

# The European Employment Strategy (EES) from the Standpoint of the Primary Stakeholders (European Employment and Vocational Training Organisations and Civil Society)

## FINAL PROJECT REPORT

The European Employment Strategy (EES) from the Standpoint of the Primary Stakeholders (European Employment and Vocational Training Organisations and Civil Society) is a project carried out by the European Vocational Training Association (EVTA), co-financed by the European Commission, Directorate-General Employment and Social Affairs, in the framework of the open call for proposals VP/2004/015, budget line 04.021500 «AWARENESS RAISING FOR THE EUROPEAN EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY

The project started on 15/12/2004 and ended on 15/12/2005

### 1. Project aims

A seminar which will include high-level participants from most of the European National Employment and Vocational Training organisations as well as Civil Society representatives from European networks (including the Social Partners) will be organized to discuss the results of a matrix/questionnaire that will be designed so as to permit precise evaluation of the way in which each of the consulted parties understands the EES, the current divergences/convergences of each organisation with the EES - taking into consideration the policies of the individual national employment/education-training ministries (depending on the systems used) - and the steps that these organisations are taking to increase convergence. During the months preceding the seminar the questionnaire will be designed and sent out and the results collated and analyzed. During the seminar the EES will be presented in detail, the questionnaire results discussed and new solutions, leading to increasingly rigorous implementation of the EES, debated. Seminar results will then be presented in a handbook, included in EVTA's extranet, knowledge-sharing website (EXEMPLO) and an information campaign (EVTA's newsletters and journal plus CD-Rom) organized. <sup>1</sup>

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1 summary from the project application

The project would be divided into the following stages:

## Preparation phase

Constitution of a group of 4 employment specialists, drawn from EVTA member organisations that are responsible for both employment and vocational training in their countries, to draw up the questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of two parts and deals with both the priorities of the European Employment Strategy and the Lifelong Learning policies, focusing the analysis of the degree of convergence, at the level of EVTA's own member VET organisations, on their knowledge of and involvement in the shaping and implementation of employment policies, including the lifelong learning area of their training policies with those suggested by the EES and the Recommendations. An independent communications specialist, with the required background, will prepare an information package explaining the EES and European Union employment policies in general (including development).

## Implementation phase

Arrangements will be made with the primary employment organisations of all European Union countries for the questionnaires to be answered and processed. Arrangements will be made with a number of European Civil Society networks, as well (Adult education, trade unions, employers), for the same purpose.

The responses will be collected and processed, and the results will be collated and analysed by the original group responsible for establishing the questionnaire. A report of results and an handbook for EES implementation will be drafted.

## Drafting of the study and seminar

A report on the results of the study will be prepared, and an EES implementation handbook for all organisations involved in the study. These will be presented during a high-level seminar, that will include representatives from all organisations involved in the Study, as well as representatives from the EU level. The results will be debated and the basis of how to go about creating a system of shared good practices and benchmarking considered.

## Dissemination of Results

The handbook, will be published on CD ROM, which will be made widely available. a full report will be made available on EVTA's extranet website, EXEMPLO, a short reports in EVTA's newsletters and on EurActiv.

## 2. Project implementation

### The study: operational issues

The EVTA project was launched in the first quarter of 2005. A working group was constituted during a side meeting at the EVTA Seminar “Vectors to innovation - Bringing the spirit of Leonardo back to Leonardo”<sup>2</sup>. The group was made of experts from 5 organisations that are responsible for both employment and vocational training in their countries<sup>3</sup>, a European expert on labour market issues and VET<sup>4</sup>, and the in-house coordinator<sup>5</sup>. For internal communication and cooperation, a community was created on the EVTA web site. Over the months, the community gained 23 members.

A draft questionnaire was designed and tested by the members of the working group in their respective organisations. The questionnaire focused on the key question: “How do primary stakeholders (employment and vocational training organisations and civil society) integrate this new European Employment Strategy?”

