

EAPN POSITION ON SKILLS AND MOBILITY

New Skills for New Jobs

In December 2008, the European Commission released its “New Skills for New Jobs” communication, providing a first assessment of labour market and skills needs up to 2020, and a mapping of existing anticipation instruments at national and European level. The document also proposes a more effective approach to ensure anticipation and matching between labour demand and supply through synergies between employment, training and education policies. In March 2009, the EPSCO endorsed the Commission communication, stressing the need for upgrading skills and providing access to quality education and lifelong learning for all, as well as for mapping-out and anticipating the labour market needs in order to ensure better skills matching. The Spring Council has given additional impetus to this approach, viewed as the main medium- and long-term response to the crisis aftermath. It has been confirmed that this agenda will be a priority for the upcoming Spanish EU Presidency.

There are a number of important issues which EAPN would like to point out in relation to this initiative:

- **Equal access to training**

The responsibility for retraining and upgrading skills does not lie exclusively with the employee or jobseeker, but there should be incentives for employers, as well as Public Employment Services, to provide such services. There are already examples in this sense (AT, CZ, NL). In other countries (PT) however, it is increasingly difficult for workers to reconcile training with working hours. Furthermore access to training is not smooth for all groups, so targeted approaches for vulnerable groups need to be devised, to make sure that especially the low-skilled, young people, people in poverty, migrants and minority groups (including the Roma), people with disabilities and other disadvantaged categories can access skills upgrading. Increased attention should be paid also to the flanking services, which are necessary to enable some unemployed people to access suitable learning experiences. **Policies affecting education, training and skills upgrading need to ensure that tailored responses are in place to address the specific obstacles faced by people excluded from the labour market.**

- **Promoting job creation and job quality**

Upgrading skills and retraining are not enough when job opportunities are shrinking. Training and education do not solve issues such as quality of work (including living wages, protection of employment rights and job security) for those who will continue to hold low-qualified jobs. Skills upgrading is too often linked with flexicurity, but from a perspective where increased “flexibility” of the labour force is expected and required, but nothing is said about how advanced training can ensure better job security. **Policies dealing with training and up-skilling need to be complemented with initiatives aimed at job creation, prioritising job quality and employment security, while simultaneously reinforcing social protection schemes.**

- **Defining the purpose of training**

EAPN stresses that lifelong learning is, first and foremost, part of an individual's personal development. In terms of the access to the labour market, however, training priorities are established in function of the company's needs, or larger labour market needs. People must be equipped with those skills that ensure that they are able to access quality jobs, which effectively lift them out of poverty. Also, in view of exploring new sectors for job creation, such as the green economy and social services, adequate skills need to be in place so that people, especially those currently furthest or excluded from the labour market, can be prepared to take up these new jobs. Empowerment skills and life-coaching also constitute an essential step in supporting people, particularly vulnerable groups, to effectively integrate into the labour market and to seize existing opportunities. **Training policies have to be aimed at responding at the broader labour market needs, and focus on those skills which facilitate access to sustainable, quality jobs, which effectively constitute a sure route out of poverty and social exclusion.**

- **Recognition of non-formal skills**

The issue of the recognition of non formal experience, which is crucial for the integration on the labour market of vulnerable people, is not sufficiently addressed. Adequate mechanisms need to be set in the place for the recognition of non-formal skills, which are often regarded as low skills. This is especially important for groups such as carers. Formalising and updating of their skills is crucial in the context of investing in social services as mechanisms for job creation. Moreover, these services are badly needed in a time where the demographic change realities and the work/life balance agenda requires more and more access to quality, affordable care services. **EAPN calls for the European Union to be the catalyst for the development of the recognition of non-formal and informal education and in-work experience.**

- **Providing adequate income support for young people**

Training provided should follow a lifecycle approach, to make sure that groups which could be vulnerable to exclusion, such as young people, recent graduates, single parents, people with disabilities or older people enjoy equal access to education and up-skilling opportunities. Several proposed initiatives focus on retaining young people for longer in education and promoting quality traineeships and apprenticeships. While EAPN supports this initiative, we point out that these can not replace adequate jobs and, especially, often do not provide the means necessary for a life in dignity, being often unpaid, or paid a symbolic amount. **These measure needs to be accompanied by adequate income support, to prevent young people from experiencing poverty while not yet integrated in the labour market.**

Mobility

Mobility of workers in the European Union is the overarching priority of the Czech Presidency. In the context of responses to the economic downturn, mobility has been mainstreamed in all recovery plans and other European Commission documents, as a viable strategy to counter the rising unemployment. The informal EPSCO on March 9th prepared Conclusions on the professional and geographical mobility of the workforce in the European Union. This is based on the Commission Communication of December 2007 (Mobility, an instrument for more and better jobs: The European Job Mobility Action Plan 2007-2010).

EAPN would like to share the following concerns regarding the mobility agenda:

- **Not a choice**

For people experiencing poverty and exclusion, looking for a job abroad is often not a positive choice, but a necessity driven by economic hardship in their own country. This is particularly true for Member States with no adequate minimum income schemes, high unemployment and/or poor employment standards. Rather than trying to move people around like objects, in order to fill vacancies across the continent, employment opportunities should be created at the national level. Mobility is also not an option for the low-skilled, as most support only targets the highly-qualified European work force. **The EU's first priority should be ensuring adequate income and decent / quality work for people within Member States, so that they do not need to migrate to get a decent life.**

- **Safeguarding rights**

The absence of a defined minimum set of rights across Member States, and the complexities in transferring rights (e.g. pension), remain a core obstacle. If mobility is to ensure alternatives to a life in poverty, Member States should guarantee equal employment and other social rights, by ensuring quality jobs, living wages, decent working conditions and job security, as well as equal and affordable access to services, particularly in relation to services which can support smooth integration and family reunification, such as housing, access to healthcare, education, childcare etc. **A complex policy mix, with EU-defined minimum standards, needs to be firmly in place in order to safeguard the human, social and employment rights of migrant workers and their families.**

- **The crisis context**

The shrinking job supply has resulted in many migrants already returning home to their countries of origin. The impact of the crisis is squeezing migrant workers' rights – with the first rounds of redundancies, priority is being given to keeping national workers. The first to be hit are third country nationals, then EU migrants, forcing them to return home with worsening conditions. This presents an additional risk that the crisis further erodes wage levels, increasing the percentage of the working poor (currently 8% of workers). Moreover, the mobility of enterprises is now on the rise, with many companies moving headquarters to countries where labour force is cheaper. **The EU must make a central commitment against social dumping, and be aiming to safeguard jobs, rather than shedding labour costs as the first line of redistributing losses.**

- **Making the link with migration and tackling discrimination**

Mobility is migration, be it temporary or permanent, and a more explicit link should be made between geographical mobility and migration policy. There is a need for a consistent, ethical approach, which identifies clearly the reasons for mobility / migration, and provides equal treatment. Mobility is experienced differently depending on gender, age, socioeconomic background and level of qualifications. For instance, Roma communities are highly mobile throughout Europe, but suffer everywhere from segregation and discrimination. Tailored support is needed for different groups experiencing different complex barriers. **The EU should be urging employers to effectively tackle discrimination and ensure equal opportunities, to respect employment protection, and commitments to migrant workers.**