



# **Impact of ongoing reforms in education and training on the adult learning sector**

**(2<sup>nd</sup> phase)**

**Final report**

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drs. S.D. Broek, drs. B.J. Buischool, dr. B. Hake

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## Preface

Research voor Beleid (Zoetermeer, the Netherlands) is pleased to submit the final report with the outcomes of the study on the assessment of the impact of ongoing reforms in education and training in the adult learning sector. This study is a follow-up of a previous study commissioned by the European Commission on the impact of ongoing reforms in education and training in the adult learning sector carried out in 2009.

The aim of this study was to provide a thorough analysis of ongoing developments, reforms and modernisation in the adult learning sector in the countries participating in the Education and Training 2010 process. In order to pursue this aim, data was gathered in 32 countries and case studies were carried out. The data gathering is done by experts of the ESREA-network and is based mainly on existing literature on national level. The outcomes of the data gathering were intensively discussed by the experts and the research team during an expert meeting to come up with concrete conclusions and recommendations.

During the study, the research team met on regular basis with the European Commission and informed the Adult Learning Working Group (ALWG) regularly on the progress made. The research team presented preliminary outcomes during ALWG-meetings in Brussels on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June 2010, the 25<sup>th</sup> of October 2010, and the 31<sup>st</sup> of January 2011.

The report consists of two volumes. The first volume contains the main report. The second volume is an annex-report containing the detailed descriptions of the methodology used, examples of measures implemented to increase participation in the countries, descriptions of the case studies and outcomes of the expert meeting. Furthermore, a literature list is included used for the analyses on country level. The main report consists of three parts:

- Part A: Aims of the study, the object of study and methodology
- Part B: Outcomes of the study
- Part C: Final conclusions and recommendations

The research team would like to thank firstly all experts involved in this study (Michael Osborne, Kate Sankey, Eva Andersson, Larissa Jogi, Marin Gross, Ewa Kurantowicz, Adrianna Nizinska, Bettina Dausien, Daniela Rothe, Erik Kats, Paula Guimarães, Emilio Lucio-Villegas Ramos, Peter Mayo, Nena Mijoc and George Zarifis). Secondly, we would like to thank the officials from Unit B3 of DG EAC, especially Maike Koops and Martina Ni-Cheallaigh, guiding this study and finally, the Adult Learning Working Group members for their support and feedback during the study.

*Zoetermeer (the Netherlands)*

*Simon Broek*

*Bert-Jan Buiskool*

*Barry Hake*



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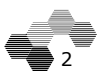
## Used abbreviations of countries

AT	Austria
BE	Belgium
BG	Bulgaria
HR	Croatia
CY	Cyprus
CZ	Czech Republic
DK	Denmark
EE	Estonia
FI	Finland
FR	France
DE	Germany
EL	Greece
HU	Hungary
IS	Iceland
IE	Ireland
IT	Italy
LV	Latvia
LI	Liechtenstein
LT	Lithuania
LU	Luxembourg
MT	Malta
NL	Netherlands
NO	Norway
PL	Poland
PT	Portugal
RO	Romania
SK	Slovakia
SI	Slovenia
ES	Spain
SE	Sweden
TR	Turkey
UK	United Kingdom



## **Part A: Aims of the study, the object of study and methodology**

*Part A will present the aims of the study, the object of study and the analytical framework underlying the data gathering. Furthermore, the methodology is introduced.*



# 1 Aim of the study and analytical framework

## 1.1 Aims of the study

This study should provide a thorough analysis of ongoing developments, reforms and modernisation in the adult learning sector in the countries participating in the Education and Training 2010 process.

The overall objectives of this project are:

- A thorough analysis of ongoing developments, reforms and modernisation in the adult learning sector in the countries participating in the Education and Training 2010 process;
- An assessment of the role of the European Commission stimulating adult learning;
- Identify conditions for successful and effective adult learning policies on EU and Member State level.

The specific focus of this study is the question concerning the articulation between the demand for, and supply of adult learning and the ways in which policies seek to improve the articulation between demand for and provision of learning opportunities. The most basic indicator of an effective adult learning system is the participation rate by adults taking part in adult learning activities, as well as educational attainment and qualification levels.

## 1.2 The object of study

### 1.2.1 Strategies for increasing and widening participation

Recent developments in empirical research on participation in lifelong learning point to the importance of understanding unequal participation in adult learning in terms of the **organisation of social and educational policy** systems<sup>1</sup>. This perspective on participation in adult learning argues that quantitative and qualitative findings with regard to barriers to participation in adult learning need to be integrated with the political economy of investments in adult learning. This entails that boosting the levels of participation in lifelong learning is a policy question involving the re-distribution of investments in initial and post-initial learning in order to create new "structures of learning opportunities" for adults throughout the individual life course. Understandings of the broad structural conditions relevant to differential patterns of participation could possibly make a contribution to the formulation of targeted policy instruments aimed at overcoming both structural and individual factors in order to lower thresholds and encourage greater participation in adult learning.

A distinction is made between increasing and widening participation. Although the study takes both concepts into account it is important to separate both:

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<sup>1</sup> Rubenson, K. & Dejardins, R. (2009), "The impact of welfare state regimes on barriers to participation in adult education: A bounded-agency model", *Adult Education Quarterly*, vol. 59, no. 3, 187-207.

- **Increasing participation:** The primary goal of increasing participation is increasing the numbers of people participating in education and training. This is directly quantifiable in the participation rates.
- **Widening participation:** It consists of an attempt to increase not only the numbers of people entering a certain kind of education or education in general, but also the proportion from so-called "under-represented groups". It does not only take into account, therefore, the quantitative side, but the qualitative side of participation as well.

Increasing or widening the participation of adults in lifelong learning entails different strategies and policy instruments. In short, widening participation ranges from economic, financial measures to stimulate adults to get involved in learning, to outreach activities of learning providers. All strategies implemented to increase the number of adults in education, or to reach for disadvantaged groups concern the articulation between supply and demand of lifelong learning.

### 1.2.2 Mapping adult learning policies

In order to reach the objectives presented in section 1.1, it is necessary to map adult learning policies throughout Europe in a consistent way. In order to do so, first we will give a working definition of adult learning and the adult learning sector and secondly, we will present an analytical framework stipulating the issues that need to be taken into account in comparing adult learning policies.

In most Member States adult learning has a longstanding tradition and is rooted in different historical backgrounds. Within the policy of the European Commission, adult learning is primarily taken as part of the wider context of lifelong learning.

#### Definition of adult learning

Definitions of adult learning vary. In the European Commission Communication, *it is never too late to learn*, the field of adult learning is defined as all forms of learning undertaken by adults after having left initial education and training, however far this process may have gone (e.g., including tertiary education). The recently published Study on European Terminology in Adult Learning emphasised that this also includes university-level or higher education undertaken after a break (other than for deferred entry) since leaving initial education and training.<sup>1</sup> One of the key characteristics of the field of adult learning is its enormous variety. All kinds of educational activities are established to meet an ever larger variety of the learning needs of different groups in society. The term lifelong learning is often also used for adult learning, but also includes initial education as well: education from 'cradle to grave'.

#### The context in which adult learning takes place

The context in which adult learning takes place is characterised by many variables. It depends on the socio-economic and political structure of the country, the history with regard to lifelong learning, the articulation between supply and demand, the stakeholders involved, the structures established, and institutional patterns of provision etc. Furthermore,

<sup>1</sup> NRDC (2010), Study on European Terminology in Adult Learning for a common language and common understanding and monitoring of the sector

it should be noticed that there exists a degree of overlap and interaction between educational sectors. Therefore, measures and policies in one educational sector might affect the dynamics in another sector.

### **Reforms in the adult learning sector**

Although developments in the education and training systems strongly influence the adult learning sector, in this study, we focus on reforms specifically related to the adult learning sector. In this respect it is necessary to determine what we consider as reform. There are various definitions of reforms, all having their specific focus and emphasis.<sup>1</sup> Reforms are often described as 'corrections' of the existing practice to better equip structures, policies to reach the objectives set. Reforms therefore, are implemented within a strategic framework, with existing structures and measures that need to be reformed in order to meet the targets and objectives set in that strategy. They always aim at structural changes, are implemented deliberately and take into account an entire policy field including stakeholders. Other reforms in the education and training sector which indirectly influence the adult learning sector, or the participation of adults in education, will not be the core object of study, but can be included in the contextual descriptions of a reform.

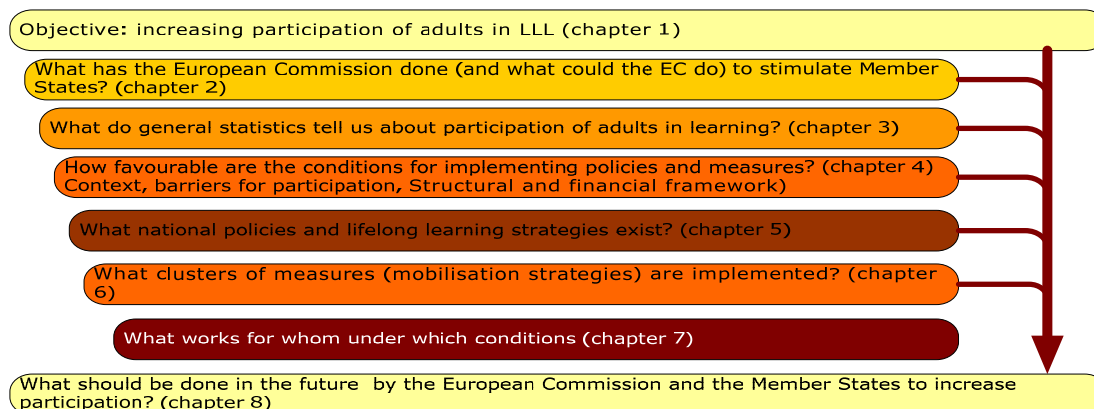
### **Framework for the study and structure of the report**

As already indicated, efforts in the Member States to increase and widen participation of adults in learning always take place within a historically grown context, political and legal frameworks, structural and financial framework. Moreover, countries have specific barriers that hamper participation of adults of certain target groups. To increase the participation of adults, different mobilisation strategies can be deployed, containing various measures each affecting the interaction of supply and demand of adult learning in a country. These measures may lead to outputs, results and finally to impact on reaching the Lisbon-goals. Figure 1.1 includes an overview of the above described policy cycle that form the basis for data gathering on country level.

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<sup>1</sup> The OECD provides the following definition, used in their statistical work: "a reform is a process in which changes are made to the formal "rules of the game" – including laws, regulations and institutions – to address a problem or achieve a goal such as economic growth, environmental protection or poverty alleviation. Usually it involves a complex political process, particularly when it is perceived that the reform redistributes economic, political, or social power." OECD (2006), DAC Guidelines and Reference Series Applying Strategic Environmental Assessment: Good Practice Guidance for Development Co-operation, OECD, Paris. Other definitions use descriptions such as, deliberate and essential improvements in public management structures, processes and policy content. Pollitt and Bouckaert (2000).

**Figure 1.1** Analytical framework for assessing strategies and measures for increasing the participations of adult in LLL



Source: *Research voor Beleid*

The layers of this analytical framework guided us through the research process and forms the structure of this report. First of all, in Part B we will address the background of adult learning policies in the EU and we will focus on finding conditions for successful policies to be implemented. Subsequently, we will focus on the policies themselves and measures taken. Finally, we will assess what kind of policies and measures work for what kind of target groups under which specific conditions. Furthermore, we will examine what Member States can do to increase participation and what the European Commission can do to support the Member States in pursuing the agreed objective of 15% participation of adults in 2020.

### 1.3 Methodology of the study

In order to pursue the above mentioned objectives of the study, the emphasis has been on gathering data from all the participating countries (32), condense data and analyse the findings. In the annex-report a detailed description of the methodology can be found. Here, a short overview of the research activities is provided.

- 1 Collecting data at National Level: on the basis of existing literature, country experts analysed the situation of adult learning in the 32 countries
- 2 Inventory on European Level: The research team conducted a literature review, and interviewed a limited number of policy-makers at European Level (4 policy makers of DG EAC).
- 3 Drawing up the case-study reports: The case studies were aimed at mapping the dynamics of a specific, effective instrument, taken into account the broader context, policy and strategy in which the instrument is implemented. The main source for the case-studies was existing literature on the instruments and (evaluation) reports implemented in the countries. If there were "blanks" in the datasets for the case studies, the cluster experts organised additional interviews with relevant stakeholders (policy makers, academics, and/or sectoral organisations).
- 4 Expert meeting: The analyses and provisional results were discussed during a meeting between the core team, the cluster experts and the European Commission. This meeting

served as an occasion for gaining a deeper understanding of the outcomes and their potential impact for future policies and strategies in the field of adult learning and mobilisation strategies to increase levels of participation. For the expert meeting the country experts and a representative of the European Commission was invited.

- 5 Comparative analysis: towards policy recommendations: The research team mainly focused on the extrapolation of explanations that were found in the country analysis, the case studies and finally explanations that that were formulated during the expert meeting.

To this report, an Annex is attached containing a literature list of the general sources used in this report. The Annex-report (different volume) comprises amongst others, the national sources used to analyse the situation on a country level.



## Part B: Outcomes of the study

*In Part B the outcomes of the research activities are discussed. In this, the layers of the analytical framework will guide us through the adult learning policies and initiatives. Chapter 2 will focus on the role of the European Commission; chapter 3 will provide some statistics on participation. Then, chapter 4 will review the background against which policies and measures are implemented in the countries to increase participation; chapter 5 will assess what has been done in countries in terms of developing policies and chapter 6 will focus on mobilisation strategies. Chapter 7 will go into the question on effects of policies and finally, chapter 8 will look at the question what works for whom under which conditions.*



## **2 European policies in adult learning**

The objective of this study is to identify how the Member States could increase the participation of adults in learning. In this, the European Commission has played an important role in the process of developing the adult learning sector. This chapter examines the role of the European Commission in supporting and encouraging the Member States in achieving this objective. Moreover, this chapter deals with the question whether there is room for improvement in the European Commissions' support and encouragement of the Member States.

Firstly, the OMC in the framework of adult learning and specifically the Action Plan on Adult Learning is elaborated upon. Secondly, the governance structure of the European Commission is discussed. In this section, we also define certain conditions that are crucial for a successful implementation of the OMC as a governance structure. Thirdly, on the basis of the conditions for successful implementation of the OMC suggestions for improvement are given that contribute to improving support and encouragement to Member States. Finally, a conclusion is given.

### **2.1 Initiatives of the European Commission and OMC in the framework of adult learning**

#### **2.1.1 Needs and challenges for adult learning**

The Lisbon European Council emphasised the role of education and training in developing the most competitive and dynamic knowledge based economy capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion. To this end the Lisbon and subsequent European Councils called for concerted efforts in modernising E&T systems. The role of adult learning in this context, in addition to its contribution to personal development and fulfilment, is increasingly recognised on European as well as national level by Member States' National Reform Programmes.

Recent research confirms the importance of investing in adult learning<sup>1</sup>. Public and private benefits include greater employability, increased productivity and better-quality employment, reduced expenditure in areas such as unemployment benefits, welfare payments and early-retirement pensions, but also increased social returns in terms of improved civic participation, better health, lower incidence of criminality, and greater individual well-being and fulfilment. Research on older adults indicates that those who engage in learning are healthier, with a consequent reduction in healthcare costs.

Adult learning could help overcoming the following challenges:

- Rapidly accelerating skills redundancy, while more jobs are in need for high skills
- The high number of low-skilled workers in Europe

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<sup>1</sup> OECD (2005), Promoting Adult Learning.

