



ETUC Position on the European Commission proposal “Erasmus for all”

Background

On 23 November 2011 the European Commission published the proposal of “Erasmus for All” (<http://ec.europa.eu/education/erasmus-for-all/>) as the new programme for education, training, youth and sport to replace the lifelong learning programme that covered the period 2007 – 2013 (http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc78_en.htm).

This paper sets out the ETUC’s position on the Commission’s proposal, following consultations with the ETUC member organisations in January and February 2012¹.

ETUC Position

1. **Lifelong learning is an essential tool** to educate and prepare individuals for life and to ensure full employment, while combining policies promoting quality assurance and social progress. ETUC reaffirmed its position on lifelong learning in December 2010 in its Resolution “More investments in lifelong learning for quality jobs”². The objectives underlined are still valid and need to be fully achieved.
2. The ETUC **welcomes the Commission’s intention to continue to develop a lifelong learning programme** for the period 2014 – 2020. The new programme should be built on previous good experiences and extend lifelong learning in order to reach as many EU citizens and workers as possible.
3. Increasing the quality of education and enhancing lifelong learning requires adequate and targeted funding. Member States should **refrain from making public spending cuts** which will affect the provision of top quality education and training. Ensuring high quality education and making learning mobility available for all are essential if Europe is to recover from the current economic crisis and ensure a sustainable, inclusive and high quality labour market.
4. ETUC welcomes that the “Erasmus for all” proposal seeks to contribute to the efforts of achieving more and better jobs and growth in line with **Europe 2020 objectives**. However, lifelong learning should also aim to prepare individuals for life. In this context the objectives set by other relevant EU texts should be recalled, namely the Brugge Communiqué; the Communication “A new impetus for European cooperation in Vocational Education and Training”; the Council Conclusions on a benchmark for learning mobility; the Council conclusions on Early Childhood Education and Care. These documents should become an integral part of the new proposal.

¹ The ETUC speaks on behalf of 84 national trade union organisations from 36 European countries, as well as 12 European trade union federations, making a total of 60 million members, plus observer organisations in Macedonia, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina (www.etuc.org)

² <http://www.etuc.org/a/8067>

5. The ETUC considers that the proposed **budget** to be allocated to the new programme (19.5 billion €) is **appropriate** and adequately reflects the EU objective to continue to invest ample resources in lifelong learning. This amount should not be considered exorbitant as in relative terms it corresponds to roughly 1% of the total budget of the EU. Every effort must be made to resist attempts to lower this amount. The ETUC has concerns about the “performance-based” allocation of funds, as it may prioritise the participation of only the best students in the programmes and organizations or consortia which have already been granted projects.
6. The ETUC welcomes the objective to simplify and streamline the programme into three interrelated policy priorities. This new **architecture** could lead to greater coherence and synergies as well as to reducing the administrative and operational costs. Nevertheless, ETUC underlines that this new approach should not reduce the visibility or effectiveness of specific education sectors (such as adult learning, early child care education and VET) and that it does not hinder the possibility to finance small-scale but highly innovative projects.
7. The ETUC has **concerns** about changing the **name of the programme from lifelong learning to “Erasmus for all”**. The new name could be misleading as the word “Erasmus” is already associated with the mobility of higher education students and formal education. This may not attract the critical mass of students, teachers and trainers across all education sectors that still need to be strengthened. We therefore urge the Commission to find a new title which adequately emphasis the mobility of all sectors including formal, non-formal and informal pathways of learning.
8. The ETUC believes that programmes such as **Lifelong Learning Programme** and specific sub-programmes such as **Leonardo, Grundvig** and **Comenius** as well as the **Youth in Action programme** have proven their added value. The EU should build on their positive outcomes as well as addressing some of their shortcomings. Serious consideration should be given to whether or not these brands should be withdrawn as they have demonstrated high visibility and identification levels in the past.
9. The ETUC shares the Commission’s views on the importance of **learning mobility** at European and international level. Students, teachers and trainers who have participated in mobility programmes and projects play key role in promoting lifelong learning, and improving the quality of education. Thus, we are pleased that the “Erasmus for all” proposal places an increased focus on teachers. However, the proposal should also include the support of teacher education, improving teaching and training methodology etc as objectives for the mobility of teachers and trainers. Additionally, transnational mobility should also aim to increase the number of highly educated students.
10. The new lifelong learning programme should increase opportunities for transnational mobility of **VET students and VET teachers and trainers** as well as the institutions and organizations providing such education and training. The new programme should place more focus on the teaching and learning needs of all those in vocational education and training as well more specific objectives addressing the **adult learning**, including VET for adult citizens. ETUC strongly believes that the **study visits for education and vocational training specialists** and decision-makers that were so far managed by Cedefop, under the current lifelong learning programme, should be included in the new proposal.

