European Cooperation in Education and Training 2020 – EARLALL Reflections to the consultation by DG EAC

May 2018

The present document highlights EARLALL's experience and opinion on the implementation and evolution to date of the Education and Training 2020 framework. It responds to the call launched by the European Commission (EC) – DG EAC in April 2018 to collect stakeholders' reflections on ET2020 in the preparation of its successor in order to make sure that its future design is fit for purpose and takes into account future challenges. It also needs to be understood in the context of the EC Communication on Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture of November 2017, to which EARLALL has already published a policy statement, and the Erasmus+ programme in its present and future design (see EARLALL's position on the future Erasmus+ design from March 2018).

In what way does EARLALL consider the activities under the scope of ET2020 to have been helpful to the organisation's goals and mission so far?

EARLALL welcomed the ET2020 strategy in 2009, and its revision and revisited priorities in 2016. Even though education and training systems are the responsibility of EU Member States and regions, EARLALL member regions have considered the ET2020 strategy supported by the EC as the reference framework to identify common education and training challenges and benchmarks and relate them to the different regional contexts.

Even if the regional level is understated and should be strengthened in the future strategy, EARLALL regions believe that the country analysis and the European Semester recommendations to Member States introduced through the EU 2020 is a good way to assess progress and tackle most urgent challenges and reforms. This also creates a dynamic dialogue between regions within the same country. The EU policy documents and benchmarks published in the context of the ET2020 strategy, notably those that support acquisition of skills and competences (upskilling pathways, new skills agenda, lifelong learning competences, digital plan, etc.) have been useful for EARLALL regions to make comparisons, to position themselves, to undertake peer learning and to adapt innovative practices developed in other regions. The ET2020 has also supported EARLALL regions to shape policies in line with the EU framework, to prioritize their objectives and target learners.

As included in the association's statutes, EARLALL supports policies aiming at achieving objectives which are in line with the ET2020 priorities, and include the following:

- Ensure universal and continuous access to learning (acquisition and renewal of skills) to facilitate active participation in society.

- Ensure tangible investments in human capital to build resilient societies which can rapidly adapt to changing environments.

- Develop efficient and innovative education and learning methods delivered as close as possible to the learners, learner-centric, at local and community level and with the support of digital structures.

◄ Promote socially inclusive principles where education and training rely on the individual needs and demands and adapt the organization of work to allow people to participate in lifelong learning while balancing professional, personal and family life.

◄ Develop and promote quality, flexible and efficient education and training systems that closely match the individual's knowledge and skills to the changing demands as far as professional profiles, organisations and work methods are concerned.

As regards the association's activities, the ET2020 agenda has always been taken into account. Moreover, ET2020 priorities are relevant but general enough as to address most past and present education challenges tackled by EARLALL:

◄ Communication: EARLALL's newsletters (*EARLALL Insights* and *EU Monitoring*) and website have been providing information about EU major events (European Vocational Skills Week, Education Summit, Upskilling Pathways PLF, 4th Migration Forum, EQF PLF, Validation Festival, etc.).

◄ Policy: EARLALL has released policy papers on mobility, the European Education Area by 2025, the new Erasmus+ post-2020, etc., and has also replied to public consultations like the recent one on mobility and values.

◄ Governance: Our events and general assemblies have been tackling issues related to skills and labour market, validation, youth entrepreneurship, integration of refugees and migrants, etc. EARLALL members are experienced regional policy makers and civil servants dealing with education and training. EARLALL is member of EAfA, the Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition and the ESF TN "Learning and Skills," initiatives supported by the EC.

◄ EU-funded projects: EARLALL is involved in an important number of EU-funded projects that add value to the current association's activities. They are dealing with the integration of migrants and refugees into the labour market, supporting digital tools to assess skills and competences and facilitate career guidance, financing of adult education, involvement of VET establishments in the definition of urban priorities at regional level, etc.

The Erasmus+ programme has been a valuable instrument to facilitate and strengthen cooperation among EARLALL regions themselves and with other stakeholders. At central level, EARLALL also takes part in an important number of EU-funded projects that support the organisation's strategy and mission.

In what does EARLALL think that ET2020 would need to change in order to better respond to present and future challenges?

Skills are a driving force for economic and social development. As the EC Communication Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture points out, education is part of the solution to get more people into decent jobs, respond better to the economy's skills needs and strengthen Europe's resilience in a context of rapid and profound changes induced by the technological revolution and globalisation.

EARLALL believes that, in the post-2020 period, EU investment in human capital is a prerequisite to achieve European objectives on territorial, economic and social cohesion. The changes that EARLALL would like to propose to the current ET2020 strategy are:

- The role that European regions have in the design, development and implementation of education and training policies needs to be recognised in line with the subsidiarity principle and the present role of the EU Member States. The support that ET2020 provides through the European Semester, the country analysis and other instruments to the Member States has to be extended in the future strategy to the European regions, especially to those that already have devolved competences in education and training. The EC Communication mentioned earlier already points in this direction though more needs to be done to take this to a more practical and efficient level.

- Vocational education and training should be strongly supported in the future education and training strategy post-2020. The positive role of VET to prevent learners education early-leaving and to bring people back to education should be recognised. The next ET strategy should include a VET system that considers:

  - A diversified offer that meets the skills demands of the productive sectors and anticipates future qualification needs.

  - Innovation and new technologies in VET.

  - New active learning methodologies that improve the technical skills and competences and reinforce transversal skills, entrepreneurship and creativity.

  - Joint work and cooperation between VET and higher education institutions to provide answers to new qualifications and new training itineraries.

  At present, the EU target of 40% of those aged 30-34 to have obtained a higher education or equivalent qualification by 2020 does not give enough visibility to the higher VET pathway. EQF could be used as a point of reference for future targets.

- The future Education and Training Strategy governance, reporting process and priorities should be simplified. The work carried out by the technical working groups (ET2020 Working Groups) should be assessed for impact and evaluated in order to decide on its future mandate. The future strategic priorities should be flexible enough as to adapt to the rapidly changing context for education and training. Priorities should also be defined in line with the EC Communication on Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture, but also on the New Skills Agenda for Europe and promote:

  - Identification and provision of skills needed for the labour market.

  - Attractiveness of vocational education and training including further promotion of work-based learning and apprenticeship at all levels and new developments of higher VET.

- The future Education and Training Strategy and its priorities should be better aligned with other EU strategies. As it is recognised in different EC documents, synergies between Cohesion Policy and research, innovation and education policies and funds should be encouraged and promoted. The Smart Specialisation Strategies operating at regional level aim at reducing economic differences and ensuring smart growth across Europe too. By investing in skills, the future Digital Europe programme will help to complete the Digital Single Market, a key priority of the Union. The current scenario, in which the education and training principles are described under the ET2020 strategy and their targets under the general EU 2020 strategy (approved two years later), is confusing for policy makers and practitioners, and should be brought together in a future EU strategy.

- The challenge for Education and Training with regard to the influx to Europe by immigrants – often refugees – will possibly not be met adequately by formal and non-formal education alone as the challenge includes cultural aspects. We therefore recommend that EU take steps that stimulates education and training providers to include informal education as new challenges need new solutions, and new solutions are developed by new partnerships.