- high level of early school leaving, while a high number of adults have reading and writing problems, encouraging the need for second chance opportunities
- Growing challenges of an ageing population and migration
- High incidence of poverty and social exclusion
- Widely varying participation rates in lifelong learning across the EU
- Need for active engagement of citizens with Europe

There is now growing discussion about ways to increase the participation of adults in education and training throughout the life course. The question is how to achieve the benchmark of the participation of 15% of adults in lifelong learning (increased from 12.5% in the updated framework for European cooperation in education and training adopted as Conclusions of the Council in May 2009) and to reduce the imbalance in participation between highly skilled (3 times more likely to participate) and low skilled adults.<sup>1</sup> It is vitally important that adults continue to learn, to develop and up-skill their competences to meet the challenges Europe is facing.

Although the role of adult learning is increasingly recognised for making the knowledge-based economy and society a reality, implementation of successful policies lags behind.<sup>2</sup> Within the framework of "New Skills for New Jobs" the bridge between the world of work and the world of education should be built stronger in order to upgrade, adapt and widen the skills of individuals to create and fill jobs of tomorrow.<sup>3</sup> Most education and training systems are still largely focused on the education and training of young people and limited progress has been made in changing systems to reflect the need for lifelong learning throughout the life course and in particular in adult learning. Further action is therefore needed to confront the challenges facing the European Union and the Member States, including in-sight in the effects of ongoing developments and reforms in the adult learning sector in Europe.

### **2.1.2 EU policies in the area of adult learning**

Adult learning has risen on the EU agenda, being increasingly acknowledged as a key component of lifelong learning policies across Europe. Since 2000 several European policy initiatives have supported the adult learning sector, in particular the memorandum on lifelong learning in 2000, the communication on making lifelong learning a reality in 2002, the 2006 Commission Communication "it is never too late to learn" and the 2007 Action plan on adult learning "it is always a good time to learn" supported by the Education and Training 2010

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<sup>1</sup> In the findings of Adult Education Survey 2007 the participation in formal and non-formal education was for people with pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education - levels 0-2 (ISCED 1997) 17.5%, for people with upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education - levels 3-4 (ISCED 1997) 34.7% and finally for people with Tertiary education - levels 5-6 (ISCED 1997) 57.9%. However, more recent presentations based on Adult Education Survey don't seem to support this huge difference between the participation of highly skilled and low skilled.

<sup>2</sup> "Modernising education and training: a vital contribution to prosperity and social cohesion in Europe – 2006 Joint Interim Report of the Council and the Commission on progress under the Education & Training 2010 work programme", European Council (2010), Joint Progress Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the "Education & Training 2010" work programme.

<sup>3</sup> See: European Commission (2010), *New Skills for New Jobs: Action Now*, a report by the Expert Group on New Skills for New Jobs prepared by the European Commission.

work programme – and now on the strategic framework E&T 2020 –and lifelong learning programme (including the Grundtvig programme). Also the Council conclusions of 2008 on adult learning address the importance of adult learning.

In this section, firstly the main policy agenda directly related to adult learning is introduced, while in section 2.1.3 concrete EU instrument and tools are discussed.

In 2000 the **Lisbon European Council** set itself the goal of making the European Union the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world. Education and training are critical factors for achieving the Lisbon strategy's objectives of enhancing economic growth, competitiveness and social inclusion. In this context, the European Commission stresses the importance of lifelong learning and the role of adult learning, including its contribution to personal development and fulfilment in reaching those objectives<sup>1</sup>. In order to pursue the Lisbon objectives, it was felt that action was needed to boost adult learning in the European Union. **The Memorandum on lifelong learning** was published in 2000, after a consultation round amongst the Member States. The objective of the memorandum was to stimulate Member States in establishing structures to reach adults and to include them in the learning society. This has been deemed as a necessity for the construction of European knowledge economies. The consultation on the basis of the Memorandum resulted in six key messages to make lifelong learning a reality, ranging from new basic skills for all, more investment in human resources, innovation in teaching and learning, valuing learning, rethinking guidance and counselling, and bringing learning closer to home<sup>2</sup>. The memorandum was followed by a **Communication on making lifelong learning a reality**, contributing to the establishment of a European area of lifelong learning, to empower citizens to move freely between learning settings, jobs, regions and countries, making the most of their knowledge and competences, and to meet the goals and ambitions of the European Union and the candidate countries to be more prosperous, inclusive, tolerant and democratic. The Member States were encouraged to take up the message and to invest in their lifelong learning policies in order to increase the participation of adults in learning. The Council resolution on lifelong learning reconfirmed the importance of implementing lifelong learning strategies in 2002.<sup>3</sup>

The European Commission has called on the Member States to promote adult learning and to place it firmly on the political agenda by adopting the **Communication on adult learning It is never too late to learn** in 2006<sup>4</sup>, followed by the Communication in 2007, on the **Action Plan on Adult Learning: It is always a good time to learn**.<sup>5</sup> Both Communications have been reinforced by Conclusions of the Council in 2008. The Action Plan on Adult Learning aims to help remove the high thresholds and obstacles that prevent adults from

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<sup>1</sup> The Commission's 2001 Communication, Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality, and the 2002 Council Resolution on lifelong learning.

<sup>2</sup> Commission of the European Communities (2000), COMMISSION STAFFWORKING PAPER: A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, SEC(2000) 1832: <http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/pdf/MemorandumEng.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Council of the European Union (2002), COUNCIL RESOLUTION of 27 June 2002 on lifelong learning (2002/C 163/01)

<sup>4</sup> Commission of the European Communities (2006), Communication from the Commission on adult learning: it is never too late to learn, COM (2006)

<sup>5</sup> Commission of the European Communities (2007), Action Plan on Adult Learning, COM(2007) 558 final: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/adult/com558\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/adult/com558_en.pdf)

engaging in learning activities, and to improve the quality and efficiency of the adult learning sector. It complements this with a call to ensure adequate levels of investment in, and better monitoring of, the adult learning sector. In order to enhance policy development in the sector, improve governance and deliver better services, the Action Plan suggests five areas of action:

- 1) analyse the effects of reforms in all sectors of education and training in Member States on adult learning;
- 2) improve the quality of provisions in the adult learning sector;
- 3) increase the possibilities for adults to go "one step up" - to achieve a qualification at least one level higher than before;
- 4) speed up the process of assessment of skills and social competences and have them validated and recognised in terms of learning outcomes;
- 5) improve the monitoring of the adult learning sector.

The Action Plan, which runs until the end of 2010, foresees continual monitoring of progress made in developing the sector, and the results achieved under each priority. To provide and support the European Commission's services with policy advice and assistance in implementing the Action Plan, the European Commission established the **Working Group on Adult Learning**. The activities of the Working Group are guided by the actions set out in the Action Plan itself and the actions proposed in the Council Conclusions and the Resolution of the European Parliament. The members represent the Member States, some of the EFTA/EFTA countries, European Social partners (European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), Business Europe), European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA), European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), European Training Foundation (ETF), European University Continuing Education Network (EUCEN), European Association of craft, small and medium-sized enterprises (UEAPME) and EURYDICE.<sup>1</sup> The members of the working group meet regularly three/four times a year in the initial stages. In cooperation with the European Commission the Adult Learning Working Group organised several activities for the period 2008-2010, such as regional meetings, peer learning activities, workshops and research studies. Focus groups linked to the five key actions, as presented above, helped to give guidance and direction to the work of the European Commission and the working group. These focus groups were designed "to give advice and guidance at strategic points in the development of the Action Plan follow up activities."<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, four regional meetings were held in October-November 2009 to discuss recent developments, share good practices, disseminate results and consult the Member States on future actions in the field of adult learning. Several Peer Learning Activities (PLAs) were organised according to the themes of the five priorities. Three PLAs took place to discuss priority action 3 ("one-step-up"), another PLA concerned priority action 4 (validate and recognise skills and competences), and on the last PLA priority action 5 (to improve the monitoring of adult the adult learning sector) was discussed. Priority action 2 (to improve the quality of adult learning) was addressed by a workshop in June 2010. Other workshops were also organised on the theme of higher education, financing and basic skills. In addition several research studies were carried out to increase the knowledge on adult learning in Europe. The Working Group and focus groups have played an important role in shaping

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<sup>1</sup> Countries that are member of the ALWG: AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, EE, FI, FR, DE, EL, HU, IE, IT, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SK, SI, ES, SE, UK. Furthermore, HR, IS, LI, NO.

<sup>2</sup> GHK (2010), "Action Plan on Adult learning. Report of the Adult Learning Working Group." p.17.

these studies. Furthermore, the European Commission also reported on all the activities which had been taking place, such as the regional meetings, PLAs and workshops.<sup>1</sup> Reports can be found on the Knowledge System for Lifelong Learning website.<sup>2</sup>

The **Council Conclusions of 22 May 2008 on adult learning**<sup>3</sup> emphasize the key role which adult learning can play in meeting the goals of the Lisbon Strategy, by fostering social cohesion, providing citizens with the skills required to find new jobs and helping Europe to better respond to the challenges of globalisation. In particular, there is a need to:

- raise the skills levels of a still significant number of low-skilled workers;
- address the problem of the persistently high number of early school leavers by offering a second chance to those who enter adult age without a qualification;
- combat social exclusion, paying more attention to the lifelong learning and training requirements of older workers and migrants;
- ensure the efficiency, effectiveness and quality of adult learning, with the aim of increasing active participation in such learning.

The Council invites the European Commission to support Member States in further developing and improving adult learning in terms not only of increased opportunities, broader access and greater participation, but also of more relevant, results-oriented learning outcomes. The Lisbon strategy, including a strong emphasis on education and training, is being continued with **Europe 2020**. EU 2020 includes smart growth - developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation – together with sustainable and inclusive growth as its three mutually reinforcing priorities which will help the EU to come out stronger of the crisis<sup>4</sup>. The place education and training was given in both strategies clearly demonstrate that this policy area is considered highly important in the EU. Just the way EU 2020 replaced the Lisbon Strategy, *the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training* (E&T 2020) adopted in 2009, replaced the Education and Training 2010 work programme launched in 2001. E&T 2020 sets four strategic objectives for education and training policies:

- Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality;
- Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training;
- Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship;
- Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training<sup>5</sup>.

Overseeing the objectives of the E&T 2020 adult learning could especially contribute to the personal, social fulfilment of all citizens (and indirectly professional fulfilment) and promoting democratic values, social cohesion, active citizenship and intercultural dialogue (and indirectly economic prosperity and employability). Analysing the strategic objectives, one can conclude that the importance of adult education and lifelong learning is emphasized in the first strategic objective on making lifelong learning and mobility a reality, while the third objective refers to the promotion of equity, social cohesion and active citizenship, especially in relation to the disadvantaged groups. Also reference is made to the importance of

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<sup>1</sup> GHK (2010), "Action Plan on Adult learning. Report of the Adult Learning Working Group.". p.17.-20

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.kslll.net/> .

<sup>3</sup> Council of the European Union (2008), Council conclusions of 22 May 2008 on adult learning (2008/C 140/09)

<sup>4</sup> EU 2020: [http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/index_en.htm)

<sup>5</sup> ET 2020: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc1120\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc1120_en.htm)

second chance education and the provision of more personalised learning. The fourth strategic objective refers to enhancing creativity and innovation, entrepreneurship at all levels of education. Although no specific reference has been made to adults, this objective refers to a better linkage to a wide range of learning environments, such as the workplace.

The policies from other DGs of the European Commission highly affect developments in education and training. Especially the **Employment Guidelines** proposed by the European Commission and approved by the Council, emphasise the importance of education on the work floor. Important within the frame of adult learning are amongst others, the second guideline addressing the development of a skilled workforce responding to labour market needs and promoting lifelong learning, and the third guideline addressing the quality and performance of education and training systems at all levels and increasing participation in tertiary or equivalent education.

### 2.1.3 Concrete policy instruments

There are a number of EU policy instruments that can contribute to reaching the aims and goals of adult learning (related) policies, as described in the previous section.

First of all, the **Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP)** was initiated by the European Commission as a continuation of the Socrates programmes to develop the education and training sector in the European Union. The sub programme Grundtvig is addressing adult learning in particular. Grundtvig, covering 4 percent of the total LLP budget, aims to contribute to the teaching and study needs of learners in adult education. Moreover, it does not only contribute to improving the quality, but it also tries to stimulate people to take part in adult education. Grundtvig has developed considerably into a broad based programme offering a range of opportunities for joint partnerships involving local and small scale providers (learning partnerships), large scale projects for generating and transferring innovative approaches, and European networks in key areas of adult learning. The mobility grants for adult education staff and, more recently adult learners are further key feature of the programme. As a result we can conclude that the Grundtvig programme play an important role in the LLP, providing the opportunity to improve competences for those adults, who are not covered by the other sectoral programmes (Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci, and Comenius programme) and especially the disadvantaged groups and in marginal social contexts (such as the elderly and those who left education without basic qualification). For the future of the LLP, a major challenge is to find effective ways and means of developing synergies between Grundtvig and the other sectoral programmes which also target forms of adult learning. Erasmus, e.g. is less successful in reaching adult students, who combine work and study. The same counts for the Leonardo programme (focussing mainly on IVET) and Comenius (not focussing on second chance education). Moreover, for future programming, one should reflect on the balance of funding within the programme between initial education and further training, second chance education and adult learning in Europe.

Adult learning policies are often geared towards employment policies. Therefore, adult learning is often included in **national development plans**, human resources plans, and plans that use **European Social Funds**. In many Member States, and especially those that

entered the European Union recently, ESF is responsible for a big part of the developments in the adult learning sector.

A variety of **European tools** has been developed supporting the educational policies in the Member States that affect adult learning as well. The most relevant European tools are:

- **ECTS:** ECTS facilitates the recognition of higher education studies (formal, non-formal and informal). The system is used across Europe for credit transfer (student mobility) and credit accumulation (learning paths towards a degree). It also informs curriculum design and quality assurance.
- **EQF:** the European Qualification Framework stimulates comparability and alignment of qualifications across the Member States, through the development and implementation of NQFs. The referencing of national qualifications frameworks and systems to EQF is in progress and should be completed by 2012.
- **ECVET:** ECVET is a voluntary framework describing qualifications in terms of learning outcomes. Each learning outcome is associated with a certain number of ECVET points developed on the basis of common European standards. 60 points correspond to the learning outcomes achieved in a year of full-time VET.
- **EQARF/EQAVET:** European Quality assurance reference framework for Vocational education and training. EQARF/EQAVET (European Quality Assurance Reference Framework) is developed to serve as a reference instrument in helping Member States to promote and monitor continuous improvement of their VET systems based on common European references.
- **Europass:** Europass makes skills and qualifications clearly and easily understood in Europe (European Union, EFTA/EEA and candidate countries) by providing standardised CV templates, a glossary and promoting the use of European diploma supplements.
- **European guidelines for recognition of non-formal and informal learning:** Developed by the OMC Learning Outcomes Group and published by CEDEFOP, provides guidelines and checklists to set up validation processes in the Member States.<sup>1</sup>

In the following section we will discuss one of the main European governance tool for improving the adult learning system in different Member States in more detail, namely the Open Method of Coordination.

## 2.2

### 2.3 The Open Method of Coordination

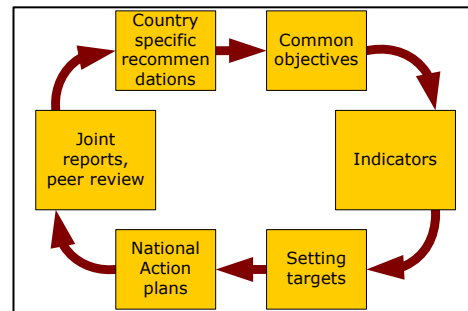
Every Member State has the authority to shape its own education policies, since under the subsidiary principle the European Union does not interfere with national policies. In order to nonetheless encourage the integration of policy measures and the exchange of best practices, several instruments are available under the Open Method of Coordination. The open method of coordination is 'designed to help Member States to progressively develop their policies', as it was been defined at the Lisbon meeting in 2000. It consists in clear guidelines, timetables, indicators and benchmarks to make policies and best practices comparable and makes possible the exchange of ideas, best practices and knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup> CEDEFOP (2009), European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning.

