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REPORT

on illiteracy and social exclusion
(2001/2340(INI))

Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

Rapporteur: Marie-Thérèse Hermange

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PROCEDURAL PAGE

At the sitting of 28 February 2001 the President of Parliament announced that the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs had been authorised to draw up an own-initiative report, pursuant to Rule 163 of the Rules of Procedure, on illiteracy and social exclusion and the Committee on Culture, Youth, Education, the Media and Sport had been asked for its opinion.

The Committee on Employment and Social Affairs had appointed Marie-Thérèse Hermange rapporteur at its meeting of 15 February 2001.

It considered the draft report at its meetings of 9 July, 8 October and 19 November 2001 and 7 to 8 January 2002.

At the last meeting it adopted the motion for a resolution unanimously.

The following were present for the vote: Michel Rocard (chairman), Winfried Menrad (vice-chairman), Marie-Thérèse Hermange (rapporteur), Jan Andersson, Elspeth Attwooll (for Luciano Caveri), Regina Bastos, André Brie (for Sylviane H. Ainardi), Hans Udo Bullmann (for Ieke van den Burg), Philip Bushill-Matthews, Alejandro Cercas, Luigi Cocilovo, Elisa Maria Damião, Proinsias De Rossa, Den Dover, Harald Ettl, Jillian Evans, Carlo Fatuzzo, Ilda Figueiredo, Hélène Flautre, Marie-Hélène Gillig, Anne-Karin Glase, Roger Helmer, Richard Howitt (for Fiorella Ghilardotti), Stephen Hughes, Anne Elisabet Jensen (for Daniel Ducarme), Ioannis Koukiadis, Elizabeth Lynne, Thomas Mann, Mario Mantovani, Paolo Pastorelli, Manuel Pérez Álvarez, Bartho Pronk, Herman Schmid, Helle Thorning-Schmidt, Anne E.M. Van Lancker, Barbara Weiler and Sabine Zissener.

The opinion of the Committee on Culture, Youth, Education, the Media and Sport is attached.

The report was tabled on 15 January 2002.

The deadline for tabling amendments will be indicated in the draft agenda for the relevant part-session.

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

European Parliament resolution on illiteracy and social exclusion (2001/2340(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Article 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,
- having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community and, in particular, Articles 2, 3, 136 and 137 thereof,
- having regard to the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights in Article 14(1): ‘Everyone has the right to education...’,
- having regard to the decisions of the Extraordinary European Council in Lisbon on 23 and 24 March 2000,
- having regard to the decisions of the Extraordinary European Council in Nice of 7 to 10 December 2000,
- having regard to its resolution of 12 October 2000 on the social policy agenda following up the Lisbon and Santa Maria da Feira European Councils and the Nice Council of December 2000¹,
- having regard to the Commission's Communication 'Building an inclusive Europe' (COM(2000) 79),
- having regard to the proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and the Council of 16 June 2000² establishing a Community action programme to encourage cooperation between Member States to combat social exclusion (COM(2000) 368) and its resolution of 17 May 2001 on the action programme to combat social exclusion³,
- having regard to the Commission's White Paper 'Education and training - teaching and learning - towards the learning society' (COM(1995) 590) and its resolutions of 18 February 1997⁴ and 11 October 2000⁵ on teaching and learning,
- having regard to the Council decision of 19 January 2001 on guidelines for Member States' employment policies in 2001 (2001/63/EC)⁶ and its resolution of 12 October 2000 on guidelines for Member States' employment policies in 2001⁷,
- having regard to the Council's Recommendation of 19 January 2001 on the

¹ OJ C 197, 12.7.2001, p. 8.

² OJ C 337, 28.11.2000, pp. 130-135.

³ Texts adopted, point 9.

⁴ OJ C 115, 14.4.1997, p. 4.

⁵ OJ C 223, 8.8.2001, p. 4.

⁶ OJ L 22, 24.1.2001, pp. 18-26.

