

Feedback to EC Consultation on the Strategic Innovation Agenda of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) for 2021-27

The Lifelong Learning Platform - European Civil Society for Education represents the civil society sector in education and training at EU level. Its members range from the largest European students association (ESN, AEGEE, ESU), university networks (EUF, UNIMED, EURASHE), vocational and training centres (EFVET, EVBB, EVTA), digital learning stakeholders (ALL DIGITAL, DLEARN, EDEN), regional authorities networks (FREREF, EARALL) (discover LLLP members here). The coverage of its membership goes far beyond civil society as it involves education stakeholders in a broad perspective, including researchers, businesses, and public authorities. LLL-P's knowledge builds upon fourteen years of experience and expertise in EU policies in education and training, lifelong learning and skill strategies. The network advocates for inclusive and innovative policy reforms in education while facilitating regular dialogue and cooperation with EU and national policy-makers.

For all these reasons, LLL-P praises the education pillar of the new strategy of the EIT post-2020. The new strategy is very much welcome by the European education sector, in particular for its focus on skill investment, capacity-building, lifelong learning as well as for promoting cross-sector cooperation through the knowledge triangle, foreseeing synergies between the Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) with other educational programmes like Erasmus+ and addressing societal challenges through innovation. The strategy, its objectives and activities are clearly relevant for the members and partners of the platform.

However, by reading the new strategy and annex documents, LLL-P wonders how its network and activities could better benefit to and from the work of the EIT. If indeed, "education and training, talent and skills development are at the core of the EIT model" then, it seems important that all stakeholders, including beneficiaries when relevant, are fully informed and/or involved in the activities and partnerships to the aim of bringing a larger impact and better chances in achieving its objectives. Key stakeholders, such as LLL-P, its members and partners, can be better aware of those opportunities and have support in accessing them. That is why, LLL-P would like to see more clarifications and information on the role and involvement of "broader stakeholders" in benefiting and promoting the initiatives (1). It is also interested in learning more about the plans regarding synergy building with Erasmus+ and hope the strategy will foresee concrete actions in this regard (2)

- (1) According to the strategy documents, "by 2019, there are more than 600 businesses, 250 HEIs, 200 research organisations, and more than 50 civil society organisations and authorities participating in EIT KICs." The ICF evaluation (2017) also does not differentiate in the statistics what belong to the NGO sector or public authorities as both are counted altogether but it does seem that there is room for improvement. The strategy does not say explicitly how civil society and other stakeholders (eg networks of public authorities) can be involved in the KICs and other activities. For instance, how civil society representing educational stakeholders can better take part in the co-location centres (CLCs)? Two likely and beneficial outcomes of an increase in their participation would be to have more impact at policy-level (e.g. by involving regional authorities) and secondly, reaching out to more HEIs, citizens and other experts through already existing networks organised as civil society.

(2) The strategy states the synergy aims, for example, to “ensure access for Erasmus learners participating in KIC partner education and training institutions to KICs’ summer schools or other relevant training activities”, what kind of activities will the EIT implement to encourage Erasmus beneficiaries to join KIC activities? Will it take place through the KICs or via other programs or initiatives? LLLP and its members are for instance involved in large sector-skill alliances funded by Erasmus+ in highly innovative fields. How the EU institutions envisages connections between those projects and the KICs? It is important that the strategy recognises the **added value of CSOs** (e.g. students network) in **coordinating** and/or **supporting** the building of “synergies between the respective communities” as envisaged in the strategy (Erasmus+ and the KICs communities).

Why is it relevant to foster the involvement of civil society in the field of education and training?

- **Civil society are diverse organisations representing a wide range of stakeholders.** They are key nodes at the crossroad between networks of different parts of the knowledge triangle. They do not only represent citizens but stakeholders at large. Their work is crucial to ensure inter-disciplinary and inter-sectoral approach thanks to their unique capacity to bring business, researchers, experts, public authorities, practitioners and beneficiaries around the table. CSOs can support the EIT to make sure that “KICs become fully integrated into the local innovation ecosystems” (Commission’s Opinion on the independent evaluation of the EIT, 2018).
- **They can increase the impact of the initiatives (incl. societal impact), making them better known, reaching out to a broad range of stakeholders, disseminating and sharing the good practices.** The ICF evaluation indeed pointed the issue that “despite the communications activities undertaken by the EIT, there is limited brand awareness within the wider stakeholder community. Internal communications could be improved, with KIC partners calling for more information on what the KICs have achieved.” This is essential to ensure systemic impact. CSOs have a crucial role to play in helping the KICs to have a larger impact.
- **EU and national civil society networks in the field of education and training can support the EIT by bringing expertise and impact at policy-level.** The evaluation states clearly that this is an area to improve: “the Strategic Innovation Agenda for the EIT recognises the potential of the EIT and the KICs as a resource for policy-makers, though thus far the EIT’s influence on policy development has been limited, in part due to a lack of dedicated resources and the relative immaturity of the EIT and KICs.” Many LLLP members have been advocating for years for more innovative and entrepreneurial education systems in higher education and other sectors (adult education, teacher education, and VET), and at all levels of governance: from local, regional and national through members’ members towards the EU level. They have established experiences, contacts and expertise in participating in policy-making.
- **Involving civil society and other education and training sectors helps to ensure the social dimension of innovations.** From the strategy, it is clear that KICs also aim to address societal challenges. However, the strategy does not specify how it intends to do so, for instance by including societal impact indicators in the KICs areas of activities. The innovative potential of CSOs and those who they represent are often underestimated. The non-profit sector is actually a key producer of such innovations. For instance, many innovations in education (participatory, learner-centred) were implemented in the non-formal education sector long before the formal sector. LLLP and its members advocate for years for more innovative and entrepreneurial approaches to education, research, and engagement with (social enterprises) or the non-profit sector¹.

¹ LLLPlatform (formerly, EUCIS-LLL) (2013) *Position Statement and Compendium of Best Practices – Fostering Entrepreneurial Mindsets* <http://lllplatform.eu/lll/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/EUCIS-LLL-position-Entrepreneurship-mindsets.pdf>