Although the OMC mostly consists of some general actions, a specific toolbox exists for every policy area. The many national differences that exist and the differences in time and resources that are needed require a certain amount of flexibility in the choice of instruments in order to reach the goals. Therefore, not all of the following actions are always put into practice. However, it gives a clear overview of the steps generally taken in the process of the implementation of the OMC:

- definition of common objectives to guide national policy
- formulation of guidelines
- agreement on a list of indicators and benchmarks
- translating guidelines in national action plans (NAPs)
- comparison national results and identification best or good practice
- monitoring, peer review and evaluation
- provision of learning opportunities
- development of national policy
- re-formulation of guidelines
- results assessed



Source: Ter Haar 2008, 4<sup>1</sup>

While in theory the OMC is supranational, the main Community institutions are given substantial power to have influence in the process.<sup>2</sup> Although the OMC is mainly based on co-operation, co-ordination is needed to bind the national actors. Hence, the European Commission, and the European Council indeed have significant influence in how the OMC should be implemented. This argument is supported by the different steps taken in the process.

In order to analyse the work done by the European Commission to encourage the Member States to increase participation rates in adult learning, by means of the Action Plan on Adult Learning, and to be able to make any recommendations for the future it is important to take into account that the Action Plan was designed in the framework of the OMC. The OMC was introduced as a new method in order to achieve the Lisbon goals in 2010 and "aims to spread best practices and achieve greater convergence towards the main EU goals".<sup>3</sup>

Before we will look at instruments and measures the European Commission implemented in the last years to stimulate Member States to develop policies to increase the participation of adult in learning, this chapter first tries to identify some criteria that should be taken into account when measuring the effectiveness and efficiency of OMC-processes in general, to provide a framework for future possibilities for improvement of the processes.

<sup>1</sup> Haar, ter, Beryl (2008), The True Raison d'être of the Open Method of Coordination. Leiden University.

<sup>2</sup> Regent, Sabrina (2003), 'The Open method of Coordination: A New Supranational Form of Governance?'. European Law Journal. Vol.9. No.2: 190-214. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., p. 191

<sup>3</sup> Eurofound (2007), Open method of coordination:

<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/areas/industrialrelations/dictionary/definitions/openmethodofcoordination.htm>

From the literature certain conditions can be distilled that are crucial for successful implementation of the OMC. These conditions are presented and explained in the following table and paragraph. As different conditions might apply to the EU or to the Member States a distinction has been made.

**Table 2.1** Conditions for successful implementation of the OMC<sup>1</sup>

Formula for success	Operationalisation	
	EU	MS
High level of institutionalisation	→ Strong leadership → Treaty base	→ Clear organisational structure → National representative
Presence of conflict between MS with <i>incentive or reluctance to act</i>	→ Presence of MS with incentive to act that will take on the lead to persuade the reluctant MS	→ Debate on national priorities
Preparatory political involvement	→ Previous EU actions in certain policy fields	→ Embeddedness in culture → Time needed to gain political support
Availability of specific objectives, benchmarks and indicators	→ On EU level	→ On MS level
Involvement and cooperation of stakeholders	→ Active engagement in working groups and meetings	→ Active engagement in working groups and meetings
Common concern	→ Discourse → Shared responsibility	→ Voluntary involvement civil society

Source: Several sources, adjusted by Research voor Beleid

In the section below we further explain how these conditions for successful implementation of the OMC apply for the specific situation of adult learning in Europe, confronting both theory and practice with the aim of identifying where there is room for improvement.

## 2.4 OMC in adult learning: how to improve?

### 2.4.1 Level of institutionalisation

*One of the conditions of successful implementation of the OMC is a **high level of institutionalisation**. This means that an organisational structure exists where people continuously work on the coordination and improvement of a specific sector. Someone has to take on the role of coordinator in order to coordinate a large scale cooperation process such as the OMC. As the European Commission only has limited competences a certain treaty base must exist which allows the European Commission to exert some influence. Also at the national level there needs to be a clear organisational structure*

<sup>1</sup> Gornitzka, Ase (2005), *Coordinating Policies for a "Europe of Knowledge" Emerging practices of the "Open Method of Coordination" in education and research*. Oslo: Centre for European Studies. Working paper No.16. March 2005; Humburg, Martin (2008), *The Open Method of Coordination and European Integration. The Example of European Educational Policy*. Berlin: Jean Monnet Chair for European Integration and the Freie Universität Berlin. Working paper No.8; Newgov (2005), *Classifying and mapping OMC in different policy areas*. Reference number: 02/D09. Dublin: University College Dublin; Ruiter, de, Rik (2010). 'Variations on a Theme. Governing the Knowledge-Based Society in the EU through Methods of Open Coordination in Education and R&D'. *European Integration*. Vol.32. No.2: 157-173. Routledge Taylor and Francis Group; Tholoniati, Luc (2010), 'The Career of the Open Method of Coordination: Lessons from a 'Soft' EU Instrument'. *West European Politics*. Vol.33. No.1: 93-117. Routledge Taylor and Francis Group.

*coordinated by a particular party. Someone has to take the lead in order to get the subject on everyone's agenda and to create a platform for discussion.*

Concerning the level of institutionalisation in the field of adult learning we can conclude that on the EU level as well as on the national level institutions, regulations and strategic plans have been established in order to improve the adult learning system. The adult learning sector is already institutionalised at the European level. However, the Member States' adult learning sectors differ enormously and despite all efforts in the framework of the OMC institutionalisation is scattered. Regularly changing regimes, ideology and positions at the European and national level make it difficult to keep items on the agenda. Furthermore, adult learning is often addressed as a part of the overall education sector instead of being addressed as a particular sector. The institutions, regulations and at the national level are thus not always the logical consequence of the Action Plan on Adult Learning, but rather the result of a long historical development influenced by the numerous European guidelines for improvement in the education sector and employment guidelines since the presentation of the Lisbon Strategy and the OMC.

#### 2.4.2 Presence of conflict

*A second condition is the **presence of a conflict** (policy directions / ideology) between Member States with an incentive to act or reluctance to act. Because of a conflict of opinions the Member States with an incentive to act will try to persuade the reluctant Member States to join them in developing a particular policy field. If there is no conflict no debate will follow and few actions will be initiated. The same applies to the national level, where the more reluctant parties will have to be convinced of the importance of a potential national priority. In order to get a topic on the national agenda someone needs to be absolutely convinced of its importance and lobby for more support.*

Regarding the presence of conflict between Member States with incentive or reluctance to act improving the adult learning sector, we can conclude that two types of conflict have been met at the basis of the implementation of the OMC in adult learning: the debate on national sovereignty and the debate on employability versus personal development. Since education has always been seen as a national prerogative<sup>1</sup>, any community influence on national education policies has always been highly debated among the Member States of the EU. However, as the improvement of the education level in Europe emerged as precondition for economic growth, education became a common concern. As a result, the Lisbon Treaty eventually also led to the implementation of the OMC in education and training. The second debate concerns whether the main objective of adult learning is either employability, personal development, or both. There are many national differences, different priorities are established and different objectives are attributed to adult learning. The most important lines of approach in the debate on adult learning are employability and civil society. In other words, adult learning either serves increasing employability or to create an inclusive civil society providing room for personal development. Within and in between the Member

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<sup>1</sup> Gornitzka, Ase (2006), *The Open Coordination Method as practice – A Watershed in European Education Policy?*, Oslo: Centre for European Studies. Working paper No.16. December 2006, p.9.

States tension exists between both lines of approach. The arguments for and against both statements are of crucial importance for future development of the adult learning sector.

### 2.4.3 Political involvement

*A third condition is **previous preparatory political involvement**. Some steps are often taken in the past that have led to an increased awareness of, or involvement in a topic. A certain foundation needs to be existent in order to continue developing a policy field. This certainly applies to the EU level where many Member States need to be familiar with the topic, but also on the Member State level itself where the policy field needs to have had a certain history. Not only does the topic need to be embedded in the national culture, but the culture itself also determines the way people cooperate with each other. For instance, if a national culture is very hierarchic or masculine<sup>1</sup>; few stakeholders will be involved in policy making. When developing a certain policy field that is hardly embedded in national culture, more time will be needed to gain political support.*

Concerning the political involvement, one can conclude that the Lisbon Treaty has led to a common concern for the development of education & training systems in order to achieve economic growth. Besides, the Bologna process and ET2010 have strengthened the involvement of and cooperation amongst the Member States in education policy. Although cooperation in the field of adult learning is relatively young, a number of political milestones have been achieved, such as the Lisbon Treaty, the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, the Communication on Adult Learning of 2006 and the Action Plan on Adult Learning of 2007, but also the Council Conclusion on adult learning in 2008. These have all contributed to the current state of affairs in adult learning and provide proof of a certain amount of political involvement of the Member States. On the national level, adult learning policy is highly dependent on the general familiarity with adult learning. This accounts as well for the work done within the framework of the Action Plan on Adult Learning. Historical development throughout Europe of influential traditions have characterised voluntary and public efforts to organise adult learning and its systematic provision of adult education. These continue to play a significant role in shaping national responses to the challenge of delivering effective lifelong learning policies through their promotion of adult learning and efforts to raise levels of participation. As a result many differences exist between Member States. With the introduction of the Lisbon Treaty and the increased attention to education & training for some Member States adult learning was a relatively new concept on a policy level. Other Member States had a longstanding tradition in adult learning and in these Member States the adult learning sector was already much more developed. The first group of Member States thus had considerable arrears in the field of adult learning from scratch on. When adult learning was not embedded in the culture of a Member State, more time is needed to gain the political support of a Member State and its citizens. When a Member State has a longstanding tradition in adult learning, only the formal structure and instruments need to be adjusted as the people are already aware of the importance of adult

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<sup>1</sup> According the Geert Hofstede a national culture can be defined by its degree of Power Distance, Individualism, Masculinity, Uncertainty Avoidance, or Long-Term Orientation. The degree of masculinity "refers to the distribution of roles between the genders which is another fundamental issue for any society to which a range of solutions are found". G. Hofstede. 'Geert Hofstede Cultural Dimensions'. [http://www.geert-hofstede.com/hofstede\\_netherlands.shtml](http://www.geert-hofstede.com/hofstede_netherlands.shtml).

learning. The Member States thus still seem to be in different phases when it comes to the implementation of the Action Plan as they also had different starting points.

#### 2.4.4 Availability of objectives, benchmarks and indicators

*A fourth condition is the **availability of objectives, benchmarks and indicators**. Although this forms an official part of the OMC process, specific SMART formulated objectives are not always present. Consequently, it is often difficult to stimulate concrete actions and to measure results. Also, on the national level specific objectives are not always formulated. The question is if there are any measurable objectives, benchmarks or indicators available which give a clear direction to what a specific policy is supposed to achieve.*

Concerning the availability of specific objectives, benchmarks and indicators in the field of adult learning, we can conclude that in general, the European objectives and guidelines have been integrated into national strategic plans. However, again this was hardly the consequence of the Action Plan on Adult Learning specifically. Most of the objectives were integrated according to the Lisbon Strategy, employment guidelines or other documents such as the Memorandum and Communication on Lifelong Learning. Generally, Member States prioritised the common objectives, benchmarks and indicators they had to meet and hardly any specific national goals were formulated. In a consultation of the members of the Adult Learning Working Group it was indicated by a large part of the members that the Action Plan addressed the right topics to improve the adult learning system in their country, but also that it is not sufficiently precise and useful for concrete actions of policymakers. More concrete targets should be decided upon in order to create a clear common focus and to facilitate the improvement of the adult learning sector. This might be problematic at the European level since the OMC was not designed to enforce the achievement of certain objectives but to stimulate European cooperation and coherence. Member States should be able to work towards the common goals at their own pace and resources available. In doing so, Member States could define more concrete targets at national level, also in relation to different kinds of adult learning. Using the same indicator to measure participation in higher education and basic skills education, might not provide qualitative data to develop policies on and monitor the progress.

#### 2.4.5 Involvement and cooperation of stakeholders

*The fifth condition, namely the **involvement and cooperation of stakeholders**, is of crucial importance for the success of the OMC, as the method is theoretically supposed to work bottom-up. Guidance and coordination on the community level will only be effective and sustainable, if the programme is supported by the Member States and its civil society and actively implemented on the local level. Therefore, not only should stakeholders be willing to participate in EU events and meetings on certain topics, but also stakeholders should be involved in national policy making and implementation.*

Concerning the involvement and cooperation of stakeholders, the analysis show that historically, national governments, regional and local governments, social partners, providers, community groups and social movements, and adult learners themselves are involved in the development of adult learning. Because the OMC is supposed to function bottom-up, stakeholders should be actively involved in order to successfully implement the Action Plan on Adult Learning. Analysis of country specific documents provided some insight in this respect, but do not give any hard evidence for e.g. the active involvement of civil society or cooperation between stakeholders. In general, it can be stated that stakeholder involvement is high in sectors where formal structures exist, such as Vocational Education & Train-

ing and higher education, while structures are often lacking in non-vocational and non-formal adult learning resulting in limited stakeholders' involvement. Furthermore, although modern interest groups are developing in for instance Central and Eastern European countries, policy making is still considered a political matter. The process of Europeanization helps to increase the visibility of these interest groups at national level, but they are still limitedly consulted.

From the consultation with the members of the Working Group on Adult Learning it appeared that most of them were either actively or passively participating in activities organised by the European Commission. This mainly concerned activities such as the plenary working group sessions, peer learning activities or study visits, or other thematic activities. Fewer members were participating in the steering group. People mostly felt that they were acting as an ambassador of the Working Group disseminating effectively the policy outcomes of the working group in their country. Slightly fewer people were also authorised to speak on behalf of the whole adult learning sector in their country during the European Commission meetings. To improve the adult learning sector at European level working group meetings were considered very useful, followed by peer learning activities and regional meetings. For the improvement of the adult learning sector at national level peer learning activities were found most useful, followed by regional meetings and communications on adult learning. However, a recommendation frequently provided was to involve more relevant stakeholders. Involvement on the European level is thus quite high, although improvements could be made, such as the organisation of non-vocational and non-formal adult learning.

#### 2.4.6 Common concern

*Finally, there should thus be a **common concern** among Member States that it is important to develop a certain policy field. There should be a European discourse on the topic in order to gain similar understanding of the definitions, the instruments available and an agreement to reach a certain quality level. As a result a feeling of shared responsibility should be created which is the main drive behind the policy developments made and which also serves as a motivation for improvement of national policies. On the national level, however, the civil society should also be aware of the importance of the policy developments and be willing to contribute to achieving the common objectives. Instead of a political concern it should be considered a personal or public concern.*

Finally, assessing the level of common concern in the adult learning sector, we can conclude that on the European level a common concern was clearly defined by means of the Lisbon Strategy. In order to become "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with better and more jobs and greater social cohesion"<sup>1</sup> education & training systems must be improved as well. The application of the OMC in the field of education & training led to discussion about objectives, benchmarks and indicators, strategies, instruments and activities that could be used to create better coherence between the different European education policies. A discourse was thus certainly present. As the European Commission had only limited competences in

<sup>1</sup> Lisbon European Council (2000). 'Presidency Conclusions'. [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/00100-r1.en0.htm](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/00100-r1.en0.htm).

this field, it was considered the responsibility of the Member States to achieve the common targets. This feeling of a shared responsibility should facilitate the implementation of the OMC and the Action Plan in particular. The fact that an Action Plan with all its initiatives has been established is in itself an indicator of the common concern that exists for adult learning, at EU level as well as at national level. However, at national level the level of common concern again depends on the embeddedness of the topic of adult learning in the national culture, as was indicated in the section on preparatory political involvement. Also, the debate on employability versus personal development determines the amount of and reasons for involvement of civil society in the field of adult learning. Civil society could be involved in adult learning policy developments for different reasons in the different Member States. This also has its effect on the willingness and public support of people to contribute to the Action Plan and communication towards civil society. It should thus ideally be adjusted to the national values attached to adult learning.