11. The current proposal fails to adequately address adult learning as a sector of its own. Additionally, the new programme should provide separate support for non-formal and informal adult education. The specific role of **non-formal and informal education** should be strengthened and should encompass all three key policy priorities. As it is currently worded, the proposal seems to state that non-formal and informal learning are relevant only for young people. ETUC considers that non-formal learning is relevant to young citizens and older people alike, especially in a context where people between 30 – 40 years of age need to upgrade their skills or retrain themselves in vocational education and training programmes or where citizens over 50 are generally offered less training opportunities.
12. ETUC believes that the new programme should find the right balance between fostering high standards of mobility and enhancing lifelong learning for **all citizens**. It should be as **inclusive** as possible. The current text focuses on the mobility of students in higher education. ETUC believes that the participation of primary, secondary and VET students as well as apprentices in mobility programmes should be also enhanced. Furthermore, the participation of schools and institutions in the lifelong learning programme should be available to all education sectors, including early childhood education, and to all cultural projects.
13. All students, trainers, academic staff and workers in general should have **equal access to learning mobility** through education and training at all levels, regardless of their age, gender, employment status, or nationality, and particularly groups with low participation in the labour market, such as older workers and those on temporary or part-time contracts. They should be able to acquire, update and develop their knowledge, skills and competences throughout their lifetime. Those that need training the most should not be the least likely to obtain it and the new programme must ensure that it is based on an inclusive structure. The new proposal should clearly spell out its aim to reach the marginalized and at risk groups.
14. ETUC is concerned about the proposal to establish an **Erasmus loan guarantee scheme** for master courses. The new loans system should not encourage governments to cut incentives to attend universities nor to decrease the availability of publicly funded courses for students. ETUC stresses that the extension of the tuition fee courses, accessible by study loans, could contribute to the exclusion of low, middle class and socio-economically disadvantaged students. Furthermore, the loans should not enable private banks to increase their profits.
15. The proposal recognizes that there are **gender inequalities** in education and training. However, it fails to sufficiently address them with concrete indicators. The new lifelong learning programme should enhance the participation rate in initial and continuous VET of people facing transitions within the labour market and of groups with low participation in training, such as women, the low-skilled, disabled and older workers.
16. The new programme will be launched in the **2013, the EU Year of Citizens**. It should therefore aim to promote active citizenship, respect for human rights and democracy, equal opportunities for women and men, and to combat exclusion in all its forms, including racism and xenophobia. Thus, the proposal should refer to the objectives indicated in the Commission Communication: EU Framework for National Roma Integration strategies up to 2020; in the Commission Communication: European Agenda

for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals; and in the Commission Communication on Early School Leaving.

17. Although the three key actions identified by the proposal are relevant, the ETUC would like to see a stronger emphasis on the lifelong learning approach when addressing mobility of individuals and **strengthening partnerships between educational institutions and other relevant stakeholders** in the framework of innovative and strategic alliances (in particular sector skills and knowledge alliances). These alliances should include trade unions and social partners, and not only the business community. The objective of these alliances should be to improve the education and training of all and they should not serve solely the needs of the business sector.
18. As a consequence, a specific reference to **social partners' involvement** and role in promoting lifelong learning should be clearly stated in all three key actions. ETUC strongly recommends that strategic partnerships between education and business in the context of the new programme are based on social partnership, with an involvement of trade unions' representatives at all relevant levels. ETUC also very much regrets that the new draft regulation no longer includes a specific reference to social partners' access to the new programme in the **list of definitions**.
19. One of the key actions of the new proposal aims to support **policy reform** on the basis of policy dialogue in EU third and neighbouring countries. The ETUC stresses the importance of ensuring that trade unions are actively involved in all policy dialogues and recommends that the new programme be used as a means to enhance third-countries social policy agenda and not only for economic purposes. In this regard social partners' dialogue and governments' respect for freedom of association and collective bargaining are essential to move forward lifelong learning.