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EUCIS-LLL POSITION "AGENDA FOR NEW SKILLS AND JOBS: MORE FOCUS ON INCLUSION, CONTINUITY AND PROGRESSION"

The European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning (EUCIS-LLL) gathers 24 European networks active in the area of education and training. Together, they represent thousands of teachers, animators, school heads, HR professionals or trainers, in training centres, schools, associations, colleges and universities. We very much welcome the focus on smart, inclusive and sustainable growth of the Europe 2020 Strategy. We also believe it is important to have flagship initiatives in order to make EU cooperation more visible for European citizens. One of them is an "**Agenda for New Skills and Jobs**". It aims to show the possible EU contribution to a joint effort towards full employment as part of Europe 2020 strategy.

EUCIS-LLL supports the overall orientation of the Agenda for New Skills and Jobs (ANSJ) and welcomes its focus on implementation and "*resolute action*". The Agenda is very ambitious with 13 action points and 4 key priorities covering many aspects of education, training, employment, youth or social affairs. However in times of crisis and change, the **austerity measures put in place by EU Member States are having an adverse effect by acting on investments in education and training**¹.

This raises two main questions:

1. How to guarantee that the flagship **ensures that skills, competences and knowledge are reinforced** as a way out of the crisis to the 80 million people who are living in poverty or at the threat of falling into poverty and to overcome that 77 million people between 25 and 64 years still have, at most, a lower secondary education?
2. How to **raise political commitment of member states, ensure transversal dialogue within European Institutions and promote civil dialogue** to implement concrete mechanisms that are flexible enough to take into account the diversity of situations and individual pathways and timetables, at European, national and local levels?

By 2020 35% of jobs will require higher qualifications compared to 25% today. We can see that many solutions exist or could be implemented rapidly and are cost-effective, they are however dispersed and not coordinated. To that end **a financial model needs to be built to organise the existing means around key priorities such as:** ensure access to lifelong learning for all, create synergies between lifelong learning sub-sectors, invest in innovative and qualitative learning, strengthen a long-term political commitment of public authorities at all levels, support the role of civil society organisations and improve and foster sustainable funding mechanisms.

In order to reach the goals of the Agenda for New Skills and Jobs, EUCIS-LLL recommends to:

- A] Ensure that skills, competences and knowledge are reinforced
- B] Raise political commitment and ensure stakeholders' involvement

¹ To provide some examples: in 2008 Latvia faced devastating cuts in education and training and saw subventions reduced by 48% in 2009 and 10% in 2010; Ireland intends to cut 22 million Euro in 2011 in funding for schools and vocational educational committees including grants for adult literacy and community education; and in France by 2013 100.000 civil servant jobs will be cut and a drop of 10% in operating expenditures realised.

A] ENSURE THAT SKILLS, COMPETENCES AND KNOWLEDGE ARE REINFORCED

1/ EU policies and programmes should aim at the most vulnerable groups

Although we support the need for excellence raised in the Agenda, we would like to underline that those who have the lowest levels of qualifications, no qualifications at all or no relevant work-experience may be left aside: people who traditionally face difficulties in the labour market (young and elderly workers, migrants, women, etc.). As stated in Europe 2020, *“about 80 million people have low or basic skills, but lifelong learning benefits mostly the more educated”*. Access to lifelong learning needs to be improved. In the [Council Conclusions of 14/02/2011](#), most Member States *“recalled the importance of establishing lifelong learning strategies [...] since people now have longer working lives and this increases the need to continue acquiring and developing new skills throughout life”*. This remains a great challenge in the XXI Century and it should be a clear priority in the Education and Training 2020 work programme.

2/ Adopt a broader “skills use” focus

Some of our members questioned “excellence” as the only way forward for Europe. The very value of academic qualifications and the economic return to these is being raised increasingly. The neglect of vocational and workplace education needs more attention. In that view, a focus on “skills use”, whereby we look at the skills we need to equip people with is the way forward. Individuals need to be flexible enough to adapt themselves to the short-term contracts/high job turnover which will characterise future labour markets. Some of our members added that the concept of project-based learning around issues like entrepreneurial activity and possibly social enterprise is a key. The idea of bridging learning at work is of absolute importance to the utilisation of skills. Other members outlined the need to also look at other transversal skills such as active citizenship or solidarity (see our [position paper on active citizenship](#), Jan. 2011). Non-formal education plays a key role in developing these social and civic skills. Millions of associations “outside of school” provide opportunities through the diverse activities they propose for example citizenship through sports, culture or sustainable development. Learning by doing is a very effective way to develop civic and social competences but also to develop an appetite for learning.

3/ Recognise and validate skills, competences and knowledge

We observe a multiplication of jobs, a shortening of job lengths, a higher frequency of unsolicited periods of unemployment, a request for more mobility and flexibility within companies. This introduces a new challenge of ensuring the continuity and progression of individual learning pathways. To that end, it is essential that skills, competences and knowledge acquired through non-formal and informal (prior) learning are recognised as part of the strategy to bridge educational “gaps” and hence contribute to increasing people’s life opportunities. This process should not focus only on academic outcomes but take into account the entire spectrum of learning – formal but also non-formal and informal. In this perspective, the generalisation of the use of learning outcomes is crucial. This requires a culture shift as well as structural reforms. New legal structures and policy frameworks have to be developed, in full cooperation with the social partners, which take into consideration formal, non-formal and informal acquirements. This helps reduce the risk of unemployment for those that have skills but not the paper qualifications and avoids the repetition of learning. Furthermore, individual competence valuation and assessment programmes have to be developed, as part of career guidance systems, that contribute to solving labour market restructuring and adaptation problems and gives people the possibility of upgrading their competences for the labour market through non-formal and informal education and vocational education and training.