## **2.5 Concluding remarks chapter 2 on the role of the European Commission**

We can conclude that adult learning has risen on the EU agenda, being increasingly acknowledged as a key component of lifelong learning policies across Europe. In addition, the European Commission has different instruments at its disposal to support the Member States in increasing participation of adults in learning. Confronted with the formula for success for successful implementation of OMC processes, it appears that there is room for improvement for procedures and processes to support and stimulate the Member States to act in the field of adult learning.

Considering that the Action Plan on Adult Learning (as part of the OPMC) is currently in its evaluation phase, learning opportunities can be provided for further developing national policies and re-formulate guidelines in order to improve the adult learning sector in the framework of following up the Action Plan. The first steps have been taken to develop an European adult learning sector; however, much more is still to be done. What is important to take into account is that the OMC cannot force change, and aims at converging policies through 'soft' measures, such as exchanging knowledge. As the European Commission only has limited competences in an OMC, its success mainly depends on the commitment of the Member States to put considerable efforts in the development of the adult learning sector on EU and national level. A short overview of the success and failure factors as described in this chapter shows that Member States could be much more involved. Although the importance of adult learning, as acknowledged by Member States, it sometimes seems to be the supposititious child of the education & training sector. National stakeholders, such as the representatives of the Adult Learning Working Group, are well aware that more needs to be done to improve the adult learning sector. However, they are dependent on their governments' commitment, which unfortunately often are not at a desired level to really build sustainable European policies on adult learning. The common concern that needs to be available for a successful implementation of the OMC in adult learning is clearly present, but it still heavily depends on other European and national priorities as well. By placing adult learning on the European and national agenda, governments would be enforced to reserve more budget for adult learning, which would facilitate improvements in this sector. For instance, more emphasis could be put on adult learning by integrating the subject in other

related policy fields, such as employment (including VET) and higher education policies. More cooperation could take place between DG EMPL and DG EAC, but also within DG EAC connecting better different education sectors and formal, informal and non-formal learning in the lifelong learning perspective, for instance by means of the Lifelong Learning programme and its sub programmes Grundtvig, Leonardo da Vinci and Erasmus. The LLP could be better attuned to allow adults to participate. The programme could balance more between initial education and post-initial education in all educational sub sectors (especially in secondary and tertiary education). In addition, some Member States with an incentive to act should be willing to take the lead to increase the importance attached to adult learning in other Member States. Another option could be to increase the involvement of social partners, as they are currently involved only to a limited extent, especially in the Central and Eastern European countries, and could pre-eminently be considered the best actors to promote adult learning. One way of increasing the cooperation between different divisions of the European Commission and to align initiatives in adult learning is to have more inter-service activities. Furthermore, in order to create a clear focus, objectives need to be more specific and adjusted to the field of adult learning at the national level. However, it must also be taken into account that the Member States have had very different starting points in the development of the adult learning sector. Therefore, more time and efforts, more concrete objectives and actions and a stronger role of social partners, NGOs and other stakeholders are needed to create some convergence in this field. A second Action Plan would be particularly welcome. However, a follow up of an Action Plan will only be effective if the Member States devote some of their attention to adult learning as well. Because of their agreement on the use of the OMC to achieve the Lisbon, EU 2010 and 2020 goals, they have restricted the European Commission in its actions. Simultaneously, the Member States have taken on the shared responsibility to facilitate certain reforms themselves. Furthermore, the Member States form a crucial link between the EU and its citizens. Without their commitment it is highly unlikely that the OMC could ever become successful. The EU should thus continue to support cooperation between the Member States in order to offer them an incentive to invest in adult learning.





## 3 Reflection on statistics

In this chapter several statistics concerning adult participation in learning will be presented. The aim of this chapter is to present what is known in quantitative terms on participation by adults in education and training. This chapter should not be read as the output and outcomes of policies in the various countries, but more as a starting point for the comparison on other items, underlying the way adult education is organised (contextual, legal, structural, etc.). Furthermore, critical notes will be provided on the quality of data available.

### 3.1 Participation statistics

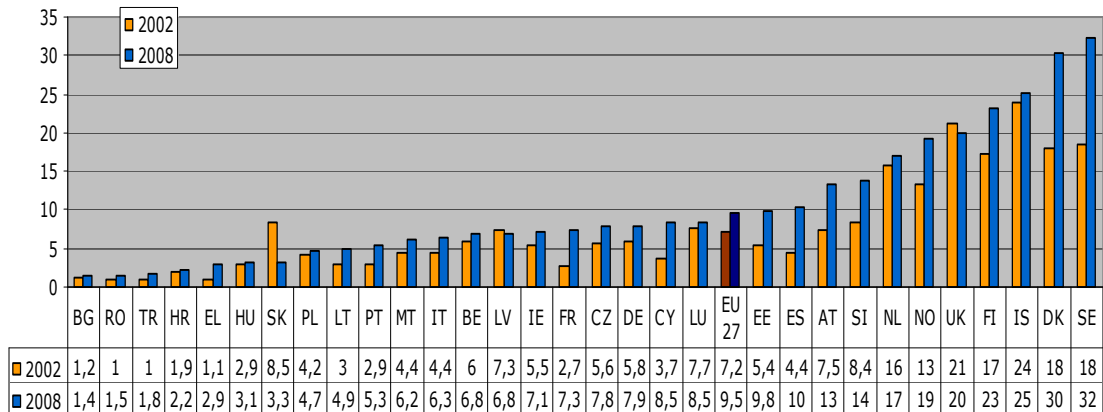
In addition to the national statistics and quantitative sources, the major European-wide statistics are the Labour Force Survey and the ad hoc module of the Adult Education Survey which will run its first comprehensive data collection in 2011. Since a very thorough discussion on participation rates is presented in the previous study from the European Commission<sup>1</sup>, we will only mention some statistics and give some illustrations obtained from country specific documents. In the following section the main statistics of the Labour Force Survey and the Adult Education Survey will be presented.

The **Labour Force Survey** (LFS) measures adult participation in education and training. It gives statistics on the percentage of the population aged 25-64 participating in education and training over the four weeks prior to the survey. The European benchmark, agreed upon in the Lisbon agenda, of 12.5% participation in 2010 will not be reached this year (2010). The EU-27 average is in 2009 far behind with 9.5%. There are countries that have scored above the European benchmark, such as the Nordic countries (SE, DK, FI, IS and NO). Furthermore, western European countries, such as the UK and NL present high participation rates. The other countries with a higher participation rate than the European benchmark are Slovenia and Austria.

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<sup>1</sup> PPMI (2010), Assessment of the impact of ongoing reforms in education and training on adult learning.

**Figure 3.1** Labour Force Survey (2002 and 2008) Life-long learning (adult participation in education and training) - Percentage of the population aged 25-64 participating in education and training over the four weeks prior to the survey.



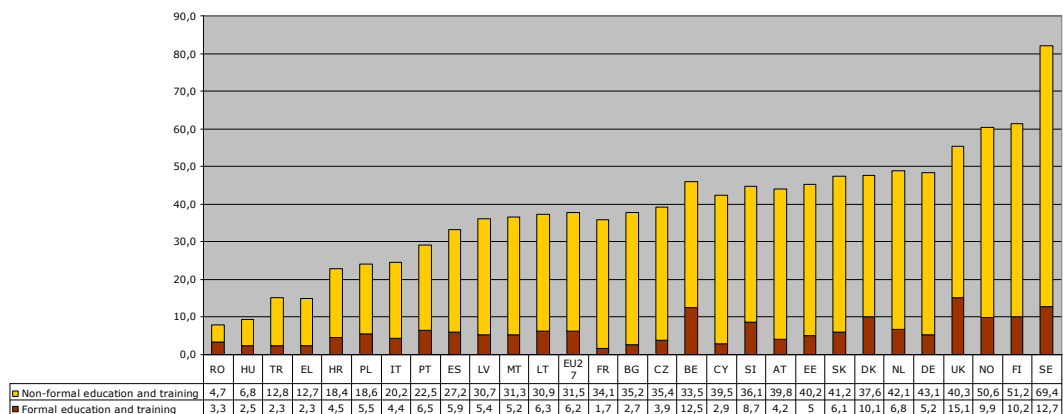
Source: Labour Force Survey

When taking into account developments over the years **between 2002 and 2008** a lot of countries increased their participation rates. The absolute increase was the highest in Sweden and Denmark. A decrease is recorded in the Latvia, United Kingdom and Slovakia. Throughout Europe, the increase between 2002 and 2008 was 2.3% (see figure 3.1).

The **Adult Education Survey (AES)** has been carried out by 29 countries in the EU, EFTA and candidate countries between 2005 and 2008 in a pilot exercise, which for the first time proposed a common EU framework including a standard questionnaire, tools and quality reporting. In the current database information from 24 countries is included; information is lacking for 3 countries: Ireland, Iceland and Luxembourg. These countries did not take part in the pilot survey. The reference year is set at 2007. The survey covers participation in education and lifelong learning activities (formal, non-formal and informal learning). All definitions apply to all persons aged 25-64, living in private households.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/microdata/adult\\_education\\_survey](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/microdata/adult_education_survey)

**Figure 3.2** Adult Education Survey: Participation rate in education and training (Extracted 27-10-2010)



Source: Eurostat (AES) 2007) on IS, IE, LI and LU no data.

In the AES, in general, the same picture appears as in the Labour Force Survey. The Nordic countries score high percentages of participation. Also, the low scoring countries in both surveys show overlap. The position of Slovakia can be called a surprise, being one of the low scoring countries in the Labour Force Survey, and being the seventh highest in Europe with regard to participation in non-formal education.

The way statistics are gathered influences the participation rates. Since the results of the Labour force survey are stable over the years, despite some breaks in the data series, the reliability is not hampered for statistical reasons, but the experts and respondents involved in this study indicate that the questions asked, and the concepts used are not always used in the same way throughout the countries: there are cultural differences causing diverging participation rates. Country differences are dependent on definitions and concepts used in relation to learning. For instance, in some countries, mainly the New Member States, education and training for adults are rooted in the formal system (schooling) both by the structure of institutions, policy and awareness of potentially learners causing, neglecting non-formal learning as being learning in the strict sense at all. In other countries, for instance the Anglo-Saxon countries and the Netherlands, adult learning is primarily seen as related to employment and in-service training, having possible an effect on participation rates when it comes to including adult learning for the own interest and other non-vocational learning. Furthermore, the Luxembourg sources indicate that the statistics are not applicable for Luxembourg due to its specific situation with regard to the high number of frontier workers. Although these contextual differences exist, it is very hard to assess what the impact is of these different conceptualisations on the participation rate.

Within countries there are **regional differences**, as for instance in Italy, where due to several reasons (informal economy and the suspected nepotism) incentives for education are less developed in the south than in the north. Furthermore, in several countries, differences can be seen regarding the distinction between urban and rural areas.

## 3.2 Educational Attainment

Levels of educational attainment have an effect on adult participation. Recent reports show that people, who have completed at least upper secondary education, are three times more likely to participate in adult learning, also called the Matthew effect or accumulation thesis.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, adult education is a means to increase the educational attainment in a country. So the educational attainment can be both a *cause* for higher participation in adult learning and a *result* of effective adult learning policies.

Most countries have comparable percentages of the population (25 to 64) having completed at least upper secondary education in 2008. Eight countries had 85% or more of the population completing upper secondary education. Nineteen countries record a percentage between 60 and 85% and five countries have less than 60% of the population completing upper secondary education. Among the latter, three countries need to make considerable improvements (Turkey, Malta and Portugal). According to the Eurostat indicator<sup>2</sup>, the European average is 71.5%. The data for Eurostat, refers to the educational attainment of the population aged 25-64, while the EU benchmark refers to the youth obtaining an upper secondary diploma. This benchmark has been set on 85% in 2010 and the EU average on this benchmark was 78.1% in 2007 and increased 1.5% between 2000 and 2007.<sup>3</sup> There are major differences between the two data sets. For instance, Ireland has reached the benchmark for upper secondary attainment (86.7% in 2007) and has high numbers in higher education, but scores relatively low with regard to the educational attainment of people aged 25-64 (70% in 2008). This is mainly caused by the low levels of educational attainment of the older population.

The levels of educational attainment do not necessarily coincide with the participation rates in the countries. The fact that higher levels of education lead to higher levels of participation might be true in general, but is not always supported by statistics in the different countries. For instance, the Czech Republic has the highest percentage of upper secondary educational attainment (90.9%), but scores a low percentage of participation in adult learning (7.8% LFS). Another interesting example is the position of Iceland. In this Nordic country the participation of adults in learning is among the highest in Europe and the educational attainment is among the lowest. This is due to the fact that decades of low unemployment and the availability of jobs caused young people to start working very early in their life, not completing upper secondary education, and learning alongside their job in adult education colleges. This particular Icelandic situation has become a severe draw back in beating the current crisis since now there are fewer jobs available.

Four groups can be identified on the basis of the comparison between participation rates and educational attainment:

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission (2007) Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training: indicators and benchmarks. Commission Staff Working Document

<sup>2</sup> Eurostat, Educational Attainment: Percentage of the population aged 25 to 64 having completed at least upper secondary education (2008)

<sup>3</sup> European Commission (2007) Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training: indicators and benchmarks. Commission Staff Working Document

1. Countries that have both higher participation rates and an educational attainment in relation to the European average. Countries include: AT, SI, NL, UK, NO, FI, EE, DK and SE. This group contains a lot of the Nordic countries.
2. Countries that have a higher participation rate but a lower educational attainment. Countries include: ES and IS.
3. Countries that have a lower participation rate but a higher educational attainment. Countries include: CZ, CY, LT, SK, PL, LV, DE, HU, BG, RO and HR. This group includes a lot of the New Member States
4. Countries that have both a lower participation rate as an educational attainment. Countries include EL, IT, LU, BE, IE, FR, TR, PT and MT. The countries in this group can be mainly found in the southern Europe.

### 3.3 Concluding remarks chapter 3 on statistics

What can be concluded from the statistical data on participation of adults in education and training is that the Lisbon objectives will not be reached and that there are big disparities between the countries, both with regard to participation in adult learning and educational attainment. The new E&T2010 benchmark of 15% participation presents severe challenges for policy makers to reach these participation rates by 2020.

When looking at the participation statistics, the main conclusions are<sup>1</sup>:

- There are differences between the different databases used with regard to methodological solutions, definition of key concepts and the reference period. In general it can be said that the AES includes more types of learning and therefore reports higher participation rates than the Labour Force Survey. On the other hand, the ranking of countries is similar with only a few exceptions.
- With reference to the Labour Force Survey 2008, there are large differences in participation of adults throughout Europe ranging from 1.4% in Bulgaria to 32,4% in Sweden.
- There are differences in the participation rates in formal and non-formal adult learning. In general, the countries that showed a high participation in adult learning in general, have a high percentage on non-formal learning as well (mainly Nordic countries).
- In general, low-skilled and low-qualified workers receive less training than others. This is confirmed by the European Commission report measuring progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training, stating that those with upper secondary are more than three times more likely to receive training. Those with higher education may be even five times more likely to receive training.
- Participation does not differ significantly on employment status, on average, 9.5% of those employed and 8.7% of those unemployed participated in education and training.
- Elderly people are likely to participate less than young adults.
- Some country information indicates that increased participation rates are partially caused by reforms in adult education and training.

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<sup>1</sup> Partially based on the study of PPMI (2010), Assessment of the impact of ongoing reforms in education and training on adult learning.