The responses should help to understand:

- the way in which EVTA members and partners understand the EES;
- the current divergences/convergences of each organisation with the EES - taking into consideration the policies of the individual national employment /education-training ministries;
- the steps that these organisations are taking to increase convergence.

The questionnaire consisted of two parts:

- Part A (questions 1 to 11) focused on the employment strategy from an organisational point of view. It encompassed questions on the contributions at national and regional levels, as well as on the results for the organisations themselves. The 2004 Employment policy Guidelines provided the basis for the questions.<sup>6</sup>
- Part B (questions 12 to 21) was devoted to VET and lifelong learning, based upon the 2004 Recommendations of the European Council. This section prioritised organisational priorities and practices.

The questionnaire was sent to EVTA members and to other organisations. WAPES<sup>7</sup> operated as a go-between. The action covered the 25 EU Member States. However, despite renewed efforts, in writing and by phone, both from EVTA and WAPES, it appeared impossible to get answers from respondents in the 25 countries. We were not able to receive valid contributions from Italy (they explain to us the difficulty to answer the questionnaire due to their regional structure), Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and the United Kingdom. In our view, this clearly indicates the weak perception of the European Employment

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2 Budapest, 24 and 25/2/2005

3 4 members participated directly: FAS (Ireland), OAED (Greece), IEFP (Portugal) and FOREM (French-speaking Belgium), whereas a fifth member organisation, VDAB (Dutch-speaking Belgium), acted in an advisory capacity and two experts, as well.

4 Jos Janssens, Primula, France

5 Sophie Falier, EVTA

6 The Integrated Guidelines were only available after the summer break 2005, when the project was already under way.

7 WAPES: World Association of Public Employment Services

Strategy and the Lisbon targets among professionals in the field of employment and vocational training and education. However, the quality of the answers received was quite good, which allowed us to prepare the final seminar in Athens. And, even if they didn't answer the questionnaire, Italy, Lithuania, and the United Kingdom were represented in the Athens seminar and gave important inputs.

The questionnaires were intended for those experts within the organisations, who were expected to know rather well the policies and practices of his/her organisation, both at a national and a regional level. We asked them to consult other colleagues within their organisation, where needed.

In our formal and informal messages, we highlighted the importance of this project for EVTA and all its member organisations. In a rapidly changing European Union, in a globalising world, vocational training providers and labour market services cannot remain without reflecting on own policies and practices. Not adapting to new requirements would reduce actors to mere spectators on the employment and vocational training stages. It is only by evaluating results, work and ambitions, as individual organisations and within the framework of EVTA, that VET providers and labour market organisations will continue to be actors shaping policies and serving the citizens of their countries.

We knew beforehand that some colleagues would have difficulties in understanding the questions, since they were not familiar with the subject. Therefore, we produced an information package on the European Employment Strategy on EXEMPLO (EVTA extranet) and on the EVTA web site. The documentation contained Hyperlinks referring to Commission sources and to specific pages of the <http://www.regionalactors.net>, a web site developed by the RENCOM project (Fifth Framework Programme for Research).

The questionnaire was in English only. However, colleagues could also answer in French and German. The offer to provide help by phone for other languages by the EVTA team was not needed by colleagues, although the Hungarian colleagues had the questionnaire translated by their own means. In order not to force colleagues to supplementary work, we invited them to have some answers backed up with existing documents, preferably in English, French or German. This was a very good experience: the colleagues who sent us high quality texts or presentations made for other purposes were able to highlight their experiences much more efficiently than colleagues who relied solely on their own answers to the questionnaire. We also gave our colleagues the opportunity to ask questions on the questionnaire or on the EES by email, which was quite well used.

The results of the questionnaire are a valuable input for the Athens seminar in December. This seminar formally concludes the project; in fact, it is the kick off of a new phase of awareness raising on EES and of exchanging best practices between EVTA members and other civil society organisations. Thus, despite the difficulties at start to receive valid answers for all Member States, we may say that a process of awareness raising and information is well under way.

