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Report

TOWARDS A EUROPEAN
EDUCATION AREA?

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Initiated by the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) and by the Lifelong Learning Platform (LLLp) together with a number of MEPs, the European Parliament’s Interest Group on Lifelong Learning brings together civil society representatives and MEPs to discuss key issues connected to lifelong learning with strong emphasis on adult education.

An important reason to form the Interest Group on Lifelong Learning was the new Juncker’s European Commission and its priorities. We stand for a comprehensive and trans-sectorial lifelong learning approach, and want to stress that education is not only about employment, but is linked to personal development, social inclusion, active citizenship, and much more. These topics represent an even greater transformative point, on the account of the digital and green transitions of the von der Leyen Commission.

The interest group works as a “watchdog” to what the European Union is doing on lifelong learning, and builds on its transversal composition to foster lifelong learning policies in Europe.



THE STANCE OF EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS



MEP SIRPA PIETIKAINEN, CHAIR OF THE LIFELONG LEARNING INTEREST GROUP

MEP Sirpa Pietikäinen, Chair of the Lifelong Learning Interest Group of the European Parliament, opened the conference by stating that we need more Europe in the area of education: we need to harmonise better and increase resources, with the aim of raising standards at EU level, across all levels of education. The lifelong learning approach in this realm is fundamental, as well as the presence of European institutions in the front line.

Janine Costa, Representative of the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU emphasised that a **lifelong learning approach is missing from the European Education Area Communication**: she stressed that during the Portuguese Presidency the EEA agenda will be moved forward and a new education and training cooperation framework will be developed. She insisted on the importance of involving stakeholders, including civil society, in the co-creation process, for a cross-border and cross-sectoral cooperation in E&T. The LLLPlatform welcomed this initiative, as it provides room

for a deeper cooperation, something that was already in the making in their annual work programme. Further cooperation and a better dialogue between civil society organisations and the Portuguese Presidency was praised as necessary.

MEP Radka Maxová brought the attention towards the need to provide access to quality education for adults and senior citizens citing the need for their inclusion and involvement in society, to increase active lifestyles, prevent diseases, increase personal development and fight the spread of disinformation - citing the 2018 Council Recommendation on competences for adult learning. In essence, this was effectively the lifelong learning approach missing from the EEA communication. While the EEA does mention lifelong learning, it does not especially target older people, we therefore should be striving for a more organised and structured cooperation on this.



MEP RADKA MAXOVA, EMPL COMMITTEE

Carlo Scotoli from the Directorate General on Employment and Social Affairs of the European Commission, mentioned how a coordinated implementation is needed now - this is the moment for the Member States to make efforts in implementing the agenda, since it's mainly in their competence. However, he reminded, the EU has a strong impact on education and training already at the moment. He emphasised how fundamental the role of Civil Society Organisations is in reaching out to all those who need to improve their skills. Bridges should be built with SMEs, industry, research, and other social partners spanning even outside the world of education and touching upon topics such as environments.

Tatjana Babrauskiene, Member of the European Economic and Social Committee, pointed out how the Covid-19 crisis showed how quickly people have "reformed" in the education world. We should look at lessons learnt through this 'process' (i.e. the covid crisis) to inform political actions and policy outputs. She deemed that **what is essentially missing to move forward is investment** - Member States should increase funding for lifelong learning and especially for adults, re- and up-skilling, especially for those who are vulnerable in society, including women and young girls. Member States should look beyond formal education and allocate more funds for non-formal and informal education, such as youth organisations for instance. Soft skills are needed to face the transformations we are embarking upon, in this context social and citizenship competencies are important. In fact, **citizenship education should be available to everyone**, which calls for a greater focus on the Council Recommendation on Promoting Common Values.

Oonagh Aitken, from the LLLP Steering Committee, welcomed synergies with the European Research Area and the Digital Education Action Plan, and stated that education should be seen as a major contribution to achievement of a Social Europe. To achieve a holistic lifelong learning approach, more synergies across sectors are required, as well as a greater focus on non-formal and informal education. The European Skills Agenda and the European Education Area links could be strengthened for these synergies to happen, and cooperation between European programmes and instruments remains a crucial improvement. Ms Aitken stated that what is needed is **"Evolution not Revolution"**: why not build on past achievements? Let's, for instance, build on the Council Recommendation on Key Competencies from 2018 and the improvement that it underlines.