## 4 The background against which policies and measures are implemented

This chapter will set the scene for discussing measures to increase participation of adults in learning. Section 4.1 presents barriers for learning. Section 4.2 goes into the historical and socio-economic context in which adult learning policies are developed and section 4.3 elaborates on structures and finances related to adult learning in the different countries. Finally, in section 4.4 some conclusions will be drawn on sketching the background of adult learning policies, in terms of how favourable conditions are for implementing effective adult learning policies.

### 4.1 Barriers for participation and what to learn from them?

Research on individual motivations, such as extrinsic, instrumental, intrinsic, social and conditional motivations, together with the psychological barriers to participation in adult learning have had limited influence upon policy debates and policy interventions, however in recent years, under influence of the Adult Education Survey and other statistics, a closer look has been given to research on barriers in developing new policies. Somewhat greater policy relevance has been associated with empirical research which has addressed the influence of the "situated nature" of participation in adult learning in the social environment of adults. Such research has studied factors such as the influence of family, neighbourhood, friends, and colleagues at work, on the expected returns to participation in adult learning, etc.<sup>1</sup>

In the European context of research on participation in adult learning, research into societal factors has been more prevalent, and this research has made a relevant contribution to policy debates about the influence of societal factors upon participation in adult learning. From the early research of Strzelewicz onwards, research in Europe has focussed on social class and educational background as structural factors which influence participation in adult learning.<sup>2</sup>

Strategies designed to resolve the problems identified with widening participation and that aim to introduce targeted policy instruments need to take into account the prevailing barriers for adults to participate in learning activities. Given the extensive literature on barriers to learning, it is important to relate structural factors to the perceptions of barriers perceived by individual who wish to learn.<sup>3</sup> The much-quoted classic text focused on the institutional, situational, and dispositional barriers experienced by individuals which result in their non-participation is:

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<sup>1</sup> Gorard, S., Rees, G. & Fevre, R. (1999), "Patterns of participation in lifelong learning: Do families make a difference?", *British Educational Research Journal*, vol. 25, no. 4, 517-32.

<sup>2</sup> Strzelewicz, W, Raapke, H-D, & Schulenberg, W. (1966), *Bildung und gesellschaftliches Bewußtsein*, Stuttgart.

<sup>3</sup> Cross, K.P. (1981): *Adults as Learners: increasing participation and facilitating learning*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Other sources: Knapper, Christopher, Cropley, A. J. (2000), *Lifelong Learning in Higher Education*. Other sources for instance: Pont, B. (2004), "Improving access to and participation in adult learning in OECD countries", *European Journal of Education*, 39(1), 31-45.

- The **institutional barriers** include among others the following: lack of transparency of the sector, lack of a learning culture, strong identification of adult learning with vocational education and training and formal education (which could neglect non-vocational learning as being valuable), decrease of the number of providers, the structure of the labour market, etc. Institutional barriers concern all practices and procedures that discourage adults from participation.
- **Situational barriers** include the inability to pay course fees, lack of time due to family responsibilities and/or employment, lack of public transport, inconvenience of locations of available courses, etc.;
- **Dispositional barriers** include bad experiences of previous education, a lack of confidence in individual capabilities, feelings that one is too old to learn, a sense that learning is good but not for "our kind of people", lack of awareness of positive returns to learning, etc.

There is considerable evidence that there are significant differences as to the strength of the above-mentioned barriers in different countries. Reducing such barriers to participation in adult learning thus calls for national co-ordination of strategies and targeted instruments in order to widen participation. Coherent policies for lifelong learning on a national level need to address the structural factors which give rise to institutional, situational and dispositional barriers to adult learners.

In this section we will identify the existing barriers for adult learners in more detail that policy makers need to overcome in increasing and widening participation of adults in learning activities. This inventory will be used to see which kinds of mobilisation strategies are most effective to overcome different kinds of barriers. The link between barriers and strategies will finally be made in the chapters 8 and 9. The sections in this chapter will in consecutive order deal with: 1) individual barriers for participation; 2) institutional barriers; 3) an assessment how to overcome these barriers and weaknesses; and finally (4) a country assessment on barriers.

#### **4.1.1 Individual barriers for participation: situational and dispositional barriers**

In the Adult Education Survey, questions have been included dealing with obstacles for participation and motives for non-participation. Respondents indicating that they did not participate, but wanted to participate (12% of the sample), were asked, what for them, was the main obstacle for non-participation in formal or non-formal education and training. The most frequently mentioned reasons are 'work schedule' (22.4%) and 'family responsibilities' (22.3%). Also, 'cost of participation' (15.7%) is considered to be a main reason for non-participation. Other reasons, not mentioned very often include the lack of confidence of going back to school, not having the right prerequisites, lack of employer support and no facilities at reachable distance. There are major differentiations between countries and as well between sexes. For instance the balance between work schedule and family responsi-

bilities shows major differences between men (emphasis on work schedule) and women (emphasis on family responsibilities).<sup>1</sup>

When looking at the distribution of barriers of age cohorts, some interesting shifts can be noticed: first, for adults aged 25-34 the major barriers are family responsibilities and training costs (resp. 24.9% and 21.8%), whereas for adults aged 35-54 and 55-64, the major barrier is work schedule (resp. 23.6% and 18.2%). Secondly, for older adults, costs are considered to be less of a barrier (35-54: 15.5%, 55-64: 8.3%). Third, health and age are becoming a larger barrier in increasing age (25-34: 1.2%, 35-54: 5.5%, 55-64: 15.1%). All in all, in designing strategies to overcome barriers, it is essential to have in mind what age cohort is the main target group and what are the main barriers this age cohort faces.<sup>2</sup>

When looking at the distribution of barriers in relation to the highest level of education completed, there are some interesting findings: first, for people with pre-primary and lower secondary education levels, the main barrier mentioned is time because of family responsibilities (23.9%). For higher levels of education (ISCED 3-6) the main barrier is also time, but because of conflicting work schedule (ISCED 3-4: 21.1%, ISCED 5-6: 29.6%). Secondly, especially for people with medium levels of education (ISCED 3-4) training costs are considered to be major barrier (20.2%). All in all, barriers vary with educational levels; however, one can conclude that creating learning opportunities at the workplace is an effective way to removing barriers felt by individuals, at least to ISCED level 3-6.

The individual barriers for adult participation in learning activities involve mostly dispositional and situational barriers. Broadly speaking, the following **situational barriers** are encountered in the different countries: 1) costs of education for the adult learners; 2) lack of time: the incompatibility of combining work, family and learning; 3) distances: the lack of suitable learning opportunities nearby; 4) lack of flexibility of courses: the lack of flexibility of studying at the adults' conditions in terms of time, place and background of the learner. **Dispositional barriers** include bad experiences of previous education, a lack of confidence in individual capabilities, feelings that one is too old to learn, a sense that learning is good but not for "our kind of people", lack of awareness of positive returns to learning, etc. Information collected in the different countries (under which Greece and Latvia) indicate that previous **negative experiences** with school education are important barriers for future participation. The Latvian analysis mentions other dispositional barriers as well.

#### 4.1.2 Weaknesses of adult learning systems: institutional barriers

Besides situational and dispositional barriers, the literature mentions many other barriers that restrain adults to participate in learning often the result of general weaknesses of the adult learning system and the overall policies. In general, the following weaknesses can be recorded:

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<sup>1</sup> Boateng, Sadiq Kwesi (2009), Significant country differences in adult learning, in: Eurostat. Statistics in focus, 44/2009.

<sup>2</sup> Eurostat, Adult Education Survey: Type of obstacles reported as the most important by age groups, extracted: 28-10-2010

- The lack of **organisational structures** to facilitate adult learning is mentioned very often as a weakness in many of the 32 countries. This barrier can be mostly seen in the New Member States and the countries where adult learning is least developed, or where there is a decrease of the number of institutions (for instance in Hungary and Romania).
- The lack of a '**learning culture**' is mentioned as barrier in some countries (for example in NL, PL, CZ, SK, DE, HU, RO, EL, BG, IT, ES). This concerns the supply side of adult learning, lacking learning provision for adults, as well as the demand side of adult learning, including adults who do not demand further education and training. Moreover, despite the fact that lifelong learning has been a policy topic for many years, not much developments has been taken place in several countries and in some countries longstanding (university) structures for lifelong learning have been broken down such as evening classes (e.g. the Netherlands). In recent years however, action has been taken within the vocational field in the form of Associate degrees, learning-working-desks and RPL. The non-vocational and non-formal forms of adult learning, however, receive less attention. The slow increase of awareness of the importance of lifelong learning is also mentioned in Poland and Estonia.
- Connected with this lack of learning culture, another barrier often mentioned is the **diminishing lack of awareness for non-vocational education**, caused by a strong national focus on vocational adult education. This vocational focus is in itself not a barrier for adults to participate in learning activities. However, the emphasis on vocational education hampers the awareness of the importance of non-vocational adult learning. Adult learning is primarily seen as vocational schooling, making it less attractive for adults having a negative experience with schooling. This can be seen in Romania, where most adults are not encouraged to participate in political, civic and personal development education and training. There is a rather 'reductionist' view of adult education in national policy with a focus on 'working skills' instead of 'life skills', while strategies for social inclusion and for the regeneration of the community are far behind economy-led programmes and projects. This affects spending on adult learning as well. Vocational adult and continuing education dominate public funding and programmes with a defined orientation of public policies on tackling unemployment. Other countries where this is noticeable are the United Kingdom, Bulgaria, Greece, and Slovakia.
- The **lack of policies** in the field of adult learning is identified as the main weakness in some of the countries studied. This is for instance the case in Slovakia, but can be identified in other countries as well, such as in Cyprus, where the main barrier lies at a political and institutional level. There is a lack of mechanisms to support the development of the sector, insufficient financial means, lack of programmes, lack of reforms to modernise the sector.
- Despite the fact that employers play an important role in facilitating learning in the workplace (see also the statistics on provision of adult learning as presented by the AES), the lack of **involvement of social partners and in particular SMEs** in increasing qualifications and skills of the workforce is mentioned in many countries (for instance in France and the new Member States) as a weakness. SMEs often lack the capacity to invest in their personnel and cannot afford to allow employees to take educational leave, hereby hampering the professional development of their personnel. In other countries, instruments are put in place (for instance in Luxembourg) to increase investments of SMEs in further education.

### 4.1.3 Overcoming barriers and weaknesses: opportunities for policy

The analysis of country-specific information indicates mainly institutional and situational barriers and opportunities to overcome. On a policy level, the institutional barriers prevail, while at learners' level, the barriers are often seen as situational. However, in many cases the institutional and situational barriers can be seen as two sides of the same coin. For instance the lack of provision in rural areas can be considered a barrier with regard to the lack of suitable infrastructures, but the time to get to a learning centre might be considered a situational barrier for potential learners. The same accounts for the lack of funds. This is on a national scale an institutional barrier letting people participate in learning. On an individual scale, the lack of funds makes adult learning more expensive, hence less accessible.

The dispositional barriers and opportunities are mentioned to a lesser extent in policy documents addressing the question of raising participation, but are not considered to be of less importance. This can be explained by the specific policy-measures to overcome dispositional barriers. These measures are very much targeted at specific groups, for instance immigrant and illiterates. Other measures that are often included in lifelong learning strategies have a broader perspective and focus on infrastructural issues in relation to increasing participation and therefore address more often institutional and situational barriers.

Instruments to overcome situational barriers are put in place in many countries, for example the possibility for educational leave, to overcome the barrier of lack of time, loans, vouchers to overcome the barrier of lack of funds and tax benefits for employers to overcome the barrier of unwillingness of employers. The dispositional barriers are often intangible but very important, and this can explain why well-intended policies sometimes do not seem to function. They often address institutional and situational barriers without taking into account the disposition and psychological factors that influence the willingness of adults to participate. This is especially the case for the hard-to-reach target groups: immigrants, illiterate people, the lower educated, etc. Dispositional barriers call for targeted approaches, effective information and guidance structures and effective outreach strategies to overcome the negative disposition of adults towards learning. In chapter 6, we will go in more detail into these mobilisation strategies.

To overcome weaknesses in the general adult learning systems, governments make use of a variety of instruments. The most important mobilisation strategies are the use of quality management to increase transparency and steering in the sector and more overarching strategies, including grant reforms and re-structuring of the sector (see chapter 6.3).

When looking at opportunities for participation, many positive elements are mentioned in policy document at country level. Most of them have to do with institutional elements: accessible learning opportunities, transparency of the provision, quality of the provision, attuned offer on different levels, possibilities for recognition and accreditation of prior learning, the existence of e-learning culture. Other opportunities are dealing with making learning better accessible for learners, for instance by providing educational vouchers, possibilities for educational leave etc. In the following chapters (mainly chapter 6 on mobilisation strategies), the opportunities will be further described in detail.

#### 4.1.4 Country assessment on barriers for participation

To finalise this section on the barriers of adult learning policies we will present a country assessment on how favourable the conditions are for increasing participation in adult learning. On the basis of the analyses of country sources, a summarising assessment has been conducted. The question that guides this, very rough, assessment is the following: Are there severe or minor barriers hampering the increase in participation? The categories are defined rather broad, avoiding the impression that this table represents the outcomes of 'exact science'. The categories of judgement are: There are severe barriers ("–"); there are medium barriers ("–/+") and; there are minor barriers ("+"). The table presents the outcomes of the assessment.

**Table 4.1** How favourable are conditions to increase participation in the Member States with regard to barriers?

Country	Are there barriers for participating in adult learning?	Country	Are there barriers for participating in adult learning?	Country	Are there barriers for participating in adult learning?	Country	Are there barriers for participating in adult learning?
AT	-/+	LV	-	FI	+	PT	-/+
BE	-/+	LT	-	FR	-/+	RO	-
BG	-	LI	-/+	DE	-/+	SK	-
HR	-	LU	+	EL	-	SI	-/+
CY	-	MT	-	HU	-	ES	-
CZ	-	NL	-/+	IS	-/+	SE	+
DK	+	NO	+	IE	-/+	TR	-
EE	-/+	PL	-	IT	-	UK	-/+

Source: *Research voor Beleid*

Three clusters of countries can be seen:

- A group of countries face severe barriers in increasing the participation of adults in learning (BG, HR, CY, CZ, EL, HU, IT, LV, LT, MT, PL, RO, SK, ES and TR). These countries are characterised by the fact that extensive programmes need to be developed to overcome these barriers. The severe barriers can be of different nature and include barriers such as the lack of effective structures for adult learning, lack of finances to boost participation, large share of illiterate people, lack of a learning culture etc.
- A second group of countries face medium barriers (AT, BE, EE, FR, DE, IS, IE, LI, PT, SI, NL and UK); these are barriers that can be overcome by targeted programmes. Often, there is a well developed infrastructure for adult learning in these countries, but for certain parts of the sector, there is a lack of policy attention. Medium barriers in these countries range from certain target groups that are at risk of exclusion to the challenge of combining learning, work and family-duties.
- A last group comprises countries that face only minor barriers to increasing participation (DK, FI, NO, LU and SE). Of course, improvements can be made, but in general adults can access education fairly easily. Barriers mentioned include for instance costs for individuals.

It is interesting to see that the countries that are most advanced in increasing participation are more likely to overcome barriers sooner than countries that lag behind. On the other hand, in the countries that face severe and medium barriers more improvements can be made in order to increase the participation. The potential growth is, therefore, higher in these countries.

## **4.2 Context in which adult learning takes place**

### **4.2.1 Impact of historical background on adult learning**

The literature at country level provides convincing evidence of historical and ideological factors which have exerted their influence on both adult learning and the provision of adult education throughout Europe. Purposeful adult learning activities by individuals has clearly been a widely reported feature of social life in European societies since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Country information also refers to the historical development throughout Europe of influential traditions which have characterised voluntary and public efforts to organise adult learning and the systematic provision of adult education. Many of these institutional forms of provision remain recognisable and active on the adult education landscape of 21<sup>st</sup> century. They continue to play a significant role in shaping national responses to the challenge of delivering effective lifelong learning policies through their promotion of adult learning and efforts to raise levels of participation in adult learning.

