WCES-2010

Structural funds and the concept of lifelong learning in Romania

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Received November 12, 2009; revised December 2, 2009; accepted January 22, 2010

Abstract

This paper work is generated by the Longlife Learning concept and the opportunities offered by the Structural Funds. The subject of the LLP is very important in the context of current European and world, and is considered the cornerstone of a new society, able to adapt easily to economic and social changes caused by global crisis.

This paper is based on my previous studies and projects developed under the Structural Funds in Romania, projects were based on the concept of the LLP, as within this paper will be presented also an example of good practice.

Keywords: Lifelong learning; structural funds; human capital; knowledge based economy; training.

1. Introduction

This paper highlights the correlation between the concept of Lifelong Learning Program(LLP) and Structural Funds allocated to Romania for the period 2007-2013. LLP concept is a major objective of the Lisbon Strategy and has to develop a competitive human capital, especially in the current global economic environment, linked to an economic and social development.

LLP is a concept that is centered to human capital, which must be prepared for lifelong adaptability to labor market needs, especially in the economic crisis, which besides negative aspects, had a positive aspect in that it highlighted human capital well trained, adaptable to every challenge and request. This paper presents the concept of knowledge based economy, the future economic base, a concept supported particularly in Romania by European Social Fund (ESF) who promotes and sustains the concept of LLP as a foundation of knowledge based economy.

The topics addressed in this paper is one of the most important issues currently, considering that overcoming all the problems caused by global economic crisis can be solved more easily for the economy as long as there are well-trained human capital, that could face any challenge of crisis.

In developing countries, with economies in transition, such as Romania, the challenges are numerous in terms of economic changes. A real help to overcome these challenges came from the European Union through LLP programs.
These programs are addressed directly (through the LLP program) and indirectly through operational programs developing human resources funded by the ESF.

## 2. Lifelong Learning Program Concept and Program

Lifelong Learning Program is a European Union program for cooperation in education and training. This program aims to enhance exchanges, cooperation and mobility between education and training in the EU. Lifelong Learning Program continues Socrates Program, which ended in 2007. The period of the program is 2007-2013.

Lifelong Learning Program includes former Socrates action (mobility academic study) and Leonardo da Vinci (investments in enterprise / training).

Participating countries are: European Union member states, European Free Trade Association countries and candidate countries for integration.

Lifelong Learning Program consists of several components as following:

### 2.1 Sectoral programs

**COMENIUS** is oriented for undergraduate education, training for teaching staff in education institutions, and provide financing to make these types of actions.

In the new lifelong learning program, School Partnerships Comenius are the followers of Socrates II program. These partnerships aim to strengthen the European dimension in education by promoting cooperative activities between the schools. School partnerships fall into two categories, Projects and Bilateral/Multilateral Projects.

In the new program Lifelong Learning, bilateral projects aimed at promoting linguistic diversity in Europe and encourage the use of all official languages. So, such projects will address issues relating strictly to develop the pupils and teachers in foreign languages. Bilateral projects have duration of 2 years and require mutual exchanges of students between partner institutions.

**ERASMUS** is a sectoral program for higher education that include: student mobility (study); mobility for teachers (teaching), intensive programs, intensive language courses (EILC). ERASMUS is a part of the European Program Socrates, which aims mobility helping Universities - both of students and professors. Another objective of this program is to encourage cooperation between universities in Europe.

The way to encourage mobility, meaning the study visits, is twofold, institutional and financial support. The institutional support is accompanied by an agreement between universities for student movement, whereby they committed to receive studies without charges and, respectively, to recognize the results of your period of study spent abroad (exams, notes, loans). Financial support was a grant that will help you accomplish this shift. It is by no means a scholarship covering all expenses (transportation, accommodation, meals, books and supplies), but only an allowance has been encouraging and demonstrate the solidarity of the European Union and the governments of the countries involved. So money comes from the Romanian state budget, as well as from those of the Member States of the Union.

**LEONARDO DA VINCI** sectoral program has the objective to develop techniques for teaching / learning for all those involved in education and training (except at tertiary level), development institutions, organizations that provide / facilitate access to education and training, encouraging European cooperation in education and training, implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration concepts through innovation, testing and experimentation.