4/ Policies should pay more attention to the teaching/learning staff

Considering demographic changes, budget constraints and the challenges ahead to further open our systems, it is essential to recruit and maintain qualified professionals (teachers, educators, professors, counsellors, etc.) in our systems. These professionals are the ones who can make lifelong learning a reality. In order to have efficient and equitable systems, their training should include pedagogical elements (developing and using teaching and learning techniques), prepare them to develop partnerships (for example common modules for social workers, teachers, youth workers and counsellors) and encourage learning mobility. Being part of a European network for example allows them to improve the quality of their teaching and supports their motivation. These networks need to be further supported in the Lifelong Learning Programme post 2013 for their contribution in building a European knowledge society. Last but not least, learning environments need to be sustainable by taking into account and ensuring learners and educators' well-being.

5/ Member States should implement more flexible and permeable education and training systems

Facilitating access to education and training systems is still a great challenge in Europe. In the [Council Conclusions on the "Social dimension of education and training"](#) of 26/05/2010, the Council recommended to *"strengthen the social dimension of education and training systems by [...] Increasing the flexibility and permeability of education pathways and removing barriers to participation and to mobility within and between education and training systems"*. EUCIS-LLL aims towards the realisation of these objectives by encouraging its members to work together to find solutions across borders and the different sectors. We believe that EU programmes should facilitate such dialogue. Peer learning activities within the Open Method of Coordination should also be strengthened and be more open to relevant stakeholders' participation.

B] RAISE POLITICAL COMMITMENT, ENSURE STAKEHOLDERS' INVOLVEMENT

7/ Raise the political commitment of Member States

The situation is very critical in many countries. Education International survey on the "Global Economic Crisis and its Impact on Education"² shows that Member States have cut investments in education and training mostly as a result of a reduction in overall government expenditure. Considerable cuts were observed in Austria, Finland, Germany, Italy, Norway, Poland, Spain and UK in 2009, with the expectation of spending cuts in Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Netherlands, Malta, Portugal, Sweden and Switzerland. On the contrary, we believe that in times of crisis more has to be invested in learning: to support people on a personal level to deal with the crisis as well as to enable them to voice their concerns and needs. The relationship between cognitive skills and economic growth has now been demonstrated in a range of studies³. More than ever the right to education should be extended to lifelong learning. It is not only about access but about providing a specific support, answering specific needs of vulnerable people, avoiding segregation and promoting social cohesion and ensuring quality for all. Greater political commitment is needed amongst Member States to invest in Lifelong Learning. This shall also be reflected in the future European programme for education and training while the European Social Fund should support social inclusion and cohesion through lifelong learning at the grassroots level.

² International Education, Survey 2009, [Global Economic Crisis and its Impact on Education](#).

³ [The Cost of Low Educational Achievement in the European Union](#), Eric A. Hanushek and Ludger Woessmann, Analytical Report for the European Commission prepared by the European Expert Network on Economics of Education (EENEE), June 21, 2010 – Revised version, November 1, 2010

8/ Set up clear mechanisms to ensure a transversal dialogue within European Institutions

At the European level it is important to coordinate the various policies and ensure collaboration between decision-makers that have an impact on the Agenda. In order to be reached, policies need to be owned by those implementing them. This means setting up coordination bodies with relevant stakeholders within each EU institution. For instance, EUCIS-LLL would welcome an Intergroup on the Agenda for New Skills and Jobs within the European Parliament gathering representatives from the Employment Committee, the Education and Culture Committee and other relevant Committees. We would also like to see concrete mechanisms of cooperation between DG Employment, DG Internal Market and DG Education and Culture within the European Commission. This should happen at all levels. This cooperation is one of the goals the EUCIS-LLL Platform is trying to accomplish at civil society level, with various representatives from the education and training sectors. It is a very complicated process that requires clear mechanisms and structures for dialogue and coordination.

9/ Stakeholders' involvement and civil dialogue is a key to success!

Public authorities need to be able to rely on the increased participation of civil society representatives. The [Council Conclusions on a strategic framework for "ET 2020"](#) mentions that *"well-functioning cooperation using new, transparent ways of networking is needed not only between the relevant EU institutions, but also with all relevant stakeholders, who have a considerable contribution to make in terms of policy development, implementation and evaluation"*. It is important to go beyond social dialogue to implement a civil dialogue that includes social partners as well as civil society representatives in the debates. For instance actors in education and training should be represented in the Sector Councils on Employment and Skills – as the EESC outlined in its opinion of 17/02/2010. Finally, we regret that the debate is essentially focused on the relationship between education and businesses (i.e. EC School and Business Forum, University and Business Forum). It should rather encourage opportunities for involving firms, scientists, researchers, universities, local actors such as cities, associations, parents and other representatives of "local resources". In a perspective that gives more room for non-formal and informal learning, it is essential to broaden the dialogue.

To conclude, we would like to highlight that this requires a greater effort on behalf of institutions and organisations but it also requires an effort from individuals who have to acquire the basis to play a new role: learning to become the actor of their own path, taking advantage of all the situations they participate in, dialoguing with institutions on the basis of their prior learning (formal, non-formal and informal). For the future, EUCIS-LLL believes it is essential that our societies are capable of preparing individuals for that role.

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