The country sources refer to the development of adult education in terms of the historical dynamics of European societies which have, and continue, to influence the process of European modernisation. These dynamics include economic and technological change – in particular industrialisation and urbanisation – the formation of nation states and citizenship; issues of participation, social inclusion and exclusion; and questions of cultural identity, often formulated in terms of national, linguistic and ethnic identities. While country information refers to the specific trajectories of national histories and social-ideological factors, they also indicate the existence of European-wide patterns in the historical organisation of adult learning in terms of the organisational features of formal, non-formal and informal adult education. The information collected for this study indicate that the modernisation process in European societies has been marked by the identification of specific target groups that need to be mobilised to participate in adult learning due to their lack of the knowledge, skills and attitudes – now known as competences – and the threat of social exclusion. In terms of responsibilities for the organisation and funding of adult education provision, the literature on country level refers to the historically changing roles of the nation state and local authorities, the social partners, philanthropic initiatives and voluntary organisations, and individuals. In terms of historical and ideological factors which have characterised the organisational purposes of adult education, the country documents identify recurring shifts of focus between general adult education for personal development and vocational education for labour market needs.

Looking at the historical context and the impact of this context on adult learning, it can be concluded that the impact is enormous. In countries, where there is a longstanding, non-interrupted learning culture, it is likely that the awareness of the importance of adult learning is higher than in countries where this has not been the case. Historical and ideological

traditions in the development of adult education in Europe provide overwhelming evidence of broadly-based public and voluntary efforts to organise the provision of formal, non-formal and informal learning environments which serve to promote the participation of adults in adult education. The analysis on country level also identifies the contemporary presence of many traditional forms of general education for adults and their relevance to the implementation of lifelong learning strategies. They also identify in recent decades the growing significance of vocational education and training in the organisation of structured learning opportunities for adults. This shift has been driven by concerns about the competences of the workforce in knowledge economies, changes in the organisation of production, more flexible working careers, and more flexible conditions of employment. Such concerns have contributed to the dominant priority in public policy, together with the social partners, upon the potential contribution of adult learning and the promotion of sustainable employability throughout working life. As such, this development has only served to enhance concerns with the relatively low levels of participation in adult education in many Member States and the continuing importance of efforts to mobilise participation by adults in inclusive learning cultures which combine personal development and the acquisition of competences for life.

#### **4.2.2 Impact of the socio-economic-demographic developments on adult learning**

European is facing enormous challenges with respect to globalisation, demographic change and economic recovery, also affecting (the role of) adult learning.

With respect to the European-wide demographic challenges, the following are important in relation to increasing attention towards adult education:

- **Ageing population:** Most countries face the problems of an ageing population. This phenomenon can be seen in almost all European countries and is connected with depopulation. Ageing societies have huge effects on the economy. It can, similar to depopulation, lead to deflation and a decrease of the quality of life.
- **The composition of the population:** Another demographic issue that affects education policies is the composition of the population in terms of immigration, ethnic minorities and language differences. Most countries have within their borders ethnic minorities that are in danger of social exclusion and that are likely to find it harder to find a job, due to language or cultural differences.

In economic terms, unemployment rates have increased in 2009 compared to 2008. If we look at the average yearly unemployment rates in 2009 across Europe, one can conclude that there are a number of countries facing very serious problems with regard to unemployment, such as the Baltic States (Lithuania: 17.6%, Latvia: 14.0%, Estonia: 14.0%) and Spain (18.1%). These countries have been struck very hard by the crisis in 2009. Other countries, like the Netherlands (3.5%) and Austria (5.0%) have been able to maintain low unemployment percentages. Over the years unemployment rates have fluctuated significantly. For instance, in Poland it fluctuated between 20% in 2002 and 7.2% in 2008. Another example is Spain going from 15% in 1998, to 8.3% in 2007 and again to 18.1% in 2009. The average unemployment rate in Europe was 8.9% in 2009, showing an increase of nearly 2% in one year. However, when we compare the 2009-statistics with the time of

drawing up the Lisbon-agenda, the unemployment increased by only with 0.2%. The unemployment rates decreased from 8.7% in 2000 to 7.0% in 2008.<sup>1</sup>

With respect to the economic crisis is it argued that those with less education are hit three-fold:

- their risk of unemployment is higher;
- qualification requirements for employment increase; and
- they participate less in adult education and further education than those with higher educational attainment.<sup>2</sup>

This suggests that political measures are taken to advance the opportunities of these disadvantaged groups. This enlarged the political awareness of the importance of adult learning, however, it is still doubtful whether the crisis had a positive effect on the participation in adult learning. This might be the case in some countries, but the situation might be different in others.

Country information indicate that one way of combating the crisis is to invest in human resources, vocational education and training arrangements for employees (for instance in The Netherlands). It is, therefore, likely that the crisis affects adult learning in the vocational/professional sector positively and negatively in the non-vocational sectors. In most countries actions have been taken in order to respond to the crisis. Actions have been taken to decrease the number of unemployed, to keep workers in their jobs through short-time working arrangements, such as in The Netherlands. Other actions that have been taken include targeting the unemployed with training arrangements to increase their employability. Despite the lack of exact data, it is assumed that the crisis has effect on the following issues:<sup>3</sup>

- **Funding for adult learning:** In most countries the crisis is said to have a positive effect on the State funding of adult learning. This it mainly due to the measures taken to deal with unemployment, short-time working arrangements, etc. Funding for non-vocational education is presumably decreasing, so is the funding form participants and employers.
- **Demand for adult learning and guidance:** the demand of education for people in danger of losing their job and for people who have lost their jobs is increasing in most countries. Furthermore, young people intend to stay in education longer and continue their studies in higher education.<sup>4</sup>
- **Disadvantaged groups:** Since measures to combat the crisis are aimed at the recently unemployed and those threatened by redundancy, there is less attention for other disadvantaged groups. This does not mean however, that these groups are forgotten in policy making, but that measures for these groups are not a high priority.

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<sup>1</sup> Eurostat, Unemployment rate yearly average (2009)

<sup>2</sup> See, Dohmen D. and D. Timmermann on behalf of GHK (2010), Background report for the Workshop: Financing Adult Learning in times of crisis (Brussels, 18-19 October 2010)

<sup>3</sup> Based on the report on the Regional Meetings organised by the European Commission.

<sup>4</sup> This trend can be seen throughout Europe. Research shows however, that direct effect of the crisis on reasons why young people continue their studies are absent and that the recent increase of student numbers is highly effected by demographics (see Research voor Beleid (2010), 'Aanmeldingsgolf door crisis'? Analyse van studentenaantallen en studiemotieven 2009-10.)



**Table 4.2** How favourable is the historical and socio economic context for increasing participation in the Member States?

Country	Historical context	Socio-economic context	Country	Historical context	Socio-economic context	Country	Historical context	Socio-economic context	Country	Historical context	Socio-economic context
AT	-/+	+	LV	-	-	FI	+	-/+	PT	-	-/+
BE	+	+	LT	-	-	FR	-/+	-/+	RO	-/+	-
BG	-	-	LI	-/+	+	DE	-/+	+	SK	-	-
HR	-	-	LU	-/+	+	EL	-	-	SI	-	-/+
CY	-	-/+	MT	-	-/+	HU	-/+	-	ES	-	-
CZ	-	+	NL	-/+	+	IS	-/+	-	SE	+	-/+
DK	+	-/+	NO	+	+	IE	-	-	TR	-	-/+
EE	-/+	-	PL	-	+	IT	-	-	UK	-/+	-

Source: Research voor Beleid

Regarding the context in which adult learning is developed in the countries, four groups can be identified:

- A group of countries that lacks a well developed tradition in adult learning, and that is facing severe socio-economic difficulties in developing adult learning policies (BG, EL, IE, IT, LV, LT, SK and ES)
- A group of countries that has a well established tradition of adult learning, but that is struck by the crisis (IS, EE, UK, HU and RO).
- A group of countries that lacks a well developed tradition in adult learning, but where the socio-economic context does not impose great difficulties in developing the sector (AT, CY, CZ, HR, DE, FR, LI, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, SI and TR).
- A fourth group of countries that both have a longstanding tradition and a favourable socio-economic context for developing the adult learning sector (BE, DK, FI, SE and NO).

### 4.3 Governance of adult learning: Structural and financial frameworks

In the previous sections we have taken a closer look at barriers to participation and the context in which adult learning policies are developed. To complete the picture concerning the background of adult learning policies and mobilisation strategies, we need to examine governance, structures and finances involved in adult learning.

#### 4.3.1 Governance of adult learning

The governance structure of adult education depends on many factors, including historical developments and the structure of the educational landscape in a country. Some countries have a more centralised governance structure regarding education, such as the UK, while others, such as Sweden and Czech Republic can be characterised as having a more decen-

tralised governance structure. Many other countries, such as France, present mixed-models in governance structures, combining both centralised and decentralised tendencies.<sup>1</sup>

- **Centralised governance structures:** Lifelong learning strategies have been drawn up in close co-operation and consultation with various stakeholders. Often the Ministry of Education has played a co-ordinating role in consultation and has under its responsibility determined the strategy (see for instance Czech Republic, Denmark, and Finland). In most countries two Ministries are the most important in adult learning: Ministries of Education and Ministries of Employment and Social Affairs (for instance in the Netherlands, Malta, Turkey, and Denmark). Other Ministries involved can include Ministries of Science and Research (for instance in Austria and Denmark), and Ministries of Agriculture (also in Austria). Other ministries are mentioned as well, for instance in Belgium (Flanders), where the Ministry of Culture is responsible for all socio-cultural adult education. In some countries policy-making and the implementation of lifelong learning strategies are supported by a co-ordinating body (e.g. Finland, Spain, and the Netherlands).
- **Decentralised governance structures:** In many countries the main responsibility for developing policies for adult learning lies at national level. However, responsibilities have often been decentralised to regional and local governmental levels (as is the case in France, Netherlands, Sweden, Austria, Denmark, Estonia, and Italy).

#### 4.3.2 Providers of adult learning

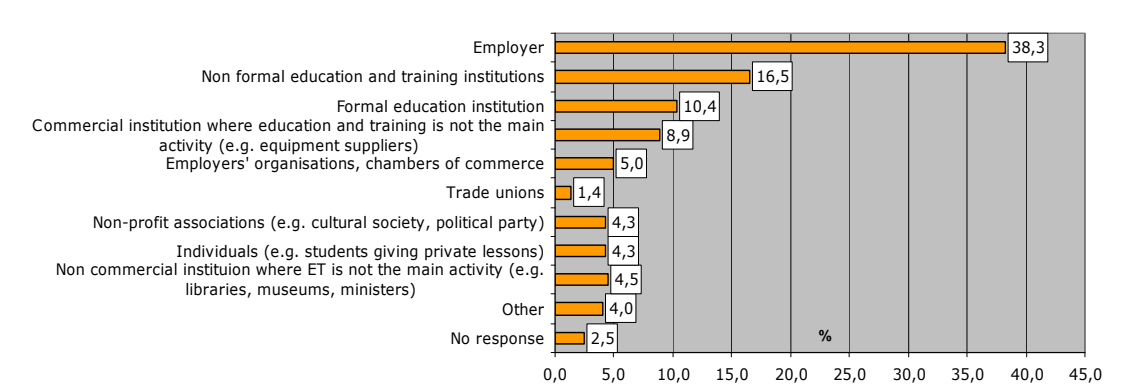
There are many types of providers. The Adult Education Survey, made use of the following classification of providers of non-formal adult education and training activities: employer, non formal education and training institutions, formal education institution, commercial institution where education and training is not the main activity (e.g. equipment suppliers), employers' organisations, chambers of commerce, trade unions, non-profit associations (e.g. cultural society, political party), individuals (e.g. students giving private lessons), non commercial institution where education & training (ET) is not the main activity (e.g. libraries, museums, etc.). According to the AES (see figure 4.1), employers are the leading providers of non-formal education and training (38%), second largest share is covered by non formal education and training institutions (17%).<sup>2</sup> Country differences have many causes, such as historical, political, financial and structural causes.

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<sup>1</sup> Daun, Holger (2004), Privatisation, decentralisation and governance in education in Czech Republic, France, Germany and Sweden, in: *International Review of Education*, Vol. 50, No. 3/4 (Jul., 2004), pp.325-346.

<sup>2</sup> See for an elaborated discussion on local learning centres the study from the European Commission: *Research voor Beleid and PLATO (2005), Developing local learning centres and learning partnerships as part of Member States' targets for reaching the Lisbon goals in the field of education and training.*

**Figure 4.1** Distribution of non-formal education and training activities by provider



Source: Adult Education Survey (Research voor Beleid)

This picture is confirmed by the document studied on country level:

- In some countries, such as in most of the old Member States, by collective labour agreements, employers are obliged to provide education and training opportunities for their personnel, making the **employers** the most important providers of non-formal education and training. In all countries **social partners** are involved in lifelong learning policies. Trade unions have traditionally played a major role in training arrangements for employees and have initiated many initiatives in the past to organise independent workers' education (examples can be found amongst others in the UK). In most countries, employers' organisations are also involved when it comes to collective bargaining agreements on education and training, but they also deliver continuing education possibilities. Chambers of Commerce are mentioned as important intermediaries in the provision of work-related education and training programmes at the regional and local levels. Furthermore, employment agencies are important players in the adult learning sector. They often deliver guidance, job-advising and provide courses for job-seekers and unemployed. While public employment services are structured differently in each country, they all share the same basic task of contributing toward matching supply and demand on the labour market through the provision of information, placement and active support service, among providing guidance and counselling and leaning activities. Public employment services actively collaborate at European level to improve their services. They are partners in EURES in order to facilitate mobility across national borders on the European labour market and, as such, are key contributors to this European Job Mobility Portal<sup>1</sup>. In many countries the employment agencies fall under the responsibility of the municipalities and they are closely related to social security agencies, or are integrated in a joint organisation (see Belgium (both Flanders and Walloon Region) and the Netherlands).
- In relation to **formal providers**, there are big differences between the Member States, for instance in the Netherlands, almost 40% of the respondents indicated that their non-formal adult education and training was provided through formal institutions<sup>2</sup>, while in France, only 1.9% of the respondents indicated the same. Adult learning is delivered at

<sup>1</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/eures/home.jsp?lang=en&langChanged=true>

<sup>2</sup> These is a discrepancy between national data and the Adult Education Survey since on national level it is estimated that 80% of adult learning is provided by private companies, while 40% of the respondents of the AES indicate that non-formal adult learning is provided through formal institutions.

all levels of the educational system. Often, the same providers are involved in providing programmes for adults as for young people. For instance in basic skills education or in vocational continuing education, secondary schools have the responsibility to provide the possibility for schooling. This is for instance the case in Portugal, United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Iceland. In other countries special structures are put in place to support adults in acquiring basic skills (Belgium (Flanders and Walloon Region) and Greece). In higher education, the same institutions are often involved in providing opportunities for adults to follow courses in higher education. Furthermore, Open Universities have been established in a number of countries (e.g. Belgium (Flanders), Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom).