On top of this, **an ambitious timeframe requires ambitious investments** (an investment geared at everyone, no matter their background). The Erasmus+ programme and the Solidarity Corps programme need major investments to become inclusive, and while the new MFF is a step in the right direction, more needs to be done to ensure the full inclusivity of these programmes. Equity of provision is needed to tackle digital divides. Moreover, there need to be flexible pathways for people to access learning pathways - she anchored the hope that the European Education Area



TATJANA BABRAUSKIENE, MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE

will equally value different **learning environments**, adding in the same spirit that the validation of these skills (volunteering included) should be possible. Ms Aitken concluded that the European Education Area should be co-created with Civil Society Organisations and education and training providers and that very importantly, they should have a seat at the table as real partners.

EXCHANGE OF VIEWS WITH PARTICIPANTS

Participants in the event agreed that in order to build a more modern system, we need to work together and think across silos and borders. True involvement of all education stakeholders cannot rely solely on such events, but needs to go beyond and walk the talk with consultations of all sectors. In this regard, it was acknowledged that LLLP is a unique place to have all sectors together to exchange and bring some of the solutions to the table in terms of cooperation and policy coherence vis-a-vis the EEA.

Discussants shared their views regarding the priority on teachers in the EEA. They welcomed the mention of teachers and the **revalorisation of the teaching profession**. In the past in teacher training there was no mention of any other sectors or bridges that you could build with them. This is an aspect that still needs to improve, the silos between education sectors need to be broken. Cross-sectoral teacher training and building platforms/communities of practitioners can have a positive impact on this regard.

Also on this topic, it was underlined that **teachers need to be much more involved in policy development** and that space must be given to the voices of teachers who are facing problems and ensure their involvement in these communities of practice. Similarly, all educators regardless of sector should be recognised equally.

Views were exchanged on the shortcomings of the EEA communication. Discussants highlighted that the Communication does not mention some key programmes and stakeholders such as Europe for citizens and UNESCO. Failing to acknowledge them is risky in the sense that it may lead to replicating programmes and projects instead of building upon existing ones. Again, the key point is to have an evolution of the existing education achievement, not a revolution - that risks erasing the good things that EU programmes and initiatives have done in the recent past.

It was also underlined that there was no mention of humanities as a key subject to promote democracy and active participation as well as there was a narrow focus on inclusion and diversity in the EEA (mainly on gender equality). On the same lines, it was brought out that although the Communication recognises the effects of the pandemic, there is no mention of other trends such as the decolonisation of education and the prevention of radicalisation (Paris declaration), which some discussants considered as a missed opportunity.

The discussion also touched upon the digital aspect of the EEA. Concerns were raised on the implementation of the **digital transformation** in a way that hinders the delivery of quality of education. This can happen in the case of transversal competences which cannot be learned online, especially age under age 15. Participants agreed that it is necessary to have an in-depth reflection on whether digital solutions are or not suitable for all learners before pushing for more digitalisation.

Regarding the pandemic and its disruptive effects on European education systems, discussants stressed the importance of general **wellbeing and mental health**. It was also underlined that parenting is in general not recognised and there is very often no training for it. The pandemic has shown that this is absolutely necessary, as parents play a major role in the education of their children. It is important to recognise the importance of the interaction between the home and the school, this can work better if both sides are aware of their shared responsibility.

On the sustainability aspect, discussants underlined that it is important to promote both the engagement of citizens together with skills and skills development focused on sustainability in order to better address the challenges posed by the green transition.



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The group aims to fight inequalities and discrimination in education in order to reach the Europe 2020 and Education and Training 2020 headline targets and contribute to the EU growth strategy this way.

Visit our website
<http://www.lll-interestgroup.eu/>

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An initiative coordinated by the European Association for Adult Education (EAEA) and the Lifelong Learning Platform (LLLP)



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