⁷ OJ C 197, 12.7.2001, p. 9.

implementation of the Member States' employment policies (2001/64/EC)⁸,

- having regard to the Commission staff working paper on lifelong learning (SEC(2000)1832 - C5-0192/2001),
 - having regard to its resolution of 21 April 2001 on the eradication of illiteracy in the Member States of the European Community⁹,
 - having regard to Rule 163 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs and the opinion of the Committee on Culture, Youth, Education, the Media and Sport (A5-0009/2002),
- A. whereas knowing how to read and write is a fundamental right,
- B. whereas the opportunity to learn how to read and write should be accessible to all as a fundamental right, and teachers and parents should recognise their obligation to ensure that this opportunity is grasped by all,
- C. whereas combating illiteracy is essential because it secures and strengthens the freedom of the individual and allows equal access for all to fundamental rights,
- D. whereas combating illiteracy is not only a job for teachers and educators but must be undertaken by society as a whole and by all public authorities in particular, and whereas the Member States must assume their liabilities under the Treaties for the content and organisation of education systems,
- E. whereas the Union must support cooperation between the Member States, promote exchanges of best practice and innovatory approaches and assess the results with the individuals and other parties concerned,
- F. whereas the Council of Lisbon decided that an 'open method of coordination' should be applied in relation to action to combat poverty and social exclusion,
- G. whereas the data available indicate that between 10 and 20% of the population of the Union and up to 30% of the population of the candidate countries are unable to understand and use the printed and written matter necessary to function in society, achieve their objectives, improve their knowledge and skills and develop their potential, and whereas this problem would become even more serious if the flow of migrants from third countries were taken into account as well,
- H. whereas statistics and detailed data concerning illiteracy at European level are not yet available, particularly as regards the definition of the phenomenon, indicators, and current initiatives and best practice in the Member States,
- I. whereas there has been no consistent and continuous commitment at European level up to

⁸ OJ L 22, 24.1.2001, p. 27-28.

⁹ OJ C 150 of 31.5.1993, p. 61.

now to combating illiteracy and whereas insufficient account is taken of people with poor basic skills when formulating Community programmes,

- J. whereas, in the interests of human dignity and the fight against social marginalisation, action must also be taken to combat the ‘returning’ illiteracy which particularly affects elderly people who, as they lose their self-sufficiency, are obliged to enter sheltered accommodation, leaving their family and socio-cultural environment behind them for good,
- K. whereas participation in the knowledge-based society and social inclusion are primarily based on the ability to read and write, and whereas illiteracy restricts access to the labour market, employment prospects and the ability to adapt to a changing society and economy,
- L. whereas the effect of the illiteracy and the low level of basic skills displayed by many workers is to increase the risk of accidents at work and to make it more difficult for those workers to be reskilled or retrained,
- M. whereas, if the goal set out at Lisbon of making Europe ‘the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion’ and, in addition, the promotion of increased awareness in respect of political participation and greater knowledge on the part of citizens of their rights and ability to assert them is to be attained, European literacy skills must be enhanced,
- N. whereas it is necessary to take into account the guidelines approved by the Nice European Council with regard to the common objectives in the fight against poverty and social exclusion and to promote the participation in working life and access for all to resources, rights, and goods and services, by forestalling the risks of marginalisation so as to act for the benefit of the categories which are most at risk,
 - 1. Calls on the Commission, in connection with the employment guidelines and the open methods of cooperation used in the fight against poverty and exclusion, and also in relation to education and training, to propose specific indicators and benchmarks relating to illiteracy and to do this in close cooperation with all the social players, particularly those who act as spokesmen for the most deprived sections of society;
 - 2. Calls on the Commission to submit to Parliament and the Council, as soon as possible, a Green Paper on Illiteracy and Social Exclusion, together with a timetable for tangible objectives along the lines of the social agenda, precisely defining the measures to be taken at European level;
 - 3. Calls on the Commission to submit to Parliament a Green Paper and an action plan based on Articles 137 and 150 of the Treaty, comprising the following elements at least:
 - (a) a common definition of the various forms of illiteracy, based on indicators which are compatible and consistent across all the Member States, so as to enable a forward assessment to be made of the current situation of illiterate people and the medium-term trends stemming from changes affecting all aspects of socio-economic and family life;

