;
15. supports the European Commission's ambition to provide young Europeans with better information about simplified procedures for social security coordination, which must take the new mobility into account;
16. underlines the need for the new generation of structural funds to take account of student accommodation;
17. stresses the connection between the discussion engendered by the European Commission's Green Paper on pension systems² and the mobility of young Europeans with a view to ensuring that retirement arrangements and pensions are more sustainable and better suited to needs. Viewed from this perspective, it is crucial that young workers be able to access jobs and working time which provide pension rights;

Educational and university policies

18. supports the Europe 2020 Strategy target that at least 40% of young people should have completed tertiary or equivalent education, but stresses that this is contingent upon university entrance becoming more accessible and available to the highest possible number of students; in addition, both at EU level and in the Member States, measures to ensure a better match between skills and jobs should be continued and expanded, focusing in particular on working together when implementing the two flag-ship initiatives "Youth on the move" and "An agenda for new skills and jobs";
19. notes therefore that, in diversifying their sources of revenue, universities must not rely solely on possible tuition fee increases which could put this increased accessibility at risk;
20. takes note of the European Commission's proposal to create, in partnership with the European Investment Bank, a European student loan facility designed to complement existing systems

¹ Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the Green Paper on Promoting the learning mobility of young people (CdR 246/2009).

² Green Paper entitled "Towards adequate, sustainable and safe European pension systems" COM(2010) 365 final.

in the Member States and stresses that these loans should not result in access to mobility becoming a commercial commodity;

21. welcomes the European Commission's initiative to establish a global university ranking system. Relevant criteria should include quality of teaching, innovation, regional and local involvement, internationalisation, student diversity, students' background from a social and geographical point of view and from the point of view of gender balance, and their level of satisfaction;
22. supports the European Commission's intention to propose attractive employment conditions for young researchers. This will require synergies between regional and European funding which allow those young people wishing to finance their theses to do so;
23. accepts that student employability must be an objective of tertiary education, but stresses that the latter must not only stimulate students' creative and innovative potential but also seek to foster their intellectual and social development;

Integration of young people into the labour market

24. would highlight the close link between poor attainment at school and socio-economic disadvantage which are key determinants to the number of young people neither employed nor in education or training. Breaking this cycle is a challenge for local and regional authorities across Europe and must be seen as a priority within this initiative;
25. supports the European Commission's desire to ensure that all young people have adequate social security cover. No young person, whatever their professional circumstances, should be without such cover;
26. recommends that the European Commission set up an online portal for the exchange of best practice examples at local and regional level on integrating young people into the labour market;
27. believes that the European Union, in partnership with regional and local authorities, who are best placed to monitor the situation of young people experiencing difficulties and implement corresponding measures, should design a systematic follow-up mechanism for young people who are neither employed nor in education or training;
28. supports the European Commission proposal encouraging Member States to establish a "Youth Guarantee" which stipulates that every young person, within four months of leaving school, should receive an offer of a job, vocational training or a place at college or university, tailored to their academic and professional career path;

29. supports the European Commission in drawing up a quality framework for traineeships, which are often an important route into the labour market for young people. Every possible effort should be made to eschew unpaid or underpaid traineeships. This European framework should make provision for remuneration and social security cover, so that young people on traineeships are able to properly integrate into society; it should also regulate the rights and duties of young people on traineeships and of the companies in which they undertake them;
30. notes that the 2011 European Year of Volunteering will provide an opportunity to: (a) demonstrate, among other positive aspects, the value to young people of voluntary activity as a means of helping to develop their professional career paths; and (b) to address the obstacles to volunteering and the need for appropriate legal frameworks to protect volunteers' rights and entitlements;
31. remains doubtful as to the effectiveness of the European Commission's proposal to establish single, open-ended contracts, and requests clarification on both the length of probation periods and minimum income levels specified for young people. The benefits offered by this type of contract in terms of facilitating young people's entry into the labour market remain rather unclear and it could even jeopardise their chances of obtaining employment and create a two-tier labour market;
32. supports the European Commission's "Your first EURES job" initiative as a pilot project which helps young people to find a job in one of the 27 Member States. This initiative should bring associations which help young people get jobs together with local and regional authorities;
33. welcomes the creation of a High Level Expert Group on Literacy as a priority action. This group should bring together local and regional experts who will be able to share first-hand experience in this domain. As the Committee of the Regions noted in its own-initiative opinion on illiteracy³, exchange of best practice at European level is key, particularly for the regional and local authorities who have come up with strategies to combat this problem;