**GRUNDTVIG** is an oriented adult education program. Grundtvig program aims to provide educational alternatives and improve access to those who, regardless of age, willing to learn new skills through adult education forms. Grundtvig helps the teaching / learning of adults and is targeted to institutions or organizations that provide or facilitate their education. Any organization in the field of adult education in the formal system, non-formal or informal can participate in Grundtvig. Adults in Grundtvig meaning persons over 25 years, or a young man in this age, which is not included in the formal education system.

### 2.2 Transversal Program

This program aims to facilitate the exchange of information and experience among policy makers and educational professionals for the common interests of participating countries, especially in education pre-primary, primary, general, technical and vocational secondary (in some cases - depending the subjects of study chosen - and higher education) support participants in the knowledge of the measures already taken at European level in education
provision to-date information related to education in Europe offering the opportunity to encourage, initiate or support activities related to other actions of Program lifelong learning.

Another objective is to encourage participants in order to be aware of the role to play and as initiators or resource persons, giving them the opportunity to establish numerous contacts during their study visit paying particular attention to issues that relate to the Lisbon process.

2.3 The Jean Monnet

Jean Monnet program is an action of the European Union which relate to the development of education and academic research on European integration.

Over 800 universities in 60 countries across the globe have been included in the Jean Monnet network since 1990 with over 2,800 such actions in the field of Jean Monnet European integration studies (approximately 1,800 teachers and 250,000 students involved who have participated in such courses annually).

3. Structural Funds in Romania - Human Resources Development Sectoral Operational Program

Besides Lifelong Learning Program, with all its components, the European Union also supports the Member States also through other new integrated operational programs with an impact as great among member and new integrated states. Regarding this, member states have developed national programs to implement reforms and policy training designed to facilitate adaptation to industrial transformation through training and retraining, improve vocational integration and reintegration to the labor market, to facilitate access to training, to stimulate cooperation on training and develop the exchange of experience and best practices for training.

European Union assistance to member countries in terms of promoting economic and social is managed by European Social Fund. This support is based on the Lisbon Strategy. It wanted to be the foundation that will make the European Union the most competitive and dynamic world economy. The strategy was developed on the background of globalization and informal society development, meaning an education reform in Europe, reform developed on the concept of Lifelong Learning Program. Strategy has proposed transforming the European Union into an attractive place to invest and work, promoting knowledge and innovation and creating new jobs.

European Social Fund is dedicated to promoting employment, helping Member States to develop a competitive human capital that can cope with new global challenges. Financing from European Social Fund grant is for all member states and is one of the pillars of the Strategy for development and employment. In the period 2007-2013 were allocated funds amounting to about 75 billion Euros to European Union objectives in terms of economic and social cohesion. With European Social Fund funding, we have about 454 operational programs in the member states, some examples being:

- Lifelong learning (Austria),
- Development of human capital, knowledge, know-how and research (Belgium),
- Improving Human Capital (Germany),
- Linking life long learning and labor market (Romania),

In terms of Romania, human resources development is managed by Human Resources Development Sectoral Operational Program its programs (HRDSOP). The program - aims human capital development and increasing competitiveness, by linking education and lifelong learning and labor market and providing enhanced opportunities for future participation in the labor market a modern, flexible and inclusive of 1,650,000 people.

HRDSOP specific objectives are to promote quality in education and initial training and learning, including higher education and research, promotion of entrepreneurial culture and improving quality and labor productivity, facilitate inclusion of young and long-term unemployed into the labor market, development of a modern labor market, flexible and inclusive, promote (re)insertion in the labor market of inactive people, including rural areas, improving public services employment, access to education and labor market of vulnerable groups.

Human Resources Development Sectoral Operational Program is divided into several thematic priorities as follows:

- Priority Axis 1: Education and training in support of growth and development of knowledge society
- Priority Axis 2: Linking Lifelong Learning to labor
- Priority 3: Increasing adaptability workers and enterprises
- Priority Axis 4: Modernizing the Public Employment Service
- Priority Axis 5: Promoting active employment measures
- Priority 6: Promoting social inclusion
Within HRDSOP, lifelong learning is not addressed in a coherent and comprehensive manner in the system and educational policies. This limits the consistency and flexibility of routes on lifelong learning. Despite progress in legislation validating prior learning, use of the existing legal framework (except for initial training) remains one of the weaknesses of the process of introducing the approach of "lifelong learning" in education and training.

Insufficient development of mechanisms for transfer of learning acquisitions made between different learning contexts limits for the population, especially the adult population, to obtain formal accreditation of skills acquired in the labor market and to re-enter formal education systems. Also, the policy-making level should be greater coherence between policies in education, initial training and continuing vocational training.