- (b) open coordination of policies to combat illiteracy with policies on equal access for all to fundamental rights and on employment and social protection, non-discrimination and equal opportunity, and lifelong learning and research;
 - (c) annual assessment of the impact of Community and national policies on illiteracy and social policy with the persons concerned;
 - (d) the active participation by all the social players concerned, and particularly the most deprived people themselves, in Community policies to combat illiteracy;
 - (e) the setting up of a network for the exchange of best practice, which should be accessible to all parties concerned, and the setting up of a statistical database on illiteracy in the Union and the candidate countries;
 - (f) specific support for the EU regions which are most affected by this form of social exclusion and for the applicant countries, with a view to drawing up literacy programmes coordinated with vocational training;
 - (g) assistance to the candidate countries to analyse their needs and implement literacy programmes;
 - (h) the revision of existing directives or regulations with a view to incorporating in the Union's policies the objective of combating illiteracy and social exclusion;
 - (i) mainstreaming within the EU's policy areas of the fight against illiteracy as a cause of social exclusion;
4. Calls on the Commission to submit to the European Parliament and the Council, as soon as possible, a proposal for a recommendation to the Member States including, inter alia, the following points:
- (a) the development of literacy courses in all vocational training programmes and actions for adults, taking into account in particular the needs of migrant workers, and the provision of financial and material support for all literacy projects set up at places of work (including the possibility of applying the agreement on paid training leave);
 - (b) the definition of priority criteria to guarantee access to training and personal development programmes for adults with poor basic skills; and of methods tailored to their needs;
 - (c) the promotion at local, regional and national level of initiatives such as mobile libraries and learning support and of any initiative which would help those who cannot read to learn to do so, irrespective of their financial status and with a particular view to facilitating their integration into society;
 - (d) the consultation and active involvement of all concerned parties in the definition and implementation of programmes to combat illiteracy at each level of decision making;
 - (e) close coordination between the relevant services responsible at national, regional and local level for implementing actions under the Structural Funds, those responsible for

policies to combat social exclusion and integration into working life and those responsible for policies to combat illiteracy;

- (f) recognition that computer illiteracy may also lead to social exclusion, and also therefore needs addressing;
5. Calls on the Commission and the Council to set up a European illiteracy monitoring centre with a brief to establish training courses and diplomas at European level;
 6. Calls on the Commission to submit to Parliament, each year, a written report, incorporating statistical data, of progress towards the objectives of combating illiteracy and social exclusion, in close cooperation with persons with poor literacy skills who have participated in training programmes;
 7. Welcomes the Commission report to the Stockholm summit on 'The concrete future objectives of education systems'; believes that the Community institutions have a useful role to play in helping the Member States to implement a long-term work programme 'raising the standard of learning in Europe, by improving the quality of training for teachers and trainers, and by making a specific effort on literacy and numeracy';
 8. Calls on the Commission to support the development and maintenance of literacy skills through programmes such as SOCRATES, LEONARDO and YOUTH, as well as through projects supported by the Structural Funds;
 9. Calls on the Commission to include literacy projects in any European Year of books or reading;
 10. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Commission, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee, and to the European associations of non-governmental organisations working with disadvantaged people.

Explanatory Statement

The most distressing aspect of life for people living in extreme poverty is not being accepted as full citizens, and being regarded as useless and insignificant members of society. *Extreme poverty and social exclusion should, therefore, be regarded as a breach of human rights.*

Combating illiteracy is not just a challenge for teachers and educators, but for all members of society. By failing to enable all citizens to succeed at school, learn job skills and actively participate in new- technology training programmes, our society is depriving itself of considerable untapped resources.

