



EUCIS-LLL Statement Intergenerational learning for sustainable societies

Brussels, 29 April 2015

Today, on the European Day of Solidarity between Generations, half of the population is 40 years old or above, and it is estimated to be 48 years or above in 2060, inevitably shaking our already fragile social structures. It is high time we take solid measures to bridge the increasing gaps between generations and sharpen ourselves up for challenges ahead. Education is a natural setting to support intergenerational solidarity and many interesting initiatives are already taking place in our schools, universities, in adult education and other non-formal and informal education settings. They offer new ways of sharing knowledge and creating more cohesive societies. EUCIS-LLL strongly believes that intergenerational learning is now more relevant than ever and should be mainstreamed at all levels.

The European Day of Solidarity between Generations reminds us of the very timely need for greater cooperation between generations in **our rapidly ageing societies**. This only adds to the rising number of people who do not have the chance to participate in voluntary activities and people with care needs. An additional problem is an increasing **shrinkage of family size**, since informal care for older people is creating more and more pressure on women and younger generations. Only a **small minority of people actively participate** in community life through voluntary activities and active leisure in their retirement years. Since coupled with the **social and economic crisis**, all this is soon likely to enhance **tensions between generations and further distance them**, and therefore considerable societal adaptations will be needed. Solidarity between generations is a EU objective since the **Lisbon Treaty** and the EU has made attempts to address this issue in a number of policies; however, this is not enough.

A **long-term strategic approach** to intergenerational learning can contribute not only to economic growth, but also to social cohesion. It is a crucial asset in building **active and inclusive communities** and the **“culture of caring”**, **promoting citizenship** and **tackling inequalities**. If placed in the core of EU policies as a transversal priority, it helps pave the way to EU2020 objectives. Greater synergy is thus needed between EU employment, education and social agendas. For example, if we consider the benchmark on early school leaving, policies that only focus on children without taking into account their social and family backgrounds are unlikely to succeed. To overcome **the heritage of low qualifications**, it is essential to address parental perception about education and empower them in the process. *“Family learning should be integrated in strategies of educational institutions to raise young learners’ attainment and to narrow the gap between the lowest and highest achievers”*, said Joke van der Leeuw Roord, Secretary General of EUCIS-LLL.

More initiatives and projects with mixed age groups between educational institutions and local communities are needed, such as opening up schools and higher education institutions, but also within non-formal education sector. Groups and individuals who engage the least in society and who are most at risk of unemployment and social exclusion should be given priority. In the workplace initiatives that help young and old people transfer their skills can improve their working conditions and performance. This can contribute to address the challenge of later retirement age by motivating older workers to use their expertise to support younger staff, which could put them into a new

dynamic with potential long-term impact in retirement years. This is how senior teachers for example could become trainers and mentors for younger ones. *“In order to achieve that, we need **strong political commitment on all levels and sustainable funding**,”* urges EUCIS-LLL President David Lopez. **Good practices** in intergenerational learning should be better shared across the EU through an increased cooperation between Member States.

Besides, it is important to understand and enhance the **potential of new technologies** to create bridges for this dialogue instead of widening the gap. *“There is growing public interest and demand for knowledge and education, together with social media movements. The improving performance and affordability of new tools and the networking infrastructure are essential in enhancing access to digital intergenerational activities,”* said Andras Szucs, Vice-President of EUCIS-LLL.

With rapid social and demographic changes, now it is more important than ever to remember across generations that there is as much to learn as there is to teach. Let’s boost intergenerational learning to prepare better for challenges ahead of us!



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Notes to the Editor: The European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning (EUCIS-LLL) gathers 36 European networks working in education and training. Together, they cover all sectors of education and training including networks for secondary and higher education, vocational education and training, adult education and popular education; networks for students, school heads, parents, HRD professionals, teachers and trainers.