## The Athens seminar

The programme was centred around 4 topics:

- information and discussion on EES and the Lisbon Strategy
- Best practices on cooperation between different partners
- Best practices on responding to industry's training needs
- The relation between regional, national and EU level

Each session consisted of two or three presentations, followed by a discussion. The sessions were animated actively, in order to allow active participation and to confront diverging opinions.

The seminar did not adopt formal conclusions. However, it was clear that participants agreed on a number of policy issues:

- Lisbon is the right strategy for the future, although the targets are unlikely to be reached within the deadline;
- Member States should involve all stakeholders in the shaping, implementation and monitoring of the policies, not only as a measure of good governance, but also for effectiveness, since there is no hierarchic relation between governments and those organisations that are expected to implement the policies decided by them.
- Regions constitute the most effective level for cooperation between different actors, and for implementing the Lisbon measures both on employment and vocational training.
- A holistic approach is needed to end the division between employment measures and education and training; this includes the development of orientation and guidance centers.
- Education policy and practice should adapt quicker to the needs of industry and the needs of individual learners, in order to enable them to respond to the challenges of globalisation; focusing on SMEs should be a priority.
- Whereas all participants seem to share the same objectives and agreed on the needs for change, there seems no obvious way to make these changes rapidly on a large scale; all stakeholders need to be convinced, and the necessary instruments for an enlarged cooperation developed.

## The dissemination of the results

Hard copies of the report of the survey are available in 3 languages: English, French and German, and available at the EVTA secretariat. All EVTA members and civil society organisations - including social partners' organisations - which whom EVTA is working will receive a copy. Similarly, which no regular relations exist, will receive a printed copy and the CD.

The seminar results have been prepared in a handbook, on CD ROM. This handbook is constructed in a practical way: an introductory text contains links to materials on the European Employment Strategy, the European Lifelong Learning policy, and the Lisbon Strategy. It gives information on the EES via a selection of Communications, comments, positions and studies, enabling people to understand the EES. A series of Hyperlinks give access to additional information sources on Member States level. Further a series of presentations on good practices are included in the package.

The project results and materials are also included in EVTA's extranet, knowledge-sharing platform (EXEMPLO). An information campaign, which has been launched via EVTA's newsletter,s will continue over the next year, focusing vocational training providers, employment services and civil society organisations

### 3. Project results

There is a *wide gap* between what policy makers assume as shared information on EES and Lisbon Strategies, and the real level of information, even among professionals in the field education and employment services. As reported earlier, the project had difficulties finding the right persons to answer the questionnaire, both in public and in private labour market services or VET providers. Only the experts involved in the preparation of National Action Plans and persons in charge of European dossiers for their organisation seemed to be aware of the European Employment Strategy. And obviously, even those colleagues did not always understand all issues addressed by the strategy.

Only *public* employment services and public vocational training providers participate to some extent in the preparation of National Action Plans. By omitting private organisations, the Member States do not only deprive themselves from well-experienced potential contributors, but they also fail to involve these providers in policy implementation processes.

PES acknowledge the frequent dramatic changes in the policies and strategies of their organisation as a result of the European Employment Strategy, private structures indicate that they have to adapt to the changed framework and its subsequent new challenges. The most radical changes however concern *methodologies*: the paradigm change from passive to active labour market measures, the systemic approach, the use of evaluation techniques and quality insurance processes, the drive for a wider cooperation. And, as a by-product, nearly all colleagues have stated that the EES has undoubtedly brought the *European dimension* much nearer to their daily practices. For some organisations, the number of transnational exchanges increased, whereas many underlined that meetings have now become regular or that the *quality of the exchanges* has much improved.