Inability to access basic training and illiteracy are unacceptable breaches of human rights not only because they deprive citizens of the reading and writing skills that are essential in our changing society, but also because they condemn people to silence, non-communication, enforced idleness and hence to social exclusion and de facto non-citizenship.

This is what is really at stake in combating illiteracy. Not having access to the power of language is a source of suffering. Those subjected to such suffering say that to know how to read and write is to 'overcome shame'.¹⁰

This own-initiative report seeks to establish joint action at European level to ensure that efforts to combat illiteracy become an integral part of across-the-board programmes to combat social exclusion, and are incorporated into all Community policies.

Definitions of social exclusion and illiteracy

The rapporteur endorses the definition put forward in 1987 by the French Economic and Social Committee, following the report by Mr Joseph Wrensinski: *'Precariousness can be defined as the absence of one or more sources of security, and in particular employment, which enable individuals and families to meet their professional, family and social responsibilities and to enjoy their fundamental rights. The ensuing insecurity may be more or less profound and have more or less serious and permanent consequences. It leads to extreme poverty when it affects several areas of life, when it becomes persistent and when it undermines a person's chances of regaining a hold on his life and reclaiming his rights by himself within a reasonable time-frame.'*¹¹

Although Europe is a prosperous continent, many of our fellow citizens live in extreme poverty and suffer social exclusion. According to the most recent Eurostat statistics, some 18% of the population of the European Union live on less than 60% of national average earnings (the low income threshold used for measuring relative poverty).

The international inquiry into adult literacy organised in 1994 by the OECD with a view to assessing and comparing adults' skills in certain industrialised countries defined literacy as the

¹⁰ *Human rights apply to everyone*. Proceedings of the 6th conference of the Fourth World People's Universities under the aegis of the Economic and Social Committee, chaired by Olivier GERHARD, Brussels, 1999.

¹¹ *Extreme poverty and economic and social precariousness*. Report of Economic and Social Council, Paris 1987.

Rapporteur: Mr Joseph WRENSINKSI.

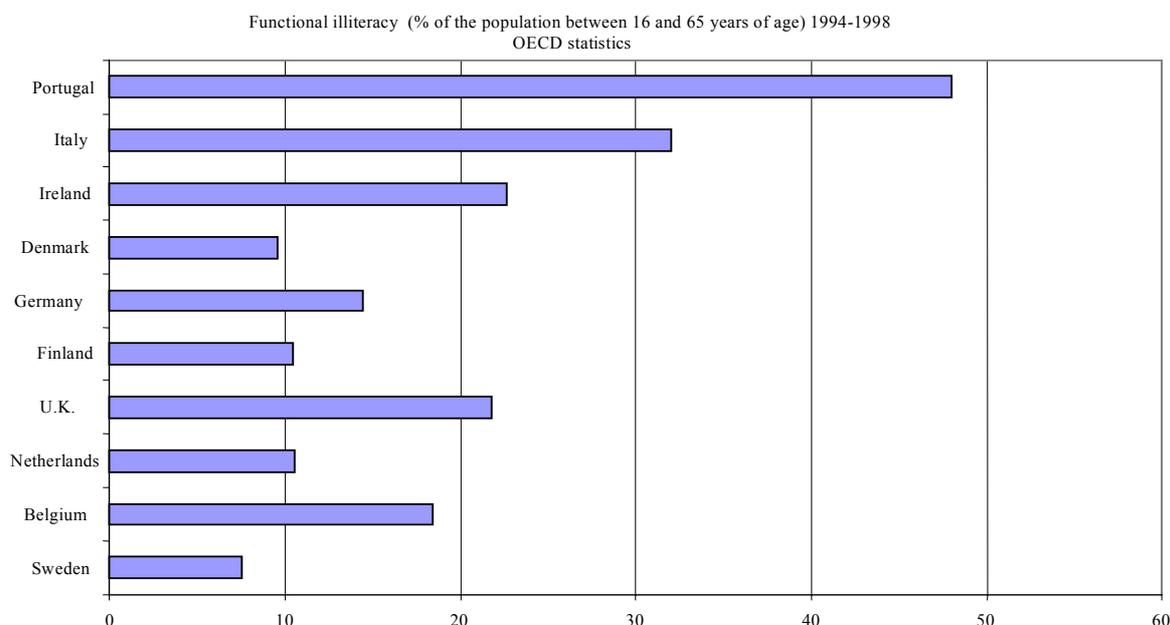
reading and writing skills used by adults in their daily lives, at work or in society.¹²

