Parliamentary Assembly
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Recommendation 1559 (2002)[1]

Training of workers in the use of new technologies

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The rapidly developing new information and communication technologies (NICT) now increasingly pervade not only private life, but also working life in every sector of the European economy, whether agriculture, mining, manufacturing or services. As the Assembly pointed out in its Resolution 1233 (2000) on the impact of new technologies on labour legislation, NICT have transformed working organisation, systems and methods, working conditions and labour relations.

2. It is estimated that 50% of all employees use a computer at work. Proficiency in the use of the NICT is therefore a necessary condition for productivity and competitiveness.

3. However, as the International Labour Organisation (ILO) pointed out in its World Employment Report for 2001, disparities in the distribution and use of NICT threaten to exacerbate the "digital divide", the gap between those who can access and use NICT effectively and those who cannot, thus intensifying existing patterns of social exclusion.

4. Access to training in NICT appears to be unequal, depending on such factors as professional status, age, sex and level of education. There are also major discrepancies between countries and regions. In the context of globalisation, this may lead to relocation by businesses to countries or regions where a qualified workforce already exists, thus further threatening employment and social cohesion.

5. With high unemployment in many Council of Europe member states, there are nevertheless shortages of labour with advanced skills in NICT. Such labour market imbalances could be partly corrected by increasing investment in high level education and training in NICT. Highly qualified staff could also be relieved of relatively undemanding jobs, which could be transferred to less qualified employees who have received the necessary training.

6. Training in NICT should, above all, contribute to social cohesion and to the integration and employment of those without the requisite skills or competence. It should focus in particular on young job-seekers, workers recently made redundant as a result of restructuring and the long-term unemployed.

7. While the foundations for proficiency in the use of NICT and for lifelong learning must be laid at all levels of the formal education and training systems, it must be borne in mind that, according to the Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe (UNICE), 80% of the new technologies in use in 2005 will be less than ten years old, whereas 80% of education and training will have been received more than ten years earlier. Therefore, increasing emphasis must be placed on continuing vocational training in the use of new technologies, whether in-house, in specialised institutions or both. Such training must benefit the entire workforce.

8. Training workers in the use of NICT must be based on a partnership between employers, trade unions and government. Firms must assume their responsibility to invest in training even where the returns are not obvious or immediate. Governments should provide incentives to ensure that companies offer training even to the least stable categories of their workforce and even in skills that are transferable elsewhere. Trade unions should make training provision a priority and focus in particular on access, incentives, course content and timetabling.

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1. Assembly debate on 26 April 2002 (16th Sitting) (see Doc. 9402, report of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee, rapporteur: Mr Birraux). Text adopted by the Assembly on 26 April 2002 (16th Sitting).

9. Therefore, the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

include activities in its work programme designed, in co-ordination with other organisations active in this field, to compare experience and identify "best practice" regarding the training of workers in the use of new technologies and the contribution this can make to social cohesion and to reducing the "digital divide";

call on the governments of the member states and the European Union:

a. to step up their efforts to support and promote the education and training of workers in the use of the new technologies;

b. to increase investment in basic and high level education and training in NICT;

c. to provide incentives to ensure that companies offer training even to the least stable categories of their workforce, and even in skills that are transferable elsewhere;

d. to fully involve trade unions in the design and implementation of such training programmes, focusing in particular on access, incentives, course content, and timetabling;

e. to seek to increase the share of such programmes implemented outside the formal education and training system.