



Joint Declaration of AER and FREREF Implementation of the 2014-2020 European Lifelong Learning Programmes

In the current economic and social context, which features high levels of unemployment, massive numbers of school drop-outs without any qualification and increasing job insecurity, professional inclusion has to become a priority. We therefore welcome the new possibility ESF offers to finance projects supporting people entering, remaining in and returning to labour.

Projects will thus be developed to assist young people in precarious situations, as well as women who left the labour market and adults in transitory situations (neither in training nor employment). This implies however that stakeholders create alliances; that Regions play their part and articulate their employment, economic, social, training and territorial planning policies; that the implementation and financing of projects are not hindered by excessively complex regulatory frameworks.

At the final stage of the European decision-making process on ERASMUS+ Regulations, Horizon 2020 and Structural Funds (more specifically on the European Social Fund (ESF) and European Territorial Cooperation programmes), and as a follow-up of the previous:

- Barcelona Declaration¹, which recommended an increased European mobility of apprentices and students;
- Common position of FREREF² members on ERASMUS +, which recommended an access to lifelong learning for all and that all learning forms should be taken into account (formal, non-formal and informal) and which expressed concerns about the programme not taking into account job seekers' mobility measures.

The Assembly of European Regions (AER) and the European Regions Foundation for Research in Education and Training (FREREF) consider that there is still a need for more vigilance in the implementation of these programmes at the regional level.

We have in fact noticed a differentiated approach on European Lifelong Learning programmes, making the coherence of these programmes not very clear and understandable in practice.

For that reason, it seems essential for us to:

- Ensure **greater coordination** among European financial arrangements by fostering effective and operational cooperation between funds managing and support agencies and authorities, all involved in the implementing of European programmes at all levels and, indeed, a bigger collaboration with the **competent regional authorities**. Regions should also be more closely associated within the process of ESF implementation, especially when they are already in charge of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Regions are therefore in the best position to secure a close relationship between funds as they have important competences in the field of education and youth.

¹ Barcelona Declaration on European mobility for apprentices and young in vocational training, Generalitat de Catalunya, FREREF and 20 Regions and European institutions, 27 May 2009 (www.freref.eu)

² "Position of FREREF and member Regions on the Erasmus for All programme", June 2012 (www.freref.eu)

- Use all available opportunities to **simplify the programmes implementation** by applying more flexible and less stringent administrative and financial procedures, taking into account only the European regulations. Adding more restrictive national rules brings chaos even in the most efficient partnerships and makes the further development of ambitious mobility projects unlikely.
- Ensure that mobility regulations for people with fewer opportunities are systematically applied. For that purpose, special attention should be paid to **jobseekers' mobility inclusion** in all National (or Regional) ESF Operational Programme, taking into account that the ERASMUS+ programme will be limited to young people who remain jobless one year after leaving the education system. In this context, current bilateral meetings between the European Commission (DG Regio and DG Emploi) and the national and regional authorities in charge of Structural Funds implementation are the best place to discuss such incentive.
- Prove to the final operators that European mobility regulations operate by using synergies (Eurosynergy). For that purpose, communication, information, and accompanying activities have to be developed, which go beyond a concrete programme approach and propose a real thematic or public approach. For example, it would be appropriate to coordinate all communication and information activities about European Youth programmes, whatever its status, qualification level or type of project. The AER and the FREREF, as well as their members, have already established various lines of action in the framework of activities such as the "Eurosynergies" project, the "Reichardt" report about information and access to European funding, or the numerous information sessions on these issues.
- **Support project engineering that is close to the final project operators and encourage regional, interregional and European operational schemes in the field of mobility.** The challenge will be to ensure the implementation of European regulations, by cooperating with funds managing and support agencies and authorities on local and regional level in order to increase the number of individual and collective projects. That shared implementation and accompanying will ensure coherence between the different European financial regulations and concrete local and regional needs. In this respect, while we welcome the financial strengthening of individual and collective measures of mobility, we also regret an almost systematic lack of European funding for accompanying and support activities of European mobility projects and local and regional partnerships. We therefore ask Member States to dedicate a part ESF funding for technical assistance for these important accompanying activities in the field.
- Finally, make sure that Article 87-3-D of the Structural Funds Regulation provides the full flexibility, required by regions, to develop future cooperation projects, which can not be paid out of any other European regulation for cooperation (ERASMUS+, INTERREG, etc.). This Article remains largely unknown by the majority of regional and national policy makers, so it is crucial that this aspect is taken into account. Serious communication campaigns on the potential of this Article as an instrument of regional cooperation have to be carried out in order to ensure that these aspects are added in operational programmes.

Based on these elements, we therefore call upon to:

- the European Commission to remind Member States of these points, during bilateral negotiations on partnership contracts;
- that these points are taken into account in the future legislation and by the national authorities in the ESF implementation process.

Finally, the AER and the FREREF will support the EC in carrying out the communication, information, and accompanying actions, via the organisation of targeted activities to the attention of their members as well as to a wider audience.

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