

POSITION PAPER

YOUTH ON THE MOVE AN EARLALL RESPONSE

February 2011



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PREAMBLE

1. The Association was established in 2001 under Belgian law, and includes 22 Local and Regional Authorities (LRAs) with competencies in the field of lifelong learning as members, plus some 11 observer organisations, representing over 61 million people from across Europe. Its role is to promote trans-regional cooperation, educational mobility, transfer of good practice, innovation and research for regional development and to support e-learning as a tool for lifelong learning. EARLALL member Governments have their own democratic mandates, policies and law making powers, albeit at varying degrees. Many have competence for functions that affect daily lives, such as health, economic development, social care, agriculture, rural affairs and, of course, education.
2. The Commission has stated that “to achieve transformational change, the Europe 2020 strategy will need more focus, clear goals and transparent benchmarks for assessing progress. This will require a strong governance framework that harnesses the instruments at its disposal to ensure timely and effective implementation”. It also states that “regional and local authorities should implement the partnership, closely associating parliaments, as well as social partners and representatives of civil society, contributing to the elaboration of national reform programmes as well as to its implementation” (European Commission, 2010: 29 and 31). This is only possible, as the Committee of Regions (CoR) warns, within a framework of multilevel governance “The European Union’s capacity to perform its role and achieve Community objectives depends not only on its institutional organisation but also, and above all, on its mode of governance. The legitimacy, efficiency and visibility of the way the Community operates depend on contributions from all the various players. They are guaranteed if local and regional authorities are genuine partners rather than mere intermediaries” (CoR, 2009:8).

LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES - ENGAGEMENT

3. EARLALL broadly welcomes the Commission Communication *Youth on the Move: An initiative to unleash the potential of young people to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the European Union*, and its emphasis on young people. The European Flagship Initiative proposes the development of education and training systems to achieve better outcomes; promoting the attractiveness of higher

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education; supporting the development of learning and employment mobility; and increasing young people's employability. It is a framework announcing new action, and the reinforcement and implementation of others, and EARLALL looks forward to the detail on the many strands highlighted within the Communication.

4. As noted above, effective cooperation and implementation in education and training requires continuous political and administrative interaction between, and ongoing commitment from, all levels of government within the EU. Meaningful engagement with LRAs is, therefore, essential for the effective delivery of actions set out in the Youth on the Move framework, and Europe 2020 more widely. However, in preparing the Communication and measures to facilitate mobility the Commission has failed to properly recognise the role played by LRAs who, given their close involvement in this area of work, are best placed to support access to mobility and facilitate the necessary action with social partners.
5. The associated Council Recommendation suggests that Member States: improve the information available on mobility opportunities; encourage language learning; address legal and institutional obstacles to learning abroad; ensure mobility experiences are of high quality and lead to recognised outcomes; target disadvantaged learners; stimulate partnerships between the business and education sectors, and emphasize entrepreneurship as a means to broaden the ways for youth to manage in a changing society. In many instances across the EU, these actions are the legal responsibility of regional Governments. It is disappointing that recognition of this has not been emphasised in the Commission's plans.
6. EARLALL member Governments are already engaged in the development and delivery of sectoral mobility programmes geared towards enhancing the employability of young people; examples include activity in maritime, automotive and tourism. In this regard, the Commission should not only be more active in recognising the essential role of LRAs, but also more open to cooperation with EARLALL member Governments directly in the development of policy in the this area, building on the store of existing experiences.

YOUNG PEOPLE NOT IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING (NEET)

7. The needs of at-risk groups should be taken into account when considering transitions between learning phases. Young people from vulnerable and disadvantaged groups can benefit significantly from, for example, European mobility actions. Programmes should be tailored to suit the needs of individuals and be set with suitable flexibility for delivery in the context of locally provided services for such

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vulnerable groups. It is essential that LRAs play a key role in this to ensure that suitable provision and information is available to vulnerable individuals, and that European programme support dovetails that already being provided locally. EARLALL is of the view that flexible use of the ESF should be applied to assist in this way, in conjunction with other mobility support programmes, such as the Lifelong Learning Programme and Youth in Action.

8. EARLALL recognises that there are close links between poor learning attainment and socio-economic disadvantage, which are key determinants to the number of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET). Addressing this is a key area for EARLALL members and regional and local authorities across the EU, and must be seen as a foremost priority within Youth on the Move. Within this, EARLALL considers it is imperative that there is strong focus on supporting young people's access to the job market through better education, training and mobility. Young people who are NEET are not necessarily lacking ability. There can be a great deal of creativity among those who disengage from formal learning, which highlights a potential area for entrepreneurship development. A commonly regarded "problem group" should instead be considered a potential asset. This mindset is also applicable when it comes to the inclusion of migrants.
9. Recent work undertaken by EARLALL member Governments through the EU funded peer learning project, SMOC, has highlighted work already underway in local areas seeking to address the issue of those NEET (SMOC Agreement Number-2008-3609/001-001 – www.mutual-learning.eu). However, simultaneously the report also shows the need for urgent improvements in some fields, where the impact of policies is still too modest, and where there is a need to cope with the risk of stagnation. This is notable for reduction strategies for those NEET. It is important, therefore, that inter-governmental peer learning mechanisms to develop local policy interventions specifically addressing the needs of those young people who are NEET, should continue to be supported at the EU level (such as the recently approved EU LLP funded One Step Ahead project). The Commission should pay close regard to the findings of such initiatives, and work with LRAs in their dissemination.
10. While, young people and initiatives to support them are essential, they are not the whole story. EARLALL also places importance on adult learners being able to improve skills and employability, not least as the people required for delivery of economic growth across the EU over the coming 10 year period are substantially already active within the European labour force, and will require ongoing support to develop skills for effective growth.