Illiteracy in Europe

The scale of the problem at Community level should not be underestimated: according to the OECD, a substantial proportion of the population between the ages of 15 and 65 in the Union is incapable of understanding and using the printed matter and literature necessary to function in everyday life.

According to this analysis, the problem of illiteracy is equally serious in the candidate countries: 42.2% of the population between 16 and 65 years of age are illiterate in Slovenia, 33.8% in Hungary, 42.6% in Poland, 20.3% in Romania, 29.5% in Bulgaria, 25.9% in Lithuania, 23.3% in Estonia and 20.3% in Latvia.

Thus while illiteracy, defined as the total inability to read and write, has now been almost completely eradicated in Europe, the phenomenon of 'functional illiteracy' is becoming increasingly serious.



Illiteracy creates an ever-widening gap between those who are privileged and live in relative security and those who are disadvantaged and marginalised, have no access to employment, suffer from financial insecurity and isolation and are excluded from social life.

In economic terms, illiteracy generates additional costs for undertakings and affects their ability to modernise. These extra costs are linked to high accident rates, extra salary costs to offset the lack of skills of individual employees and extra time for supplementary personnel supervision; further costs result from the non-production of wealth linked to the absence of

¹² OECD report. *Literacy, economy and society*, 1995.

optimal qualifications.¹³

The employability deficit also has an impact on workers themselves. Apart from the industrial accidents it causes, illiteracy is a source of absenteeism and demotivation.

There is the additional risk that the information society will exacerbate the exclusion of people with poor literacy skills and generate a new form of 'technological illiteracy' characterised by difficulty in interacting with new information technology systems.

The European Council in Lisbon confirmed that lifelong learning and action to combat social exclusion are necessary if the transition towards a knowledge-based economy and society is to succeed and to ensure that the emergence of the information society does not give rise to exclusion and leave the most vulnerable members of society out of account.¹⁴

European Union action and obstacles to action to combat illiteracy

At Community level, no coherent policy has yet been devised to tackle the problem of adult illiteracy, even if it has been frequently raised in Community documents (the report for 2000 on employment, the employment guidelines for 2001 and the memorandum on lifelong learning). The latest Community actions specifically addressing the problem of functional illiteracy go back to the Council programme to intensify measures to combat illiteracy which was adopted in 1987; this enabled the Commission to support, as from 1988, a network of 17 pilot projects on the most effective preventive measures in the field, culminating, in 1990, with the publication of a manual on a compendium of strategies and practices on the prevention and treatment of illiteracy in the EC.

The first European Parliament resolution on combating illiteracy was adopted on 13 May 1982. Ten years later the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the eradication of illiteracy in the Member States of the European Community (A3-400/92), which called on Community, national, regional and local institutions to use their human and financial resources to ensure that their citizens were able to exercise their fundamental right to education and basic skills.

The main problems impeding effective action in this field fall into the following categories:

- the absence of reliable and comparable data on literacy. There is as yet no commonly accepted international indicator. National and international bodies base their assessments on their own criteria. Each Member State uses different definitions and indicators;
- programmes intended for persons who have difficulty in reading, writing and in basic numeracy are ill-adapted to the real needs of the targeted group. Traditional approaches, both within and outside the educational system, take little account of the needs, availability and learning methods of adults who suffer from social exclusion. The more specific training measures, either at the workplace or with a view to

¹³ Hugues LENOIR, *Entreprise et illettrisme : ne pas renoncer!* in : Informations Sociales n°59.

