

POSITION PAPER

EARLALL'S POSITION PAPER ON ERASMUS FOR ALL

September 2012, Brussels



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Presentation of Earllall

EARLALL – European Association of Regional and Local Authorities for Lifelong Learning – is an international non-profit association registered in Belgium and established in 2001 under the initiative of Regional Governments willing to building a solid cooperation in the field of lifelong learning. Today it represents 33 members, among institutes for lifelong learning and Regional Authorities with institutional competences, legal power and a financial role in the field of LLL policies. Some of them have a planning and management role concerning the ESF.

EARLALL believes that Regions and Local Authorities have a privileged role in designing and implementing strategies on Lifelong Learning and Labour policies since they are in direct contact with citizens, educational institutions and business environment.

EARLALL has been constituted with three main objectives: Seeking to influence EU policies relevant for lifelong learning and increasing the role of the Regions in the field; Facilitating the cooperation between its members in order to promote the exchange of experiences and best practice between European regional and local authorities; Encouraging the development of joint actions.

The board is currently composed by 7 members:

- President: Gianfranco SIMONCINI, Regional Minister for training, labour and economical development, Regione Toscana (IT)
- Vice-president: Georgette BREARD - Brittany Region (FR)
- Treasurer: Karsten Uno PETERSEN - Region of Southern Denmark (Denmark)
- Member of the Board: Francisco José ALVAREZ DE LA CHICA - Junta de Andalucia (ES), Irene RIGAU OLIVER - Generalitat de Catalunya (ES), Gabriele WARMINSKI-LEITHEUßER - Baden-Württemberg (DE), Lena BACKELIN - Jamtland Region (Sweden)

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Background

Regional and Local Governments (LRAs) have competence in education and lifelong learning and are key actors in mobility.

They implement and often co-finance European programmes for individual's mobility as well as their own programmes; they sign bilateral agreements with fellow regions in EU and commit themselves in the quality of the mobility experience. Often mobility represents also a good starting point for a broader cooperation in crucial economic sectors.

Earlall members have been doing it since longtime and support initiatives at European level to highlight the importance of learning mobility and their own role on it, as the Barcelona Declaration¹. Earlall has also increased its commitment in supporting its members recently creating a working group dedicated to mobility and promoting a position paper².

Earlall welcomes the proposal for a broad programme for learning mobility that overcomes the sectoral differences and gives common structure and priorities; nevertheless Earlall would like to contribute to the legislative process of the proposal pointing out some elements that need to be improved in order to design a quality programme with a broad impact on the European population.

Earlall would like to stress that "*Erasmus for all*" should be ambitious and contribute to creating European citizens through mobility and learning. The focus on mobility as part of education of young people should not only be done to respond to the employment emergency but also to provide European citizens the tools to live in the future Europe, to be able to work but also to understand the changing environment, to overcome prejudices and to build a truly sense of European citizens.

Structure of the proposed programme "*Erasmus for all*"

Earlall welcomes the simplification and harmonization effort of the European Commission and the overall structure of the programme. The current programmes have been having good results but we agree that the excessive fragmentation and number of priorities and actions does not allow a coherent planning and evaluation with regards with the objectives of Lisbon and Europe 2020 strategies. Therefore Earlall positively acknowledges the proposed streamlined architecture and is glad to see that the harmonization is accompanied by an improved budget. Earlall wishes the negotiations regarding the EU budget 2014 – 2020 will confirm such data.

In such regards, it is necessary to point out the need of efficient information and effective commitment of all concerned actors in communicating and explaining the new programme and the actions in order to make them well know by the applicants and the public that was used to the traditional names (LLP, Comenius, Leonardo, ect..).

It is disappointing to see the budget disparity among University mobility and other types of individual mobility, especially Vocational Education and Training. The beneficiaries foreseen for

¹ <http://www.earlall.eu/filebank/Europe2020%20and%20low%20skilled%20people.pdf>

² <http://www.earlall.eu/filebank/Earlall%20supporting%20mobility.pdf>

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Higher Education Student mobility are about 2.165.000 versus 735.000 beneficiaries foreseen for VET student mobility.

It is acknowledged that mobility placement during the academic cycle – actual Erasmus programme – has had a positive impact not only on students' life and career but on quality of academic European systems. Such positive impact should be transferred, through appropriate founding, to VET as well for the following reasons:

- The EC should support a full equity for students in academic and in professional paths, giving them the possibility to spend part of their curriculum abroad;
- Opening VET institutions and private companies to students coming from abroad is having on a medium term a positive impact on different economic sectors;
- Vocational paths, such as the dual system, represent a model for offering high quality vocational education and training that will probably increase its appealing towards young people. That's why the EC cannot miss the opportunity to support the quality of VET offering proper mobility opportunities at the EU level.