- The Adult Education Survey indicates that in Europe 16.5% of the non-formal adult education and training is provided by **non-formal institutions**. Deviations between countries indicate that mainly the New Member States note higher percentages, for instance, in Estonia, 34.4%, in Poland 49.9% and in Slovenia 44.6% of the respondents indicate that non-formal institutions are their adult learning providers. On the other hand, countries like Belgium, United Kingdom, and Italy present rates lower than 10%. Non-formal adult learning portrays a wide variety of organisations and institutions providing opportunities for socio-cultural and liberal education. Many documents studied on country level indicate the existence of cultural centres. These centres are often based on long-standing traditions and exist for decades. Even in the new Member States, these centres survived the transition period from communist to capitalist systems (see for instance in Bulgaria). In many countries, these cultural centres are affiliated with the local government, as is the case in Sweden. Traditional folk universities / folk high schools exist in a number of countries (e.g. Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, the Netherlands, and Germany). Study circles can be found in Sweden and Slovenia. In many countries (e.g. Malta, Germany, and Greece) religious institutions are also involved in providing learning opportunities for adults. In some countries, non-formal adult learning providers are organised in associations (for instance in Austria, Czech Republic, and Latvia).
- The **private sector** is extensive in some countries (e.g. Luxembourg, the Netherlands, United Kingdom, Germany, and Belgium (Flanders)). Information collected from the new Member States indicate that in the 90s the adult learning market was completely left open for private providers. Many small training companies emerged, scattering the offer of provision and diffusing responsibilities. This process can also be seen in Western European countries. In the Netherlands, for instance, it is estimated that 80%-90% of adult learning takes place in the private sector. Other information collected on country level indicate that the number of private providers is low and that almost all adult learning is provided by public funded schools and institutions (for instance in Iceland). In Luxembourg, a recent survey estimated that there are over 300 private-sector providers of training and education active in the national market. Some of them offer computer training, others are private language schools. Some consultancy firms offer various management training courses. Although some European-wide studies have been carried out, there is little information on this market, the content of the training provided and the number of people being trained.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See: Institut Technik+Bildung, University of Bremen (2008), Eurotrainer, Making lifelong learning possible: A study of the situation and qualification of trainers in Europe. See also: NIACE (2006), contract number DG EAC 21/05, Final Report for the Study on Adult Education Providers.

- There is a plethora of **other associations, organisations, NGOs, and research institutions** active in the adult learning sector. Some of them fall under the responsibility of the government and have the task to develop and support the adult learning sector. Examples can be found in Austria, Romania, Estonia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, and Greece.

#### 4.3.3 Financial sources for adult education

In this section we go deeper into the question of the financial sources available for adult learning in general, in chapter 6 we will delve deeper into financial instruments as mobilisation strategies (such as vouchers, incentives for providers etc.).

Financial resources come from different directions. Broadly speaking three sources of funding can be identified in adult learning. First, there are **public funds** distributed in various ways to adult learning, secondly, **companies** investing in their human capital and thirdly, **individuals**, adults, themselves (partly) paying for their learning activities. The information collected on country level indicate that a large part of the costs of adult learning are covered by the state in the form of national, regional and local governments. This concerns mainly funds to spend on adult learning by public employment services. Furthermore, companies and the individual learners are responsible for often more than 50% of the costs. In some countries education including adult education delivered by state institutions and municipalities is for the most part free (e.g. Sweden and Norway). In most other countries, however, the course-fees are born for the most part by participants themselves.

The use of the **European Social Fund** for funding of adult learning, human resources and up-skilling of the labour force is a significant feature in both the old and new Member States (e.g. Austria, Estonia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Latvia, and Lithuania). It is argued that the value of ESF for the adult learning sector is significant. Many projects, initiatives and policies would not have taken place if there had not been funding from Brussels. This is for instance the case with the New Opportunity Initiative in Portugal.

Other European financial sources, such as the **Lifelong Learning Programme (Grundtvig)**, are used to fund bottom-up initiatives in adult learning, mainly in the field of quality improvement of staff (training of adult learning professionals) and mobilisation strategies to reach disadvantaged groups.

Public funding of adult learning is highly dependent on factors such as historical developments, shifts in political preferences and shifts in perspectives on adult learning. To give an idea, a few of these factors are presented below:

- **Shift in interest in, or perspectives on, adult learning:** the shift towards more vocational education and labour market related adult education and training can be seen in relation to funding schemes (see for instance in Slovenia).
- **Shifts in political landscape:** Shifts in the political landscape cause shifts in political priorities. When adult learning is high on the agenda in one political spectrum, it runs the risk of being cut by parties with other political preferences. It can be the other way around as well of course. Examples of (negative) budget shifts due to political shifts can be found in e.g. Sweden, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom.

- **Shift in accountability:** Shifts towards more performance-based funding in education, entails more emphasis on the number of students and obtained credits/qualifications in financing provision. This potentially causes a budget shift for those educational sectors that have difficulties measuring their performance in these terms. Hence, some domains of adult education run the risk of being measured according to indicators that apply more to the initial education sectors. An example where more performance-based funding will be adopted in vocational further education in 2010 in Finland.

Another factor influencing the finances involved in adult learning is the economic performance of the country. In recent years, the financial crisis affected the budgets spent on adult learning. With regard to state funding, it is still uncertain whether the crisis will have either a positive or negative effect on finances, however, it is clear that the crisis cuts very deep in the possibilities of companies and individual learners to finance participation in education and training. Although precise figures are absent, it is estimated that total budgets that flow into adult learning have decreased significantly in recent years. This, despite the empirical evidence that indicates that investments in vocational and general further training brings positive returns. Amongst others, analysis on the European Household Panel survey (EHP), estimates that permanent positive returns exist for participants in all countries.<sup>1</sup>

#### 4.3.4 Country assessment on structures and finances

Despite the major differences between countries, it can be concluded in general that in many countries much of adult learning takes place out-of-sight of the government and that governance structures in adult learning are scattered among ministries on central level and between central and decentral levels. Furthermore, in many countries most non-formal learning takes place at the workplace. In some countries, there is a large private sector. Furthermore, it can be concluded that **there is a coherent and transparent structure for adult learning in only a small number of countries** where the responsibilities are clearly divided between stakeholders. With regard to financial frameworks it can be concluded that in general, the financial situation is precarious across the European countries and that the recent economic developments worsened the situation. The European Social Fund is considered a very important pillar on which adult learning infrastructures depends in the new Member States. In most countries the costs for education and training is mostly born by individual learners and companies. In the remainder of this chapter we will present first a country assessment and secondly, a further characterisation of the adult learning domain regarding governance, main providers and finances.

In table 4.3 the country assessment is presented, focussing on structures and finances to support adult learning. The assessment took place along the following lines:

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<sup>1</sup> See: Dohmen D. and D. Timmermann on behalf of GHK (2010), Background report for the Workshop: Financing Adult Learning in times of crisis (Brussels, 18-19 October 2010): referring to: OECD (2004), OECD Employment Outlook, , Brunello, Giorgio (2001), On the Complementarity between Education and Training in Europe, IZA-discussion paper, No 309, IZA –Institute for the Study of Labor, Bonn; and University of Essex (2007), The EHP User Guide.

- Structures: Is there a coherent structural framework in the country and are responsibilities for adult learning clearly articulated amongst relevant stakeholders? (“+”: yes, “-/+”: more or less, “-”: no).
- Finances: Are there structural financial resources available to support policies for increasing participation of adults in learning: in other words, do policies have sufficient financial resources to pursue the objectives set? (“+”: yes, “-/+”: more or less, “-”: no).

**Table 4.3** How favourable are the structures and finances for increasing participation in adult learning?

Country	Structures	Finances	Country	Structures	Finances	Country	Structures	Finances	Country	Structures	Finances
AT	+	-/+	LV	-/+	-/+	FI	+	+	PT	-/+	-
BE	+	-/+	LT	-/+	-	FR	-/+	-/+	RO	-	-
BG	-	-	LI	+	-/+	DE	+	-/+	SK	-/+	-
HR	-	-	LU	+	-/+	EL	-	-	SI	-/+	-
CY	-	-	MT	-	-	HU	-	-	ES	-	-
CZ	-/+	-	NL	+	-/+	IS	+	-/+	SE	+	+
DK	+	+	NO	+	+	IE	+	-/+	TR	-	-
EE	-/+	-	PL	-	-	IT	-	-	UK	+	-/+

Source: Research voor Beleid

Looking at the table presented above, the countries can be clustered in three groups:

- A group of countries characterised by effective structures and suitable financial means to implement the adult learning policies (AT, BE, DK, LI, LU, NL, NO, FI, FR, DE, IS, IE, SE and UK)
- A group of countries that have the ability to provide the satisfactory quality of structures, but which lack the necessary financial means (CZ, EE, LT, LV, PT, SK and SI).
- A group of countries facing difficulties in terms of both implementing policies due to the lack of developed structures and the lack of financial resources (BG, HR, CY, MT, PL, EL, HU, IT, RO, ES and TR).

#### 4.4 Concluding remarks chapter 4 on the background against which policies and measures are implemented

In chapter 4 we have sketched the scene in which educational reforms that affect adult learning take place. To summarise the previous sections at the country level, we present a table in which we assess the impact of the different fields of study (context, policies, structures etc.) on how favourable the conditions are for increasing participation of adults in learning. Following this exercise, some general conclusions will be drawn.

The assessment is based on the question whether contexts, barriers, structures and finances are hampering or stimulating the participation of adults in learning. For instance, when there is, from an historical viewpoint, a learning culture in a country, this is considered to be an impetus for participation. On the other hand, when there is an absence of a

learning culture, this can be judged as having a hampering effect. Every field of study has its own assessment criterion:

- **Barriers:** Are there are specific barriers to participation in the countries?
- **Context:** Is there is a historically well developed adult education system and is there, from a historical perspective awareness for the importance of adult learning? Secondly, the socio-economic trends are taken into account, assessing whether economic developments lead to more awareness of the importance of adult learning.
- **Governance: structures and finances:** Are there structures and finances in place to boost participation of adults in learning? Not necessarily, structures and finance coincide: there can be well established structures without sufficient financial resources.

It must be emphasised that this table only provides an overview that can help to analyse the detailed information gathered form the country information. The categories are defined rather broadly, avoiding the impression that this table represents the outcomes of 'exact science'. The categories of judgement are: Hampering effect: "-"; no positive, or negative effect: "+/-" and; positive effect: "+".

**Table 4.4** Assessment how favourable are the conditions for increasing participation of adults in learning?

Cou ntry	Barriers	Histori- cal con- text	Socio- economic context	Structural framework	Financial frame- work	Cou ntry	Barriers and oppor- tunities	Histori- cal con- text	Socio- economic context	Structural framework	Financial frame- work
AT	-/+	-/+	+	+	-/+	LV	-	-	-	-	-
BE	-/+	+	+	+	-/+	LT	-	-	-	-/+	-
BG	-	-	-	-	-	LI	-/+	-/+	+	+	-/+
HR	-	-	-	-	-	LU	+	-/+	+	+	-/+
CY	-	-	-/+	-	-	MT	-	-	-/+	-	-
CZ	-	-	+	-/+	-	NL	-/+	-/+	+	+	-/+
DK	+	+	-/+	+	+	NO	+	+	+	+	+
EE	-/+	-/+	-	-/+	-	PL	-	-	+	-	-
FI	+	+	-/+	+	+	PT	-	-	-/+	-/+	-
FR	-/+	-/+	-/+	-/+	-/+	RO	-	-/+	-	-	-
DE	-/+	-/+	+	+	-/+	SK	-	-	-	-/+	-
EL	-	-	-	-	-	SI	-	-	-/+	-/+	-
HU	-	-/+	-	-	-	ES	-	-	-	-	-
IS	-/+	-/+	-	+	-/+	SE	+	+	-/+	+	+
IE	-/+	-	-	+	-/+	TR	-	-	-/+	-	-
IT	-	-	-	-	-	UK	-/+	-/+	-	+	-/+

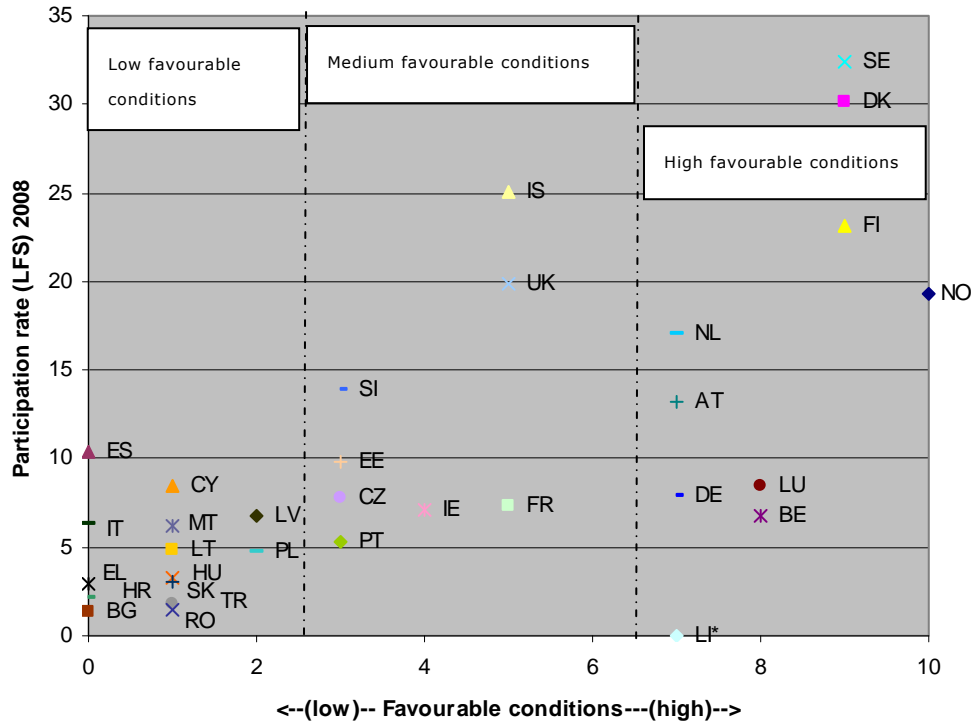
Source: Research voor Beleid, based on the country documents

On the basis of this assessment, three groups of countries can be identified:

- 1) A group of countries showing **highly favourable conditions** for increasing participation of adults in learning (NO, DK, FI, SE, BE, LU, AT, DE, NL and LI). Relative to other groups of countries, these countries share the common fact that adults face only minor barriers to participation in learning. Adult education is widely accessible; however there are situational barriers to participation, such as combining work, family duties and learning, funding of educational programmes and the lack of flexible provision. Often these countries have well developed structures in place, either related to the VET sector or longstanding liberal education institutions. The countries have often a long standing tradition in adult learning, like the Nordic countries, other countries developed lifelong learning strategies in recent years. When looking at the participation rates, these countries represent the highest scores across Europe.
- 2) A group of countries showing a **medium favourable conditions** for increasing participation of adults in learning: FR, IS, SI, PT, UK, IE, CZ and EE. These countries have satisfactory structures in place for adults to participate in learning; however, improvements are needed to bring participation to a higher level. There are countries that have very well developed systems, but where attention towards the importance of adult learning is becoming less apparent, or where the adult learning sector is primarily directed at labour market and employment policies (for instance FR and UK). There are also countries that have been severely struck by the current economic crisis (for instance, IS and EE).
- 3) A group of countries showing a **low favourable conditions** for increasing participation of adults in learning: PL, LT, CY, SK, MT, TR, EL, HU, HR, IT, LV, BG, ES and RO. This group of countries faces major barriers for implementing policies to increase the number of adults participating in adult learning. Barriers are faced at all levels, but the most influential ones are the institutional barriers: there is often a lack of sound structures and funding to get adults involved in learning. This is partially due to the fact that other educational sub-sectors have more priority. Where adult learning is considered to be important, it is mostly related to vocational education and training, second chance education and approaches to specific target groups, with the objective to increase social and professional inclusion. Some countries can be considered to be making some progress in adult learning: in recent years such countries have seen major improvements in their educational systems to enable adults to participate as well (for instance PL).