¹⁴ 'Promoting social inclusion' (Paragraphs 32 and 33 of the Conclusions)

vocational integration, often require a certain level of preparation as a condition of access;

- the need to tackle the problem by means of integrated policies combining cultural and educational objectives with social objectives and the objective of integrating people in the employment market in line with a policy of social inclusion.

The scope for Union action and the proposals to combat illiteracy

The policy of combating illiteracy and social exclusion is at present principally a matter for the Member States. However, the Community has the task of supporting national initiatives and transnational cooperation. Action to combat illiteracy and exclusion must become one of the priorities of the Union and the Member States through the mobilisation of all the policies concerned within the framework of an integrated overall strategy.

Your rapporteur proposes, therefore, that the adoption of an 'open method of cooperation' between the Member States should be envisaged in relation to efforts to combat illiteracy, possibly in conjunction with national action programmes to promote employment and social inclusion.

A. THE PARTICIPATION OF THE PERSONS CONCERNED

Any concerted strategy to combat social exclusion and illiteracy should proceed on the basis of close and continuous cooperation with the NGOs that provide long-term support to the poorest families in their daily struggle to overcome social exclusion.

B. THE ACTIONS OF THE MEMBER STATES

When it comes to action by the Member States, your rapporteur proposes that particular care should be taken to promote the following:

1. The development of literacy modules in all adult education schemes and the setting of priority criteria guaranteeing access to training programmes for illiterate people. In particular, literacy promotion schemes which can be implemented at the workplace or in collaboration with potential employers should be supported;
2. Devising teaching instruments and methods aimed at teaching literacy skills to adults, drawing on the new technologies where appropriate;
3. The mobile library and learning support initiatives proposed by associations at local level;
4. The involvement of all the social players concerned in drawing up national strategies to combat illiteracy;
5. Close cooperation between national services charged with implementing actions under the Structural Funds and those responsible for policies to combat social exclusion and illiteracy.

C. EUROPEAN UNION INITIATIVE

The actions of the Member States should be accompanied by a Commission initiative seeking to:

1. Establish common indicators, and create a database, concerning:
 - essential basic skills;
 - criteria and methods for identifying vulnerable persons and groups;
 - qualitative and quantitative objectives for actions to tackle illiteracy;
 - the identification of best practices;
 - the assessment of the costs of illiteracy.
2. Establish a periodic evaluation system covering both the impact of Community and national policies on illiteracy and the results achieved by policies aimed at combating illiteracy;
3. Incorporate action to combat illiteracy, as a generalised policy, in all EU policies (mainstreaming) and determine appropriate mechanisms to ensure that it is coordinated with those other policies;
4. Guarantee the involvement of all the social players concerned in drawing up projects and create a network of information exchanges and best practices which is accessible to all;
5. Ensure forthwith and as a matter of the utmost urgency that assistance is given to the candidate countries to launch literacy promotion programmes.

D. LEGAL INSTRUMENTS

The European strategy to combat illiteracy should be accompanied by a timetable with specific target dates, the first stage of which would be the drawing up of a Green Paper setting out the measures to be taken at European level:

- a legislative initiative;
- a recommendation for the Member States;
- the revision of current directives or regulations in order to incorporate in the Union's policies the objective of combating illiteracy and social exclusion.

Every year, the Commission should be required to submit to the European Parliament a written report with statistical data on progress made towards the objectives of combating illiteracy and social exclusion.

18 September 2001

**OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON CULTURE, YOUTH, EDUCATION, THE
MEDIA AND SPORT**

for the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

on illiteracy and social exclusion
(2001/2340 (INI))

Draftsman: Eurig Wyn

PROCEDURE

The Committee on Culture, Youth, Education, the Media and Sport appointed Eurig Wyn draftsman at its meeting of 6 March 2001.

It considered the draft opinion at its meetings of 4 and 18 September 2001.