On the *regional level*, results are more promisingly: apparently, most public and private organisations are involved in the development or monitoring of regional employment plans. Practices are different from Member State to another, according to their legal status and traditions, but even when there is no formal regional plans, cooperation between policy makers and labour market services and VET-providers go on quite well.

Regarding the different policy fields, organisations cover fairly the different fields indicated by the 10 guidelines, with the exception of GL 8 (“make work pay”) and GL9 (“transform undeclared work”). However, according to some respondents, a number of issues would require improvement, i.e. actions related to age, gender and mobility.

Entrepreneurship is a policy field covered by most organisations, but only a few consider it a priority. Apart from training courses for new entrepreneurs, it appears that the development of entrepreneurial skills and attitudes has not become a priority in labour market and continuing vocational training organisations. It also seems that some organisations hesitate to develop company-focused services, since they are not in line with their core targets.

Exchanges on training policy, training methodologies and tools, insertion of low-skilled or aged workers in the labour market, gender related actions and anti-discrimination policies seem rather well covered, although improvement is always possible. *Exchanges on new policy developments are much weaker* or non-existent, for example on new financial models for vocational training, or on the methods for taking into account future needs of the labour markets. And certainly, sharing of methodologies and tools (for example e-learning platforms) could help to avoid unnecessary costs for development of the umpteenth pilot in new Member States.

Nearly all organisations value their own experiences in the field of active labour market policies, job creation and adaptability as having a good potential for further dissemination. This is good news, because it shows that colleagues are willing to share methods and instruments with others. It is also good news, because it indicates that the basis for moving fast together to support the Lisbon strategy is available.

## Next steps

1. EVTA has taken the necessary decisions to implement the lessons from this project. AN EU-wide active *information campaign* towards VET-providers and civil society organisations has been launched. Instruments for this campaign are the study and the CD ROM developed in the framework of this project, and EXEMPLO, the best practices platform.
2. European Employment and Vocational Training Organisations and Civil Society can play a *much stronger role* to reach the Lisbon targets. EVTA will take the initiative to develop stronger alliances between vocational training organisations, NGOs, social partners, and civil society in general alliance. The first steps have been set in the framework of EUCIS, whereas ETUC has indicated its willingness in building such an alliance. Including CEEP in the efforts seem very well possible, whereas business representatives have shown interest.
3. The EVTA Executive Board has decided to step up the *development of the network*. On the one hand, there is the enlargement challenge: the efforts for cooperation with and finding new members in the new Member States and candidate countries will be reinforced. But also in the «old» Member States, there remains a wide field for action, e.g. triggered by the decentralisation efforts in some countries. On the other hand, EVTA will also develop actions in depth, combining the hitherto divided fields of action «vocational training» and «employment».
4. EVTA has taken the necessary decisions to develop its website to a real *portal*. This will enable also new actors from outside the network to participate in the virtual communities, and learn from best practices. Similarly steps are taken to develop new methodologies and practices for mutual learning, where virtual meetings and teleconferencing are additional tools to presential meetings.

## **4. Conclusions**

The project has reached the goals for which it was intended:

- verify to which extent primary stakeholders are involved in EES, and the degree of convergence/divergence with the strategy
- develop the instruments for information of VET providers and civil society organisations on EES and the Lisbon Strategy
- start an awareness raising and information campaign among primary stakeholders
- develop a strategy for developing stronger alliances between different stakeholders, enabling them to play a more active rôle in shaping and development of employment and lifelong learning policies
- share best practices on cooperation between stakeholders in regional context