Validation of learning contracts obtained a better correlation between education and initial training and continuing vocational training (CVT), improving the definition and transparency of vocational qualifications are issues to be addressed by developing and implementing the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

Progress in this area have been obtained institutional level (this way, National Council for Adult Vocational Training has been designated National Authority for Qualifications and created a National Agency for Qualifications in Higher Education), the development and activation of Sector Committees (progress is still insufficient and the financing of the Sector Committees of effective and their development, so only 16 sectoral committees were operational in 2006), and methodological plan regarding the development and validation of qualifications. NCC supports the development of lifelong learning for individuals and create a transparent system of skills that will enable the development of coherent systems initial and ongoing training from the perspective of lifelong learning and support with relevant actors involved.

4. Example of best practice - Human Resources Development Sectoral Operational Program – Romania

Title of the project "A new career - A new professional chance!"

Project to be described was requested and approved for financing in 2009, during the CALL FOR PROPOSALS nr.80 "rating - a chance for the future!" Priority Axis 2 "Linking lifelong learning and labor market" areas of intervention 2.3. "Access and participation in continuing training"

The project was supported by two private companies, training providers, one as an applicant and another as a partner.

The project idea belongs to both partners, the unfolding activities of Continuing Vocational Training (CVT) were identified staff training needs and target group to develop the funding application was attended by both partners. The implementation phase of the project both partners participate. Applicant contribution is reflected in the training professional development for learning support materials for training programs that promote, and counselling activities for professional guidance. The applicant also provide project management tracking and monitoring and reporting activities, acquire facilities necessary for developing the project in good conditions. This way he promote awareness campaigns, awareness and reporting on human capital development opportunities and organizes workshops that concern the exchange of experience and dissemination of good practice in training and professional counselling. Contribution is represented by a partner in the activities of CVT development substrate for learning, information campaigns, awareness and reporting on human capital development opportunities and participate in the organization of workshops that aims to exchange experience and disseminate best CVT practices and professional counselling. Related to the expertise and human resources involved in team management and implementation, provide most of the management team, actively coordinate implementation and monitoring, regional specialists and trainers, vocational guidance counsellors and professional development learning material and advice. Coordinators and partners provide technical specialists, trainers and coordinating promotional activities. In terms of co-partners contribute equally (50% per partner).

The project objectives are one global and many specific.

The Global objective is to develop human capital through activities of CVT for better preparation and training / retraining related to labor market needs.

Specific objectives are to provide CVT for the target group in areas of competitive labor market, certification programs acquaintance in training by the target group, supporting access of target group members to professional counselling, promotion and awareness among target group members and the public development opportunities offered by participation in training programs financed by European Social Fund (ESF).
Other horizontal objectives of the project are Sustainable Development, Innovation and ICT, Active aging, Inter-regional approach.

Dissemination of best practices and exchange experience is related to vocational guidance and counselling continuing vocational training (CVT). The project pursues its objective benchmarks of Priority Axis 2 "Linking lifelong learning and labor market" areas of intervention 2.3. "Access and participation in continuing training" as training of specialists in areas that will contribute to economic development in a knowledge society and provide opportunities for retraining and specialization for the project beneficiaries. Human Resources Development Sectoral Operational Program project meets the general objective which aims at developing human capital and increasing competitiveness by linking with CVT labor market demands.

The link between the Human Resources Development Sectoral Operational Program and Community Strategic Guidelines on Cohesion 2007 - 2013 are made for Priority Axis by attracting and retaining as many people in employment and modernize social protection systems, improve adaptability of workers and enterprises and the flexibility of the work, and Increase investment in human capital through education and training, administrative capacity, the health workforce.

The applicant aims to implement a similar project focusing on the training and the public administration for training personnel in this field.

5. Conclusion

Importance of funding Lifelong Learning Program projects and not only from structural funds is crucial to achieving the goals of Lisbon Strategy and the objective to make Europe the most competitive and dynamic world economy, which can not be met without the basis of a competitive human capital. In developing member countries they not have the financial capacity to support competitive Longlife Learning Programs and they are not able make a good reform of education, able to support union objectives.

In conclusion, Longlife Learning Programs and their support are the cornerstone of a dynamic economy, capable to face the current challenges of world’s economy changes.

References

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