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OPINION

drawn up on behalf of the Committee on Youth, Culture,  
Education, Information and Sport

on the problem of unemployment among young people

Draftsman: Mr E. BROK

This opinion supersedes and replaces the opinion  
included in the report drawn up by Mrs SALISCH  
(Doc. 1-86/83).



OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON YOUTH, CULTURE, EDUCATION, INFORMATION AND SPORT

Draftsman: Mr Elmar BROK

The Committee on Youth, Culture, Education, Information and Sport was asked to draw up an opinion for the Committee on Social Affairs and Employment on youth unemployment.

At its meeting of 28 September 1982 the committee appointed Mr BROK draftsman of the opinion.

The committee considered the draft opinion at its meetings of 26/27 January and 22/23 February 1983 and at the latter meeting adopted it by 15 votes to 0 with 3 abstentions.

The following took part in the vote: Mr Beumer, chairman; Mr Fajardie, Mr Hahn and Mr Schwencke, vice-chairmen; Mr Brok, draftsman; Mr Alexiadis, Mr Arfé, Mr Bøgh, Miss Brookes, Mrs Buchan, Mr Chanterie (deputizing for Mrs Gaiotti de Biase), Mr Gerokostopoulos, Mr Hutton (deputizing for Mr Cottrell), Mr Marck (deputizing for Mr Pedini), Mr Papapietro (deputizing for Mr Fanti), Mrs Pery, Mr Simmonds and Mrs Viehoff.

1. Youth unemployment is a central issue with regard to the future of the European Community. The frequently lengthy periods of unemployment among young people (constituting approximately 40% of the total number of unemployed in the Community) is seriously jeopardizing the social and economic stability of the Community Member States. In the interest of not only young people as individuals but also the future of Europe, the combating and alleviation of youth unemployment must be treated as a priority within the framework of efforts to remedy unemployment as a whole.
2. Youth unemployment is primarily a consequence of the economic crisis and a symptom of the resulting general unemployment. The creation of jobs and fresh employment opportunities, together with a new system of work-sharing and flexible arrangements for voluntary early retirement are essential if the situation is to be improved. Independently of this, it is necessary to formulate accompanying measures which contribute to the attainment of overall objectives and are in strict accordance with economic, labour market and financial policy.
3. With regard to the terms of reference of the Committee on Youth, Culture, Education, Information and Sport, these measures are concerned primarily with ensuring equal opportunities for all young people and improving co-ordination between those responsible in the fields of education, training and employment, i.e. ensuring that the quality of general education and vocational training is more closely oriented towards the characteristics of the labour market. Such measures must be directed towards assuring jobs in the long term and require a forward-looking approach. They must provide young people with incentive and ensure that they are able to obtain not just 'any' job but fulfilling employment which enables them to develop their individual potential.
4. At the same time it must be recognized that young people constitute a singularly heterogeneous grouping including the following:
  - young women and girls,
  - the children of immigrant workers,
  - the disabled,
  - young people in economically less-favoured areas or large towns where unemployment is particularly rife,
  - young people without a school leaving certificate,

- young people who have interrupted their vocational training or are untrained,
- young graduates,
- young people from ethnic minorities,

who are particularly affected by unemployment. These specific categories each require appropriate assistance.

5. Over and above its social significance, vocational training for young people is of fundamental importance to the economy, since one means of promoting healthy economic growth is to provide young people with genuine opportunities in the form of training for appropriate qualifications. The Community's prime objective must be to ensure that all young people receive initial training with a view to obtaining professional qualifications. To this end the best possible vocational preparation is necessary and a wide choice of vocational training must therefore continue to be made available. Moreover, all young people must be given the opportunity to acquire a general education that will enable them to play a full part in the constantly changing economic, social, cultural and political life.

At its meeting of 29 and 30 March 1982 the European Council urged the Member States to take measures to ensure that, in the next five years, all young people entering the employment market for the first time were given vocational training or initial work experience. In addition, the Commission has submitted to the Council a number of proposals embodying a 'social guarantee' for young people.

These declarations of intent are to be welcomed only if they are actually implemented and if appropriate and feasible proposals are submitted. At the same time, efforts should be made to avoid lengthening the periods spent in school and further education in a variety of ways which do not ultimately lead to employment. Training methods must do more than simply cover up the existence of unemployment.

6. One of the causes of youth unemployment - a problem that was discernible even before the present economic crisis - is the lack of work experience and shortage of training opportunities. The following measures should therefore be considered with a view to alleviating this problem:

- cooperation between undertakings for training purposes,
- better information at regional level on training opportunities made available in the form of 'training grants',
- the elimination of unnecessary and anachronistic rules which prevent or impede access to training opportunities,
- increase in training opportunities by sharing any available place on a training course between two candidates.

If possible, training should be given in all branches of employment to avoid dependence on instruction in the use of one particular machine in one particular undertaking.