Deployment of European funds

34. endorses Member States' and local and regional authorities' flexible use of the European Social Fund to assist young people. This is particularly relevant to the attainment of the Europe 2020 objectives. The fund should be deployed to its fullest extent and steps taken to raise awareness about the opportunities it offers; in order to achieve the targets set in the initiative, other European support programmes that do not focus (primarily) on employability (e.g. the lifelong learning programme) should also be retained in their current form, because education is about more than just improving employability;

³

Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on Combating functional illiteracy - an ambitious European strategy for preventing exclusion and promoting personal fulfilment CdR 193/2009.

35. notes that many programmes to promote youth mobility already exist (the Lifelong Learning Programme, Erasmus Mundus, Youth in Action, "Europe for Citizens"). These programmes could also be directed at teachers, youth workers and social workers who are often the first to inspire the young people in their charge to grasp mobility opportunities;
36. In the assessment of all the educational mobility programmes, which will give rise to legislative proposals in 2011 and a new financial framework in the post-2013 period, it is vital – as noted in the Committee of the Regions' opinion on the Green Paper on "Promoting the learning mobility of young people" – that the key contribution of local and regional authorities to promoting young people's mobility for educational purposes be taken into account. Local and regional authorities frequently function as information relays, offering advice and raising awareness of mobility opportunities. They also provide substantial funding. The red tape associated with these programmes must also be cut back;

Symbolic initiatives under this action programme and communication on the programme

37. welcomes the creation of a "Youth on the Move" card. This type of symbolic action could contribute to raising the profile of the whole initiative and help people identify more with the European Union. Genuine benefits, however, need to accrue from this card, which must not compete with existing cards, such as the International Student Identity Card or the European Youth Card provided by the European Youth Card Association (EYCA), which could indeed serve as a support. Significant reductions on youth travel and accommodation within the European Union could be mooted as one way of promoting youth mobility;
38. underlines the need to incorporate the panoply of existing initiatives such as the Europass (cv in European format) into the future "European skills passport". Fragmenting initiatives would undermine the aim of promoting mobility via Member States' mutual recognition of skills.

Brussels, 27 January 2011.

The President
of the Committee of the Regions

Mercedes Bresso

The Secretary-General
of the Committee of the Regions

Gerhard Stahl

II. PROCEDURE

Title	Youth on the Move
Reference	COM(2010) 477 final
Legal basis	Art. 307, 1st para., TFEU
Procedural basis	-
Date of Commission letter	15 September 2010
Date of President's decision	16 September 2010
Commission responsible	Commission for Education, Youth, Culture and Research
Rapporteur	Marc Schaefer (LU/PES)
Analysis	6 October 2010
Discussed in commission	18 November 2010
Date adopted by commission	18 November 2010
Result of the vote in commission	Adopted with majority
Date adopted in plenary	27 January 2011
Previous Committee opinions	<p>CdR 231/2010: EU coordination in Vocational education and training to support the EU 2020 strategy</p> <p>CdR 199/2010: Resolution on Stronger involvement of Local and Regional Authorities in the Europe 2020 strategy</p> <p>CdR 273/2009: European Year of volunteering (2011)⁴</p> <p>CdR 246/2009: Green paper on promoting the learning mobility of young people⁵</p> <p>CdR 193/2009: Combating functional illiteracy⁶</p> <p>CdR 157/2009: University business dialogue⁷</p> <p>CdR 96/2009: An updated strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training⁸</p> <p>CdR 59/2008: European Job Mobility Action Plan (2007-2010)⁹</p> <p>CdR 335/2006: Efficiency and equity in European education and training systems¹⁰</p>

⁴ OJ C 175, 1.7.2010, pp. 40–44.

⁵ OJ C 175, 1.7.2010, pp. 31–34.

⁶ OJ C 175, 1.7.2010, pp. 26–30.

⁷ OJ C 141, 29.5.2010, pp. 27–30.

⁸ OJ C 79, 27.3.2008, pp. 27-32.

⁹ OJ C 325, 19.12.2008, pp. 66-69.

¹⁰ OJ C 146, 30.6.2007, pp. 77-84.