As mentioned above, LRAs are particularly committed in mobility in VET and add own funds to organise projects within the current Lifelong Learning Programme. Increasing resources in this sector will support the effort and commitment of LRAs to offer internationalisation opportunities to their companies and their citizens.

Earllall would like to highlight the importance of linking "*Erasmus for all*" with the European Social Funds, in order to ensure that all citizens' categories are likely to be offered proper learning opportunities: in particular NEETs and low skilled adults. The emphasis given to the youngsters in Erasmus for all should not hide the huge problem of low skilled adults³: European Union should support Member States and LRAs in addressing such problems not only to face the unemployment problem but also to improve the quality of citizens' life through education.

Therefore, the inputs given in "*Erasmus for all*" to staff mobility should be aimed at giving all categories of teachers – school teachers, trainers, adult teachers – the proper tools to increase their professional skills and to be multipliers towards the society.

Earllall is glad to see a Key Action dedicated to Policy Reform as a concrete tool to finance modernization of education systems, open method of coordination and dialogue, which should be with youth organisations as well as with all concerned actors, including and especially LRAs. Earllall wishes the resources allocated to this Action in the proposal, 5%, will be increased in order to allow as much institutions as possible to participate in projects for improving their systems and policies: LRAs are at the front line for improving their policies through the European cooperation and wishes this Action will support them in this difficult task. Earllall in particular is working since many years in supporting policy learning and policy transfer among its regions in lifelong learning sector and is willing to confirm its strong commitment to the European Parliament, the European Council, the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions.

³ http://www20.gencat.cat/docs/Educacio/Documents/ARXIUS/declaracio_angles.pdf

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Implementation

Earllall wishes the simplified structure will be followed by simplified tendering procedures in order to make actually possible for even small and decentralised organizations and local authorities to participate. Some current actions demand indeed high level management skills that do not allow the weakest organisations to apply for a call for proposals. Earllall recommends flat schemes and easier administrative requirements as well as clear objectives and activities per actions: that will make easier to understand what is possible to do with each actions and how to link objectives to activities.

In the same perspective, it is important that the actions are easily recognised and well differentiated by the others by the beneficiaries and the final clients; to do so Earllall asks for a clarification of the actions in each Key Action as well as for better wording in order to avoid misunderstanding (it means avoiding the ab-use of action, key action, activity, key activity). In the wording the different types of mobility should be given the equal importance: e.g. in the COM(2011) 787/2 the VET mobility is partially hidden by the higher education mobility and the difference with the Transnational traineeships is not specified.

Increasing the recognition of the actions will increase the European added value helping the beneficiaries and the clients to linking their mobility project with European founding and the opportunities European Union is giving them.

Earllall recognizes the important role played by the National Agencies in implementing the programmes as well as their know-how. However, Earllall would like to highlight that LRAs have competence in lifelong learning as well as founding capacity. Furthermore, in some Countries, Regional Governments are managing Authorities of the ESF and manage different funds: in order to increase the synergies among different European programmes and national and local funds, Earllall believes that regional perspective should be ensured while designing and negotiating the national programmes (priorities and sectoral founding). Furthermore, regional level is often the proper level to feel learning needs of citizens and to plan coherent programmes. Earllall believes that LRAs should be involved or associated in the planning phase, respecting the national institutional setting and the internal agreements. This might be done through formalization of agreements among National Agencies and LRAs – as it happens in some Countries – or through consultation by the Commission regarding the annual priorities or the annual budget.

Earllall would also like a clear difference among the decentralised actions and the actions managed by the EACEA, and wishes that the difference will reflect the local added value from one side and the European added value for the other side.

In the current LLP, National Agencies are not providing coaching support to applicants: Earllall thinks this role is very valuable and important to ensure small organisations and local authorities are able to apply especially for the first time without specialised consultants.

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Conclusions

Earlall members renovate their general support to the programme “*Erasmus for all*” and wish the last phases of the adoption procedure will focus on improving the quality of the programme. The name chosen for such programme is “*Erasmus for all*” that uses the success of the higher education mobility programme in the current LLP. The ideal name of the programme should be easily linked to all types of mobility and actions financed by the programme and to different types of eligible public: university and VET students, young people, adults, teachers.

Stakeholders have different positions and are keen in maintaining the former situation; however it is important to designing a programme with an increased quality and internal coherence in order to have an actual impact on the European citizens.

Mobility is not the magic solution for the current difficult situation and Earlall thinks that any effort to boost mobility should be accompanied by an effort by Member States and National Stakeholders to reform the national education systems.

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