7. 'Alternating' training must be developed to a greater extent. It must be accompanied by an active policy of youth employment. Compulsory vocational training must be introduced in all Member States of the Community. The objective of alternating training should be to facilitate the transition from school to working life by, first, helping young people to find their bearings in a working environment unfamiliar to them, and then by giving them qualifications which are recognized on the labour market, thus assisting them to integrate into a steady full-time job. The pilot projects being carried out by the Commission must be extended so as to include a greater number of occupations and enable a systematic exchange of experience within the Community.
8. Given the close interrelationship between practical training and employment opportunities, it is necessary to coordinate education and employment more closely and increase cooperation between those responsible. Secondary schools should provide comprehensive vocational preparation by offering a final curriculum oriented more closely towards initial employment and subsequent careers. Vocational training curricula should be drawn up in collaboration between school and industry. This requires better training of teachers to enable them to provide more intensive preparation for employment. The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training can make a considerable contribution in this sector by carrying out independent research and co-ordinating the projects of individual Member States.
9. Education and training must take account of technological innovations in order to make young people more aware of their use and social implications. Training in new technologies as part of the general curriculum rather than a specialization enables less-favoured groups such as young people without professional qualifications to be taught skills corresponding to future economic requirements, thereby increasing their employment prospects and mobility.

10. Vocational guidance and counselling within the school system must be improved. Only in this way will it be possible to achieve a high degree of flexibility among young people, who must be helped to make their decision by means of information on possible careers and career prospects. It is important to avoid arbitrarily directing boys and girls towards careers traditionally regarded as suitable for one or other of the sexes. Generally speaking it is necessary to achieve improved cooperation between the sectors concerned with education, vocational guidance, training and placement services.
11. By stressing the qualities of initiative and willingness to accept risks, and encouraging a spirit of independence, schools should encourage their pupils to at least consider the possibility of becoming self-employed, since independent professional activity and cooperatives offer a considerable number of fresh employment opportunities.
12. The pilot projects being carried out by the Community in cooperation with the Member States to facilitate the transition between school and employment and whose objectives correspond to the abovementioned requirements, must be given increased funds and their scope must be extended. In view of the importance of these projects it is unfortunate that the Council of Education Ministers on 24 May 1982 approved only 25 of the 30 projects originally planned for the period 1983 to 1986 and accordingly reduced the funds for them to 18 million ECUs.
13. Mobility among young people should be encouraged. This requires not only education and training adapted to future economic and technological requirements but also progress in the mutual recognition of academic and non-academic diplomas and qualifications. Efforts should be made to ensure the comparability of qualifications obtained, particularly in the new areas of vocational training.

The mobility of young people during and after their training could be promoted by a greater degree of clarity concerning qualifications offered in individual career branches and countries. To this end a European vocational training card should be introduced in which all professional qualifications may be entered. Such a card would make it easier for young people to go abroad in order to complete part of their training and possibly find employment.

The programme for the exchange of young employees must be extended and greater attention given to exchanges of pupils, students and teachers. More intensive foreign-language instruction should be given as an essential means of promoting mobility.

14. Young people with a relatively low level of education frequently require special preparatory courses in order to have some chance of finding employment. Such preparatory courses should be supported by the European Social Fund provided that they genuinely promote career-oriented skills and abilities rather than being merely a surreptitious means of spending an extra year at school.
15. The problem of unemployment among young graduates must be met not only by making academically appropriate changes to the contents of the studies pursued but also by offering more practical alternatives for study, by giving sixth-form students a greater choice of vocational training courses and improved career opportunities. Vocational training should be considered in a new light in conjunction with university education. The latter is not the only means of obtaining qualifications, and it must be made clear that vocational training offers equally good career opportunities and general prospects.
16. Young people wishing to follow courses of a limited duration should be entitled to social security benefits. They should be able to choose a training programme without being in danger of forfeiting such benefits.
17. Measures should be introduced to enable unemployed young people to undertake voluntary work in the social, cultural and other fields. A number of Member States have already submitted plans to involve unemployed young people in development cooperation.
18. Our society will in future be characterized by an increase in leisure time. This process will be hastened by shorter working hours and the organizational structure of society will be required to adapt accordingly. Greater emphasis will therefore have to be placed on the creation of jobs in the services sector (and in the cultural field).

In this connection the proposals made by the Commission in its communication on 'stronger Community action in the cultural sector' (COM(82) 590 final) for the creation of jobs in the cultural sector merit in-depth consideration. Training opportunities and qualifications could open up real chances for young people in this field. At school, during further training and through youth work, young people must also be helped to make the best possible use of their free time. In general, preparation for everyday life should form an important part of all vocational training programmes.



19. An effective and appropriate education and training policy is necessary - its credibility will nevertheless depend on the possibility of finding employment.

While measures in the field of education and training alone cannot solve the problem of youth unemployment, they can ensure that

- even in the present situation no bottlenecks occur,
- instruction and skills are acquired which are oriented towards future economic and technological developments,
- more attention is paid to the development of individual potential, differences in the general level of education arising from social factors are evened out and efforts are made to give young people the necessary incentive.

