

Lifelong Learning (LLL):

“It is never too soon or too late for learning”

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Lifelong learning became key concept for any educational establishment and guiding principle for the development of education and training policies. At the Lisbon European Council in March 2000, the European government officials developed a ten-year strategy to become the most dynamic and competitive economy in the world with sustainable economic growth and social cohesion. Lifelong learning is a principal element of this long-term strategy and a core component of the European social model. The result of the Summit was the adoption of the Communication **“Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality”** by the European Commission in 2001 and a “Resolution on Lifelong Learning” by the Education Council in 2002. 17 regional lifelong learning networks were selected under the R3L initiative (Regional networks for Lifelong Learning) for the promotion of the regional dimension in lifelong learning throughout Europe.

The Lifelong Learning programme of the European Union launched in the year 2007 officially replaced the Comenius, Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci and Grundtvig programs (http://ec.europa.eu/education/index_en.html). The new lifelong learning program adopted by the European Parliament will develop an integrated strategy bringing different action programmes together.

The scope of lifelong learning is quite broad and covers both formal and non-formal educational settings. Lifelong learning includes learning for personal purposes such as personal fulfilment and adaptability, social purposes such as social inclusion, civic purposes such as active citizenship and employment-related purposes such as employability.

The European Commission’s “Memorandum on Lifelong Learning” (2000) defines lifelong learning as an essential policy for the development of citizenship, social cohesion and employment. The first definition of the concept presented in this document explained lifelong learning as a continuing learning activity from preschool to post-retirement stage. However, the main focus of the document was primarily made on the employability and the need to meet the labour market demands, create a strong employment base, develop and facilitate the skills of the European workforce for better employability and increasing international competitiveness.

Communication from the Commission “Making the European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality” (2001) gives a new definition of the LLL: **‘all learning activity undertaken throughout life**, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competencies within a personal,

civic, social and/or employment-related perspective'. It gives a new dimension to lifelong learning activity undertaken **in formal, non-formal as well and informal learning settings**. Furthermore, the emphasis is made on the social inclusion and cohesion, personal fulfilment and individual needs, active citizenship and adaptability to the changing learning and work environments.

Lifelong learning promotes increased investment in education and training, acquisition of the basic skills (maths, languages, digital literacy, etc), and more opportunities for blended and flexible forms of learning. The eight Key Competencies indicated in the '**Key Competences for Lifelong Learning – A European Reference Framework**' adopted by the Commission consist of:

1. Communication in the mother tongue;
2. Communication in the foreign languages;
3. Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology;
4. Digital competence;
5. Learning to learn;
6. Interpersonal, intercultural and social competences and civic competence;
7. Entrepreneurship; and
8. Cultural expression.

These eight competencies play a decisive role in building active citizenship, social cohesion and employability. In this respect, launch of the new Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-2013 on the 14 December 2006 is an important initiative to bring the lifelong learning process under the new umbrella of the educational establishments. The Lifelong Learning Programme will bring together four sectoral programmes of school education (Comenius), higher education (Erasmus), vocational training¹ (Leonardo da Vinci) and adult education (Grundtvig), as well as Jean Monnet programme focusing on European integration and support for certain key institutions and associations.

Greater cooperation and closer dialogue is especially important among the EU member states for exchanging the best experience and move towards the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The European Qualifications Framework provides the recognition of qualifications and clear transfer of education and training qualifications of different national systems to increase opportunities for student and worker mobility. There is a risk that the EQF tends to foster the economic and labour market oriented perspective and work-related mobility only. However, the validation of non-formal and informal learning has a wider scope and is not reduced only to the labour market and economic purposes. This creates challenges for the recognition of any kind of learning outcome and establishing all-inclusive qualifications framework.

¹ Vocational training referred as technical education prepares learners for manual non-academic or practical activities for a specific vocation/occupation.

The new Lifelong Learning Programme will create better base for a wider cooperation and harmonization of different educational institutions, programs, constructing better and more flexible learning pathways connecting basic, higher, vocational and adult education as well as the labour market. Ideally, it will engage **different stakeholders into constructive dialogue** among schools, initial as well as adult vocational education and training institutions, universities, trade unions and enterprises.

How do NGOs face the guiding principles of lifelong learning?

The guiding principles of the lifelong learning initiatives should promote social inclusion, give better and wider learning opportunities to individuals with diverse learning needs and learning potential for personal as well as professional fulfilment, increasing the sense of active citizenship, belonging, employability and adaptability.

In this respect, organization such as AEGEE will incorporate the idea of lifelong learning into its activities to promote the learning not as a process rigidly related to educational institutions limited in time. The youth should be guided and informed that **learning is continuous process** requiring continuous upgrading of their skills as well as developing multidisciplinary competencies (professional, social, individual, linguistic, etc) in order to meet the increasing flexibility and mobility (Bologna Process) within the enlarged European Union. This is important to increase the autonomy and self-directness of the youth in order to construct and follow their individual learning pathways.

Useful Links

Lifelong Learning EU - European Information on Education

<http://www.euractiv.com/>

CEDEFOP - European Centre for Development of Vocational Training

<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu>

European Trade Union Confederation

<http://www.etuc.org/>

The Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-2013

http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/index_en.html

European Launch Conference for the Lifelong Learning Programme

<http://www.bmbf.de/en/lebenslangeslernen.php>