At the latter meeting it adopted the following conclusions unanimously.

The following were present for the vote: Giuseppe Gargani, chairman; Eurig Wyn draftsman; Pedro Aparicio Sánchez, Marielle de Sarnez, Robert J.E. Evans (for Lissy Gröner), Cristina Gutiérrez Cortines (for Christopher Heaton-Harris), Thomas Mann (Ruth Hieronymi pursuant to Rule 153(2)), Maria Martens, Pietro-Paolo Mennea, Barbara O'Toole, Doris Pack, Roy Perry, Mónica Ridruejo, The Earl of Stockton (for Theresa Zabell), Kathleen Van Brempt, Luckas Vander Taelen, Sabine Zissener.

SHORT JUSTIFICATION

1. In the brave new world of the 'knowledge economy', literacy and numeracy are at a premium. Conversely, in advanced societies, illiteracy is closely associated with 'social exclusion' - shame, poverty and social immobility. Illiterates are typically trapped in menial jobs; they also end up in prison more often than those who can read and write. What can and should the European Union do to try to minimise illiteracy in Europe?

2. **What is the problem?** Until recently, it has commonly been assumed that developed countries did not have a literacy problem thanks to their long-standing policy of universal and compulsory education. This assumption was mistaken. While levels of outright illiteracy in Europe are low, a worryingly high proportion of the population of some of the richest countries in the world have poor literacy skills - they are 'functionally illiterate'. And there is a new problem: many migrants and asylum seekers, able to read and write their own languages, are often functionally illiterate in the principal language of their host country. All of this matters because levels of literacy affect the skill profile and flexibility of a country's workforce, levels of employment, training opportunities, and income. They also, of course, affect the extent to which citizens are able to participate fully in the cultural, civic and political life of the societies in which they live. For individual citizens, higher levels of literacy are associated with higher participation in the labour force, lower probability of being unemployed, and higher probability of gaining white-collar high-skill employment. Higher literacy is also linked to better health outcomes and higher life expectancy.

3. **How big is it?** A report published in June 2000 by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development - 'Literacy in the Information Age' - tried to measure levels of literacy among adults in twenty countries. The report, based on comparative international research carried out between 1994 and 1999, incorporates interviews with people across the age range from 16 to 65. Literacy is defined as: 'the ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities, at home, at work and in the community - to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential'.

4. The research on which the report is based looked at three areas:

- prose literacy (understanding ordinary information in a newspaper);
- document literacy (understanding documents such as pay checks or maps);
- quantitative literacy (understanding how to work out from an advertisement how much interest would be payable on a loan).

Five levels of competence, ranging from level 1 ('very poor skills') to level 5 ('high-order information processing skills') were identified: level 3 was seen as the minimum level of literacy necessary to cope with everyday life and work in a complex, advanced society.

5. **The literacy league table:** The following hierarchy of literacy emerged: Sweden, Denmark, Norway, the Czech Republic, Germany, Netherlands, Finland, Belgium (Flanders), Canada, Australia, USA, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Hungary, Ireland, Slovenia, Poland, Portugal, Chile. (France withdrew from the study in November 1995). But no government can afford to be complacent. In each of the following, more than 15% of the population attained only level 1 on the prose literacy test: Belgium (Flanders), Ireland, Portugal and the United Kingdom. Even in the country with the highest score on the test (Sweden), 8% of the

adult population encountered a severe literacy deficit in everyday life and at work. And the OECD report concludes that, in all of the countries and regions which took part in the study, at least one in four adults failed to reach level 3 - the desired minimum level of literacy. Poor literacy is a deep-seated problem: eradicating it is a major challenge for governments.

