

Life long learning: integrated action programme comprising Comenius, Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci and Grundtvig programmes and the Jean Monnet programme

2004/0153(COD) - 07/07/2011 - Follow-up document

In accordance with the requirements of Decision No. 1720/2006/EC, this report provides information on the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP). It builds on the findings of the LLP interim evaluation, on National Reports on LLP implementation from the 31 participating countries and on information gathered by the Commission.

Main findings: during its first three years, the Programme has financed, with almost EUR 3 billion, transnational education and training activities promoting the modernisation of education systems in 31 European countries. It has catered for 900 000 learning mobility periods of European citizens, of which more than 720 000 by students and almost 180 000 by teachers/trainers/staff. More than 50 000 European organisations have taken part in various forms of co-operation activities.

The report states that the LLP acts as a catalyst for structural change through support to policy development, cooperation and mobility. The respondents to evaluation surveys emphasised the role of the LLP mainly in policy cooperation and interchange, development of the European dimension in education and training and the extent to which the LLP creates additional value in comparison with similar international or national programmes. The finding is that in the absence of the LLP, developments in these areas would be fragmented (in terms of scope of activities and coverage of the participating countries), activities would be carried out on a smaller scale and less extensively, and a number of important results would not have been achieved at all.

However, not all the potential has been unleashed. An excessive number of objectives set for the Programme has translated in a host of specific actions, some of which lack the critical mass to have a long lasting impact. Progress towards a lifelong learning approach as opposed to one based on educational sectors is still quite limited. In addition, while the largest impact of the LLP actions is found on the individual and institutional level, the impact at systemic – policy level is rather moderate. Its direct added value is predominantly linked to the recognition of qualifications and increased transparency of education and training system across Europe but the direct influence of LLP actions on the modernisation of education and training systems is still hard to observe and estimate.

LLP mobility can be considered as success story. A study on a value of Erasmus Mobility of students and teachers indicated that a temporary period of study in another European country helped to enhance international competences, facilitated access to the labour market and contributed to placing former Erasmus students in visibly international professional positions. However, the LLP still faces some difficulties. Problems with reaching individuals and organisations beyond established education circuits, very high levels of unmet demand, still limited involvement of enterprises as venues for mobile student placements or insufficient language knowledge of participants (notably adults) in mobility actions remain important factors which limit the reach of the programme.

Targets: the most recent data show that reasonable progress has been achieved towards quantitative targets. Some 450 000 pupils were involved in Comenius education activities on an annual basis (with the target being at least 3 million over the period of 2007–2013), which would add up to 3 150 000 pupils

involved by 2013. Since the Erasmus programme started in 1987, 2.15 million students participated in its mobility actions by 2009 (with a target of 3 million by 2012). Leonardo da Vinci supported more than 72 000 placements in enterprises in 2009 and almost 79 000 in 2010, an increase of almost 10 % (the target is at least 80 000 placements in enterprises per year by 2013). Grundtvig supported mobility of around 6 100 staff and adult learners in 2009. However, based on the 2007-2009 data, the evaluators pointed to a risk that some of the LLP quantified targets set by the legal base for the sectoral sub-programmes would not be reached owing to the insufficient size of the Programme budget and other, mainly mobility related, barriers.

The report sets out the recommendations of the evaluators. It notes that the LLP is considered by the external evaluation as instrumental to reaching the key Education and Training objectives agreed at EU level. It is also important for the lives of the individual citizens involved, user friendly, highly popular and addresses the needs of its various target communities. The control framework is working effectively.

Improvements required: the number of audits or quasi-audits is high and they are not always sufficiently coordinated. Management of the previously independent programmes is not yet fully integrated. Possibilities offered by the electronic management tools are not yet fully explored. The Programme had a difficult start-up phase with a need for successive adjustments at all levels: forms, IT systems, management rules, reporting principles and requirements. It is fair to admit that the positive appreciation of the Programme management today by the main stakeholders reflects more the snapshot of 2010 than the average perception in 2007-2009. There is now a general call for stability by letting principles and processes to settle, and cost benefits having better exploited for a preparation of the implementation phase.

The Commission notes that whilst the managerial improvements required are within the reach of the Commission, other improvements are more far-reaching and would require a review and rethinking of the design of the Programme. Based on the mid-term review of the LLP, the Commission intends to:

- fix the management framework that has reached a good quality level with stable rules, procedures and IT tools minimising efforts throughout the implementation chain: Commission, National Agencies, final beneficiaries. Potential change will be assessed against a thorough cost-benefit and risk analysis;
- examine as a matter of urgency the possibility to simplify audits by replacing the current approach of untargated sampling with a new one, based on a serious risk assessment strategy;
- test new exchange platforms or the extension of existing platforms or other means to facilitate exchanges of information and know-how to match offer and demand for cooperation projects and mobility (e.g. Leonardo or Erasmus placement partner search).

Without prejudging its proposals for the next programme generation in the context of the new MFF, the Commission intends to:

- reflect on a comprehensive policy framework for the new MFF, seeking synergies between different types of EU-financed investments in education and training, to avoid overlaps and maximise impact;
- consider how to further build on the strengths of the existing Programme to contribute to the overarching Europe 2020, E&T 2020 and the Digital Agenda objectives. EU-wide actions engaging all Member States in similar activities with common objectives, transnational learning mobility, providing evidence for policy reform, serving as an incubator for innovative actions and best practices, exchange and networking at low cost, are all areas where the Programme excels;
- reflect how better to balance ambitious targets, notably through meaningful concentration, streamlining, simplification and better impact measurement;
- prepare the management and control framework for the next Programme generation to ensure a seamless start-up phase and full exploitation of all possible simplifications.