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IMPACT

11. EARLALL member Governments welcome the approach set out in the Youth on the Move Communication and progress proposed for European collaboration in education and training, while stressing that the focus should be on the rapid implementation, simplification and consolidation of effective instruments, initiatives and programmes. In particular EARLALL members are encouraged that the Commission proposes to address several crucial issues in a cross-thematic way, such as higher education, learning, vocational training and employment mobility, and youth employment.
12. In order to achieve effective transitions between learning phases and the world of work, independent guidance and counselling needs to be provided to enable learners access to the right information to inform learning and career choices. As has already been evidenced through current delivery, LRAs are best placed to provide such support to learners at all levels, and this contribution should be considered when developing support programmes at the European level.
13. It is essential that issues highlighted in the Communication affect all levels of society. Where LRAs have a clear role to play in terms of communication, dissemination, and coordination via links to social partners – and also promoting equality of rights and opportunities – they should be actively engaged on the delivery of quality assured programme actions. Regarding the issue of mobility, it is important to ensure that action achieves quality outcomes for the individual, and EARLALL is glad to see that this is highlighted by the Commission. In addition, high quality education and training provided in one location should be recognised across the whole of the EU in order to encourage mobility, exchange and facilitate access to skills for growth. Such an approach needs to be supported through robust quality assurance mechanisms, such as those supported by EARLALL members, and which are recognised by the relevant stakeholders.
14. It is also important that decisions and development of the various actions set out in the Communication on the Youth on the Move framework initiative are not taken forward without direct reference to the debate on the future EU budget. The necessary financial tools need to be made available to directly support agreed strategy, and EARLALL member Governments look forward with interest to the developing budget debate.

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PLANNED ACTIONS

15. There is a need for initiatives to be developed collaboratively to ensure that actions promoting mobility within Regions and Member States do not undermine the mutual recognition of skills. Therefore, various existing initiatives in support of learner mobility, such as the Europass, should be incorporated into future planning, such as for the European Skills Passport. The development of a Youth on the Move card could assist in helping promote learner mobility, but only if the card is seen as meaningful and of value by young people. It should not duplicate existing student cards already in use across the EU and more widely.
16. EARLALL has noted the Commission's plans to present a Communication on the European policy for multilingualism, and would like to remind the Commission that many LRAs across the EU also support the use of local and regional languages. We ask that the regional dimension be given proper regard in the development of this work, and look forward to this being reflected in the Communication in due course.
17. We support the plans to reform the European Employment Services (EURES), to develop its matching and placement capacity at the service of the European Employment Strategy, and to expand it to support Your First EURES Job.
18. The Commission's proposals on reducing early school leaving, and the establishment of a High Level Expert Group on improving literacy among young people and adults (as also signalled in the Communication on An Agenda for New Skills and Jobs) is a very welcome approach. This is a fundamental area of learner development, and the exchange of best practice across EU is key. It is particularly noteworthy as it is LRAs that have to develop and implement strategies to address the unacceptable levels of both young people who are NEET, and literacy levels.
19. On higher education, the Commission proposes to support a modernisation agenda and the development of an internationalisation strategy. EARLALL member Governments look forward to further information on these plans, which will need to have proper regard to the competencies and existing inter-governmental global relationships of both Member States and of regional Governments. Within this it would be interesting to see further information on the rationale for the proposal that European resources are applied in the development of an alternative Global University ranking system, when the Bologna process is well understood.
20. Likewise, proposals to create a European student loan facility in partnership with the European Investment Bank (EIB) should be designed to complement existing systems in Member States. EARLALL strongly believes that these loans should not result in access to mobility becoming a commercial commodity. The principle of

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‘ability to learn’ and not ‘ability to pay’ should be paramount. Within that, the policy should have regard to those groups of learners with greatest need, and not only be targeted at those studying at the tertiary level, but also be available to all disadvantaged groups seeking support to study. There are greater barriers to learner mobility for those not studying in tertiary education or who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, and these issues should be addressed through specific measures geared at reducing financial obstacles to engagement.

Footnote:

In preparing this paper, EARLALL has had regard to the following documents:

- the Europe 2020 strategy which sets ambitious objectives for smart, inclusive and sustainable growth for the next decade.
- the EU Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council Conclusions on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET2020), (OJ C 119, 28 May 2009) the basis for cooperation and which complements the Europe 2020 strategy.
- the EU Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council Conclusions on the Youth on the Move initiative – an integrated approach in response to the challenges facing young people (adopted 19 November 2010).
- the CoR consideration of the Youth on the Move initiative, and the CoR draft opinion.
- the discussion at the Regions on the Move Conference in Brussels, 30 November 2010.
- the CoR Opinion on European Cooperation in VET to support Europe 2020 (EDUC-V-007 1 December 2010).
- the Fifth EU Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion, 10 November 2010.
- the Barcelona Declaration on regional vocational mobility, 26/27 May 2009.
- the Commission’s Communication on An Agenda for New Skills and Jobs published on 26 November 2010, which dovetails the proposals contained in the Youth on the Move Communication.

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