



International Stakeholder Conference

**To Invest in People and Skills:
Empowerment through Co-operation and Networking in the Danube Region**

WORKING GROUPS

13 June 2012

Locations: Urania (Working Group 1) & Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection (Working Groups 2,3,4,5,6,7,8)

Each working group corresponds to one of the eight defined work areas adopted by Priority Area 9's Steering Group in December 2011 (for description see below).

Each working group should elaborate on the following questions:

- What examples of good practice in regional/transnational/cross-border co-operation have been experienced so far and can be specified on an ad-hoc-basis by the working group?
- Which are the key thematic fields within this particular action line where further work should be focused on, in particular by the Working Group members and by their respective institutions and states?
- Which lessons learned can be shared in view of moving from a fragmented to an integrated approach? Which examples of good practice exist which support coherency, coordination and complementarity of education, innovation and labour market policies and strategies?
- Which new projects can be developed that respond to needs in the region? How will ideas be generated? Which concrete operational projects will be drawn from the action line and abstract targets? Who will - and how - transform the action into projects that will be funded/financed?
- Which roadmap and benchmarks for the implementation of the action/work area can be developed (who does what, when and how)? Who will commit to this kind of roadmap?
- How can existing partnerships and networks be best used - and by whom? Who will create strong partnerships - and how? Which incentives need to be developed? What should regional networks and initiatives include on their agendas to support the implementation of the action?

Short description of work areas:

Work area 1

“To enhance performance of education systems through closer cooperation of education institutions, systems and policies”

Fostering efficiency, innovation and good governance in education and training is crucial in the face of the challenges posed by globalisation, demographic changes, rapid technological developments and increasing pressure on public budgets. This should be done in particular through the exchange of best practices of different education and training systems through transnational cooperation, joint development of programmes and materials, promotion of research on the economics of education, peer learning, and capacity building, i.e. for evidence-based policy and practice and for facilitating the policy learning process, strategy formulation and policy action. Specific added value lies in the inclusion of third countries and best use should be made of already existing programmes and cooperation structures.

Work area 2

“To foster cooperation between key stakeholders of labour market, education and research policies in order to develop learning regions and environments”

To increase innovative capacities of the labour force in the Danube Region, new forms of partnerships and cooperation among key stakeholders (labour market, education and training, research and employers) need to be further developed. Employers (private, public and voluntary) have an important role to play in identifying the knowledge, skills and competences needed in working life. To increase the employability and entrepreneurial potential of all learners, communication and active cooperation should be further developed between education and training institutions on the one hand and employers on the other.

Work area 3

“To support creativity and entrepreneurship”

A reorientation towards entrepreneurship and creativity, which constitutes a prime source of innovation, is important as a prerequisite for businesses, in particular for small and medium sized enterprises, and thus for Europe's competitiveness. This could be achieved through the introduction of innovative learning programmes to support creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship at all levels of education, through the promotion of intercultural dialogue or through language training, making use of the linguistic and cultural diversity of the Danube Region. Broader learning communities and creative partnerships, involving representatives of cultural actors, civil society and other stakeholders, should be promoted with a view to creating a climate conducive to creativity and professional and social needs, as well as individual well-being.

Work area 4

“To support lifelong learning and expanding learning mobility”

Comprehensive LLL strategies and their implementation have been identified as a priority for the development of knowledge societies. Making these effective and increasing their impact for individual learners remains a critical challenge. Institutional capacity building of LLL bodies is a prerequisite for implementing these policies. Countries in the Danube Region will coordinate on the development of National Qualification Frameworks. Specific added value lies in supporting non-EU Member States in drawing up their National Qualification Frameworks. Specific attention should be drawn to rural areas and to developing alternative employment opportunities and economic diversification for people occupied in traditional sectors where restructuring is still under way such as agriculture.

Work area 5

“To promote equity, social cohesion and active citizenship through education and training”

Education and training systems should enable all individuals to acquire and develop skills and competences required for their employability and to foster tolerance, intercultural dialogue and non-discrimination. Equal opportunities in learning can contribute towards the social inclusion of individuals from minorities and vulnerable groups, and active citizenship. Barriers for drop-outs to return to education and training need to be removed as well as preventive approaches and cooperation between education sectors strengthened. Mutual learning on best practices should be developed.

Work area 6

“To improve cross-sector policy coordination to address demographic and migration challenges”

Enhanced efforts should be pursued to develop knowledge on the status quo, on drivers and impacts of migration flows and demographic change, so to develop a basis for enhanced cooperation of different policies at all levels of governance. Cross-sector policy coordination between relevant government departments, education authorities, social services, healthcare services, cultural policy authorities, housing and spatial planning authorities as well as asylum and immigration services at local, regional and national level, as well as dialogue with civil society are essential to ensure an adequate level of support. Spatial consequences of migration-induced social, economic and cultural changes and possible responses in the framework of urban and rural development should be considered. Cooperation with existing organisations, such as the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), with their existing analysis and recommendations, would be particularly useful.

Work area 7

“To fight poverty and social exclusion of marginalised communities in the Danube Region, especially the Roma communities”

To make full use of the Danube Region's population specific focus needs to be put at empowering in particular groups in risk of poverty and ensuring them access and opportunities. Children, old people, mentally and physically disabled, immigrants, homeless, representatives of marginalised ethnic groups are the most vulnerable. Actions to reduce the number of people in risk of poverty need to complement each other, applying an integrated approach. Especially on Roma communities, whose living conditions are often especially dire and with no place in 21st century Europe, special attention must be paid. Hence the coordination of efforts between existing initiatives and actors such as the Roma Decade (2005-2015), European Roma Platform for Roma Inclusion, EURoma network and NGOs active in this field in the Danube Region is indispensable for improving the situation for Roma.

Work area 8

“To promote gender equality on the labour market, especially in payment”

Equality between women and men is one of the European Union's founding principles. The principle of equal pay for equal work dates already back to 1957, when it became part of the Treaty of Rome. To create equal opportunities for women and men on the labour market, discrimination, educational stereotypes, labour market segregation, precarious employment conditions, involuntary part-time work and the unbalanced sharing of care responsibilities with men must be overcome. The full realisation of women's potential and the full use of women's skills must be fostered with the emphasis to facilitate a better gender distribution on the labour market and to allow the number of quality jobs for women to be increased. Besides the discrimination against women in career opportunities, the discrimination against female employees with regard to their wage level is imminent. The so called gender pay gap (the average difference between men's and women's hourly gross earnings across the economy as a whole) in the EU remains at 17.8%, with heights around 30% in some EU Member States.