6. **Full-time education:** The relationship between literacy skills and educational attainment is not straightforward. Many adults have high levels of literacy proficiency despite a low level of education: conversely, some have low literacy skills despite a high level of education. Nevertheless (and unsurprisingly), the OECD study found the most important predictor of literacy to be educational attainment. On average, the longer that people spent in full-time education, the greater their literacy. And the negative correlation of age and literacy reflects the fact that the older age cohorts tested had on average spent a shorter period in full-time education than had the younger age cohorts. High quality full-time education makes an obvious and powerful contribution to levels of literacy in the population as a whole: according to OECD and a range of other commentators, the main room for improvement lies in more and better teaching aimed at the academically least able quarter of the school-age population and those with special educational needs.

7. **Beyond full-time education:** But, on its own, full-time formal education does not guarantee high levels of education among adults who have left full-time education. OECD concluded that, among those who have left full-time education, four factors contribute to the attainment and maintenance of high-literacy levels:

- a high proportion of the population in skilled employment
- industrial and occupational structures and patterns of work organisation which require and reward literacy skills
- participation in formal adult education and training
- the use of literacy skills at home.

This underlines the importance of policies directed at the workplace (private as well as public sector employers have a major role to play by promoting and rewarding literacy skills) and the family (such as learning programmes aimed at the whole family).

8. **What can - and should - Europe do?** Article 149§1 of the Treaty states that the Community will respect fully 'the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity'. Moreover, the resources devoted to education at European level are - in the context of the budget as a whole - exiguous. Finally, the Community should act only where there is a demonstrable and proportionate 'European added value'. Given these constraints, there are three areas falling within the sphere of competence of this Committee, where there is a legal base for action and in which the Community could make a useful contribution to raising levels of literacy in Europe:

- gathering information on how Member States plan to implement the conclusions of the Lisbon summit in the field of education and encouraging the dissemination of best practice;
- helping Member States (through the 'open coordination method') to implement a long-term work programme 'raising the standard of learning in Europe, by improving the quality of training for teachers and trainers, and by making a specific effort on literacy and numeracy', as foreseen in the Commission report on 'The concrete future objectives of

education systems'¹⁵;

- supporting the development and maintenance of literacy skills through programmes such as SOCRATES (the GRUNDTVIG adult education action), LEONARDO and YOUTH, as well as through projects supported by the Structural Funds.

CONCLUSIONS

The Committee on Culture, Youth, Education, the Media and Sport calls on the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following points in its motion for a resolution:

1. Notes that, while outright illiteracy is a relatively rare phenomenon in Europe, in every European country at least one adult in four lacks the minimum level of literacy necessary to cope with everyday life and work in a complex, advanced society;
2. Believes that, if the goal set out at Lisbon of making Europe 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion' and, in addition, the promotion of increased awareness in respect of political participation and greater knowledge on the part of citizens of their rights and ability to assert them is to be attained, European literacy skills must be enhanced;
3. Calls on the Member States to assume their liabilities under the Treaties for the content and organisation of education systems;
4. Believes that it is necessary to take into account the guidelines approved by the Nice European Council with regard to the common objectives in the fight against poverty and social exclusion and to promote the participation in working life and access for all to resources, rights, and goods and services, by forestalling the risks of marginalisation so as to act for the benefit of the categories which are most at risk;
5. Welcomes the Commission report to the Stockholm summit on 'The concrete future objectives of education systems'; believes that the Community institutions have a useful role to play in helping the Member States to implement a long-term work programme 'raising the standard of learning in Europe, by improving the quality of training for teachers and trainers, and by making a specific effort on literacy and numeracy';
6. Calls on the Commission to support the development and maintenance of literacy skills through programmes such as SOCRATES, LEONARDO and YOUTH, as well as through projects supported by the Structural Funds;
7. Calls on the Commission to include literacy projects in any European Year of books or reading;
8. Urges the Member States to acknowledge that migrants, asylum seekers and adults driven

¹⁵ Report from the Commission "The concrete future objectives of education systems" (COM(2001) 59 fin.)

out of the labour market because of technological innovations, face particular problems; and to take steps to enhance their literary skills, by coordinating their own initiatives with any taken by religious or lay voluntary organisations, trade unions or business organisations.