



POSITION OF EARLALL ON THE REVIEW OF THE EU FRAMEWORK OF KEY COMPETENCES FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

The Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning adopted in 2006 by the European Parliament and the Council sets out eight key competences. The review of the Recommendation is part of the New Skills Agenda for Europe and is linked to ET2020, including the Copenhagen process on vocational education and training (VET), the European Agenda for Adult Learning and the Agenda for Modernisation of Europe's Higher Education System. The review also related to the European Pillar on Social Rights, and it contributes to the achievement of United National Sustainable Development Goal 4 "Education 2013".

The European Association of Regional and Local Authorities for Lifelong Learning - EARLALL acknowledges the importance of the common framework and welcomes the update and the objective to deliver a relevant tool that can assist stakeholders at local, regional, national and European level in adequately addressing new societal challenges.

When the terminology of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning was introduced to the EU in 2004 by the High-Level Group on the Lisbon Treaty, the concept was broad in its theoretical and pedagogical scope, and wide in its implication of life span. It was about Key Competences which were needed from cradle to grave for people in Europe to have a life where everyone could have the capacity to make use of possibilities in the community and to contribute to the same. The Key Competences Framework was a "competence contract" between the individual and society. If both parts kept their promises in the deal, Europe would produce citizenship for all and a sense of belonging would be combined with real access to all kinds of options in regards to learning, labour life and leisure.

When the European Commission in November 2005 presented its Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning the perspective was broad: *"In accordance with international studies, 'competence' is defined here as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to a particular situation. 'Key competences' are those that support personal fulfilment, social inclusion, active citizenship and employment. The development of the knowledge society is raising demand for the key competences in the personal, public and professional spheres. The way in which people access information and services is changing, as are the structure and make-up of societies. There is increasing concern about social cohesion and developing democratic citizenship; this requires people to be informed, concerned and active. The knowledge, skills and attitudes that everyone needs are changing as a result."*¹

This was ambitious! It was about personal fulfilment and active citizenship as much as it was about employment.

¹ Proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on key competences for lifelong learning. /* COM/2005/0548 final - COD 2005/0221 */

With the financial crisis in 2009, however, and the Euro-crisis and refugee-crisis afterwards, the perspective on the practical implications of Key Competences has gradually changed and narrowed to basic skills for employability. The lifelong and life-wide learning perspective is becoming increasingly distant, and that happens at the same time as the European demography changes dramatically.

First, the number of older adults grows all over Europe unevenly. And the access to volunteering of this target group is not stimulated if the older adult's richness and capacity are not understood nor recognised. Secondly, the number of immigrants from Africa, the Middle East and elsewhere is higher than any time before in recent history. Third country nationals come with very different backgrounds, which means that they often lack needed competences for a satisfying livelihood in Europe, and have other competences which are not noticed or recognised here.

With the demographic changes accompanying the growing number of older adults and immigrants, it seems to be counterproductive to narrow the concept of Key Competences to skills for labour life. Europe needs more than ever to include these growing groups in society by making the most and the best of their competences for the benefit of our society. By only focusing on competences needed for employability, policies will not be developed to value and take advantage of the existing competences of these target groups, and, thereby, won't make use of an overall potential for soft integration and cohesion, nor realise how lifelong learning can create true citizenship and worthy intergeneration.

In today's European situation, it is important to emphasize inclusion and cohesion in the competences framework. Diversity and differences between people need to be seen as an asset and not as a problem, and, in this context, understanding and learning are more important factors than ever. Lifelong learning needs to be lifelong, and not just limited to school time.

The framework also needs to emphasize the need for flexible educational tools so that learning becomes available to everyone regardless of where they live or of their age. This is an important thing that all stakeholders in the area of lifelong learning should relate to and for which they should have a strategy and a will for implementation.

The European Association of Regional and Local Authorities for Lifelong Learning - EARLALL - currently includes the co-operation of more than 50 regional and local authorities (full members, observers and partner regions) aiming to influence European policy and to co-operate in projects in the field of lifelong learning. EARLALL's goals are cooperation and attention to raising the role and visibility of regional and local authorities in the field of lifelong learning at European and international level.

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