## Lessons learned

1. The European Employment Strategy *remains to a large extent a top-down exercise*, and up to now has not been able to involve the European citizens behind the idea, as could be expected. However, we did not expect that inside the organisations actually involved in the shaping and implementation of the EES, e.g. Public Employment Services, only very few colleagues are really aware of the Strategy, and the resulting new challenges for their own organisation. Additional efforts will be needed, in order to inform people and structures about the EES, and to convince them for participation. Our project has clearly demonstrated that, once they understand the background, the challenges and the mechanisms all actors from civil society, social partners, training providers or employment services are willing to be more involved in the development and implementation of the Lisbon Strategy.
2. Despite some criticisms on the implementation methods of Lisbon, the structures involved in the EVTA-project seem confident that the *Lisbon Strategy is the right way to move forward*, not only for society as such, but particularly for their own institutions as well. There are no tangible differences in attitude between EVTA members, other CVT-providers, employment services and civil society organisations in general. However, the reasons behind this position might differ. Civil society is in the first place concerned about the democratic evolution of society, about equal access to employment and learning, and about insertion of those actually excluded. Training providers have observed over the last few years the evolving needs of individual learners, industries and the entire society, and the way this has affected their operational set-up, work organisation and methodologies. Business representatives try to get rid of regulations and legislation, which they often regard as superfluous, harmful for world-wide competition, and a bureaucratic burden. Trade unions clearly are concerned about their membership, employees and unemployed, and are looking for the best ways to defend their constituencies' interest. Employment services are still in the midst of a fundamental turnover, which has changed profoundly their working methods, and which generated even a feeling of insecurity for staff and management in cases of privatisation threats. However, all these different organisations seem to share the drive for modernisation and the willingness to adapt of the own structures and working methods in order to respond better to the challenges of globalisation.
3. Cooperation between different types of organisations on national or regional level needs to be fostered. The best practices shared at the final seminar between participants demonstrate clearly the added value of such strategies, enabling structures to detect the needs of industries and individual learners, to respond better and quicker to these needs, and to unleash unused resources. Particularly the cooperation between organisations representing small and medium-sized companies, VET providers and other regional actors seem promisingly. The Structural Funds Initiatives are supporting this way forward. The *EU-wide cooperation between different types of partners* has to be deepened. The cooperation between social partners, civil society, labour market services and VET providers has to be strengthened, EVTA is willing to take its share of this challenge.
4. All actors in the field of employment and lifelong learning need to change strategies and practices, and as a consequence, *need to overhaul their*

*organisation's structures and internal procedures.* The increasing complexity and comprehensiveness of the issues to be solved in labour markets makes it almost impossible for a single actor to solve problems alone. They will not be able to work efficiently within the new policy frameworks and to deliver the expected services if they do not improve and broaden their partnership approach, and look continuously for synergies and mutual learning within these partnerships.

## Recommendations on EU level

1. The project has clearly demonstrated that the willingness to be informed about the EES, and to be involved in development and implementation has to be fostered. Whereas the European Commission seems to take its share of the burden by supporting EU-wide networks, Member States seem to be to a large extent absent from the field. We suggest the Commission to continue its efforts for convincing Member states to *good governance*, not only with a view to democracy, but *also for reasons of efficiency*. The Lisbon Strategy will only be implemented if unused resources and energy -e.g. training providers- are maximally involved.
2. Learning from best practices is a widely shared belief. However, learning processes have to be supported. It is unlikely that labour market services and vocational training providers are able to transform their own organisations, methodologies and operational practices in a short term without financial support. Mutual learning can only be effective in well-designed processes: the EU level Peer Review Programme - the predecessor of the actual Mutual Learning Programme - has demonstrated that once-off activities between Member states have no tangible results. This is not different for mutual learning between organisations in different countries. We suggest the Commission to *ensure transnational cooperation* in the operational programmes of the 2007-2013 phase of Structural Funds.
3. Implementing new policy orientations require structural and operational changes in the implementing organisations. Such restructuring processes are time-consuming and in many cases, external consultancy support is needed. Policy makers tend to *underestimate time and resources needed for change*. For example, it is quite easy to call for broad partnerships between employment services, social partners, local administrations, training providers and regional development centres for designing and implementing local strategies. Constructing these partnerships and animating them may take years, before they are fully operational.