The following figure confronts the measurement of favourable conditions with the participation rates, recorded in the Labour Force Survey. How favourable the conditions are is calculated on the basis of the previous assessment. (a '+' is replaced by 2, '-/+' is replaced by 1 and '-' is replaced by 0, the final outcome is the sum of these numbers). Although this is not a very exact measure, it does indicate some evidence concerning the implementation of adult learning policies in a country. From the figure it can be concluded that there is not a strict correlation between how favourable the conditions are and the participation rate. Some countries show highly favourable conditions, but a low participation rate (for instance, in: LU, BE, DE). On the other hand, other countries have a high participation rate, but lower favourable conditions compared to other countries (for instance, IS and UK). The lack of correlation at the high ends of both favourable conditions and participation rate indicates that the output in terms of participation rates is not always related to the input in terms of tradition, structures and finances.

Figure 4.2 Favourable conditions and participation rates



Source: Research voor Beleid, LFS, own calculations, for LI no LFS-data is available.

## 5 National policies for adult learning: lifelong learning strategies

Chapter 4 already provided a general assessment of favourable conditions for implementing effective lifelong learning policies in the countries. In chapter 5 we will look at lifelong learning strategies implemented in the countries for increasing participation of adults in learning.

As we have seen, adult learning is often related with other educational sectors. In general, it can be said that adult learning, at least the employment-related parts, is highly influenced by VET. However, other educational sectors influence participation by adults as well. As we have seen in the chapter on the context in which adult learning takes place, both the historical analysis and the economic analysis indicate a shift towards more vocational/professional oriented forms of adult learning. Improving skills and competences of the labour force is seen as essential in the knowledge economy. The VET sector, therefore, is often involved in developing and implementing vocational adult education and training strategies targeted at adult learners.

In this section, a variety of policies will be reviewed that have affected adult learning in recent years in the Member States. This section will specifically focus on lifelong learning strategies implemented in the countries.

### 5.1 Types of Lifelong Learning Strategies

Explicit lifelong learning strategies have been adopted by the majority of countries in recent years.<sup>1</sup> Some of the countries did this in response to the European policies (Lisbon strategy and the Memorandum on lifelong learning), for instance Estonia, Latvia, and Bulgaria, others already had developed such a strategy (e.g. Sweden, the Netherlands, and Belgium (Flanders and Walloon Region)). Most countries developed their lifelong learning strategy before the publication of the Action Plan on Adult Learning in 2007.

The 2005 and 2007 National Reports drawn up in the context of the E&T2010 work programme indicate that "the vast majority of countries have progressed – at differing stages - in adapting their education and training systems to the LLL approach. However, coherence and comprehensiveness as well as concrete implementation of LLL policies remained for the majority of them a challenge."<sup>2</sup> The 2009 reports largely confirm these findings.

The following approaches can be observed among the countries that have reported progress regarding their LLL-policies:

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission (2009), Key competences for a changing world, Draft 2010 joint progress report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the "Education & Training 2010 work programme", COM(2009)640 final

<sup>2</sup> European Commission (2009), Key competences for a changing world, Draft 2010 joint progress report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the "Education & Training 2010 work programme", COM(2009)640 final

- A single strategy document which is broadly comprehensive and coherent has been adopted and is currently being implemented (CZ, DK, EE, FI, LT, SI, UK- Scotland); This LLL document is of significant relevance for policy making, covers all levels of education and is based on analysis, accompanied by specific objectives, embedded in legislative regulations with an associated budget, supported by a roadmap having performance targets and support by stakeholders. Austria is currently at an advanced stage in developing such a strategy.
- A LL- document has been adopted which shows a strong focus on a specific target group or a specific sector rather than covering the full spectrum of LLL (Lithuania, Latvia, Slovakia), which provides primarily a framework in which certain themes are addressed for each educational sector (e.g. Germany) or where the relevance of the strategy across sectors needs to be improved (e.g. Hungary).
- A set of policies /sectoral strategies covering all key areas of LLL, have been adopted under the guiding principle of LLL and are currently being implemented, though not having been underpinned by a single LLL strategy document (BE Flanders, ES, FR, IE, IS, LU, NL, NO, PT, SE, UK-England).

Poland, Romania and Spain reported that they are still in the process of developing a single strategy document.<sup>1</sup>

The idea that the term 'lifelong learning' is victim of policy rhetoric, rather than of policy practice, is confirmed by John Field. He argues that although commitment and policy endorsement of lifelong learning is virtually universal, policy development and implementation is patchy. The favourable policy climate has paradoxically failed to generate much that is new or innovative in terms of specific policy measures.<sup>2</sup>

It should be noticed, however, that in the Member States, the term 'lifelong learning strategy' is often not more than a label for educational policies in general and that there is very limited attention paid to adult learning. Therefore, three groups of countries can be identified in relation to lifelong learning strategies and the attention adult learning receives in these strategies:

- 1) Countries that developed a broad strategy in relation to all educational sectors and in which the focus is more on initial education: **Broad lifelong learning strategies**
- 2) Countries that developed a strategy that explicitly focuses on adult learning: **Strategies focused on adult learning**
- 3) Countries that have not (yet) developed a lifelong learning strategy: **No lifelong learning strategies**

In the following sections core elements of lifelong learning strategies developed in the Member States will be presented in more detail. However, as we have seen in chapter 4, policies depend on the specific context (e.g. historical and socio-economic), governance and structures in place in the Member States, hampering the comparability of lifelong learning strategies between Member States.

<sup>1</sup> European Commission (2009), Key competences for a changing world, Draft 2010 joint progress report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the "Education & Training 2010 work programme", COM(2009)640 final

<sup>2</sup> Field, John, (2006), Lifelong Learning and the new educational order, p. 29.

## 5.2 Broad lifelong learning strategies

In the countries where a lifelong learning strategy has been drawn up, this mostly contains an integral approach towards lifelong learning including all educational sectors. Lifelong learning has been taken as education from 'cradle to the grave'. These lifelong learning strategies cover all levels of the educational system including pre-school and school education, initial VET, higher education and continuing education and training, including teachers' and trainers' qualification. Lifelong learning is seen as a key pillar upon which the educational system of the country is based (e.g. Luxembourg). Lifelong learning strategies are developed in close co-operation with a variety of stakeholders, in all educational sectors and including the social partners. The aims of the lifelong learning strategies are in the end economic of nature. They can aim to make education available for all, in order to boost the knowledge economy of the country (see e.g. Denmark and Iceland).

Some countries (e.g. Cyprus, Hungary, Bulgaria and Germany), use lifelong learning strategies to **reform their entire educational system**. Objectives of the strategies include e.g. to "Make education and training systems accessible to all citizens of Cyprus, including those with special needs and disadvantaged groups. Improve education and training systems, their content and infrastructure, in order to meet the educational and training needs of the modern Cypriot society". This is also the case in Hungary, where the LLL strategy should aim at increasing equal opportunities in the whole system, strengthening the links between the education and training systems and the labour market; application of new governance methods; enhancing the efficiency of the education and training system, and increasing related public and private investment; improving the quality of education and training. The Hungarian lifelong learning strategy not only considers the ideal of lifelong learning as a strategy for continuing to educate people beyond their school years but as a cradle-to-grave concept of which formal schooling is the earliest phase. Another interesting lifelong learning strategy has been developed in Germany, where the strategy is seen as a broad strategy, integrating policies aimed at all the educational sub-sectors, but in which the same horizontal issues need to be addressed. Hence, although the strategy has sectoral policies, the same issues are tackled in all sectoral policies.

Other countries (for instance in Austria, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom) use lifelong learning strategies as an **umbrella strategy** to integrate specific objectives within the different educational sub-sectors. In the different sub-sectors, most countries have established similar targets and goals. With regard to early childhood education, countries emphasise the importance of a good start for children in initial education and focus on preventing deficits in educational performance. For instance, in Austria the consultation paper on lifelong learning strategy<sup>1</sup> explicitly includes the objective for improving educational provisions for children before formal school attendance (pre- primary education), by establishing a chair for pre-school and primary school pedagogy, working out an educational framework for kindergartens, and improving the education of kindergarten teachers. In the UK, the lifelong learning policy is more and more aimed at improving the school system, through, for instance, the Children's Plan, 2007 which sets out the strategy and delivery

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<sup>1</sup> BMUKK (2008). Wissen – Chancen – Kompetenzen. Strategie zur Umsetzung des Lebenslangen Lernens in Österreich.

plans for children (0 to 19-year-olds) and children's services for the next 3 years (2007-2010) in the context of the longer term ambitions for improving children and young people's lives.<sup>1</sup>

Some strategies particularly address certain themes, such as **reducing the number of drop-outs from the educational system**, both in secondary and vocational education. School drop-out is a problem all Member States face and all develop policies to tackle this problem<sup>2</sup>, however, not all countries do this within the framework of their lifelong learning strategies, like for instance Luxembourg, where a separate strategy aims at reducing the number of early school leavers. The same accounts for many other countries (for instance in the Netherlands), where reducing the number of school leavers is seen as a positive remedy for social exclusion in later life. Another example can be found in Iceland, where there is a very specific situation with regard to the number of people dropping out of the educational system.

The Icelandic national lifelong learning strategy is complemented by a specific Adult Education Act in March 2010. This Act includes provisions for building bridges between the system for validation of non-formal and informal learning and the formal school system.<sup>3</sup> Adult education is defined as any kind of study, solution or counselling that is meant to meet the needs of individuals with short formal education and is not based on legislation for upper-secondary education or higher education.<sup>4</sup> Hence, the act is mainly concerned with the low qualified. The act entails the following key topics: recognition of non-formal and informal learning and accreditation of education and training providers.

In general, both with regard to the **early childhood education** and early school leavers, the emphasis is on assuring that people have a good start in life, and preventing them from exclusion both socially and on the labour market. Paradoxically, these 'preventive' lifelong learning strategies see adult education as a remedy when the initial education system is failing. More emphasis on 'prevention', could lead to less emphasis on 'recurring' adult learning, that is, adult education and 'second chance education'. Therefore, lifelong learning strategies that focus on early childhood education and preventing early school leaving can hamper second chance education in terms of policy attention and funding. In the country documents, this however, does not appear to be the case: investments in and attention to, second chance education remains at a reasonable level and in many countries 'recurrent' and 'preventive' lifelong learning strategies are seen as two sides of the same coin.

A third major theme that can be identified in most lifelong learning strategies is the development of **vocational and professional competences**. In this regard, emphasis is placed on tuning educational provision to the needs of workers and employers. This can be

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<sup>1</sup> See: [www.dcsf.gov.uk/childrensplan](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/childrensplan)

<sup>2</sup> European Commission (2009), Commission staff working document: Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in Education and Training: indicators and benchmarks 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Eurydice (2010), National system overviews on education systems in Europe and ongoing reforms 2010 Edition: Iceland.

<sup>4</sup> Icelandic Adult Education Act, no. 27, 31 March 2010.

found in most countries, among which the Netherlands, Austria, United Kingdom, Lithuania, Ireland, Germany, and Iceland.

Another theme that receives attention in lifelong learning strategies is **combatting poor literacy**. This issue is related to the European work on the Key Competences of lifelong learning<sup>1</sup> and is also integrated in the Action Plan on Adult Learning. This is frequently related to social inclusion and civic integration policies in relation to minority groups. Policy in this field is often related to both early childhood education and parental support, and with preventing school drop-out. Not being able to speak the national language properly, for migrant as well as natives, is the cause of disadvantages in participating in both society and the labour market. Countries that focus explicitly on this theme in their lifelong learning strategies are the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, and Hungary.

A further theme that features regularly in lifelong learning strategies is raising **the participation of adults in education and training**. In operationalising this objective, policies move in different directions. For instance, in The Netherlands emphasis is given to creating flexible, accessible short-cycle courses in higher education (like in Denmark, Belgium (Flanders) and the United Kingdom). In Austria, policy focuses on older groups (50+), improving educational provision for them by improving the incentive system for providers and businesses, developing promotion instruments for individuals, bundling and improving the visibility of learning opportunities for the older learners, and developing learning opportunities for people after working life. In Iceland, the lifelong learning strategy aims to create opportunities and motivate people with little formal education, to improve access to education and training for the general public, to increase participation of the general public in education and training, and to ensure equality regarding access to public funding for all individuals and at all levels.

What can be very clearly seen is that these lifelong learning strategies are often not specifically directed at adult learning; on the contrary, adult learning is often one of the under-developed elements of the lifelong learning strategy. More attention is paid to preventing school drop-out, early childhood education and improving vocational education and training.

### 5.3 Lifelong learning strategies focused on adult learning

In the previous section, broad lifelong learning strategies have been discussed, and it can be concluded that attention towards adult learning in lifelong learning is not always as prominent as might be desired. However, in many countries there are more narrowly defined lifelong learning strategies that focus more on adult learning as a distinct sector of provision. For instance, in the Nordic countries, lifelong learning has been an integral part of education policy for many decades, including a specific focus on adult learning.

There are some countries aiming specifically at adult learning in their lifelong learning strategies. In these specific strategies more attention is paid to non-vocational adult educa-

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission (2006), RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning (2006/962/EC)

tion (for instance in Denmark, Finland, Norway, Estonia, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Slovakia, and, Sweden). However, there is a difference in the level at which the strategies are implemented. The broad lifelong learning strategies are often regarded as general economic frameworks that combine various specific strategies for each educational sub-sector. This can be seen, for instance, in The Netherlands, where the broad lifelong learning strategy does not specifically pay attention to adult learning, but where strategic plans are included that combat illiteracy, aim at civic integration courses for immigrants, and the upskilling of the labour force.

In some countries, the lifelong learning strategy is focused on more **humanistic elements**, for example in Estonia, where the strategy aims at improving the capacity and ability to cope with the lives of individuals, strengthening the social integration of the population, the development of citizenship, and improving the quality of people's lives. In Ireland the strategy for adult education has, among other things, included the principle of boosting citizenship: to grow in self-confidence, social awareness and social responsibility and to take a pro-active role in shaping the overall direction of societal and community decision-making. Other examples can be found in Sweden, Denmark, Latvia, Slovenia, Belgium (Flanders and Walloon Region) and Finland.

Issues that are often included in strategies aimed specifically at adults are: validation of prior learning, quality of provision, guidance and flexibility of provision.

#### **5.4 Absence of lifelong learning strategies**

In some countries there does not seem to be a coherent, all-embracing lifelong strategy. Some countries not having a lifelong learning strategy have initiated discussions and negotiations concerning such strategies include Malta, Romania, and Spain. In a small number of countries very little has happened (Italy and Liechtenstein). In Liechtenstein it is not considered necessary, given the size of the country and the adult learning sector. It must be noticed that not having developed a lifelong learning strategy does not mean that nothing is initiated to develop a coherent educational system and to increase the participation of adults in education. For instance, the responsibility of adult learning can be delegated to regional governance levels, having their own policies on adult learning and lifelong learning.

#### **5.5 Concluding remarks chapter 5 on national policies: lifelong learning strategies**

There are two major policy fields related to adult learning: education and employment policies. The policy perspective from which adult learning is approached, determines the specific characteristics of the adult learning policy. In countries where a lifelong learning strategy has been drawn up, adult learning is most of the time seen as an element within the educational policies, as a part of learning taking place after initial education. However, in these lifelong learning strategies, the emphasis is mostly placed on initial education and preventing school drop-out. In countries where the emphasis is on employment issues and labour market policy, one can see that adult learning is very much related to vocational

education and job-training, together with the lack of recognition for socio-cultural adult education and liberal education.

In general, it can be concluded that the policy framework in which the wide variety of adult learning takes place is often not coherent and no overarching frameworks exist that covers the entire field of adult education. This implies that in many countries gaps exist with regard to legal arrangements, for instance in assuring the quality of provision and especially the quality of staff.

In table 5.1 an assessment is presented with regard to the presence of adult learning in policies and legislation. With regard to lifelong learning strategies, it is assessed whether lifelong learning strategies have been developed (+). In some cases this has not been the case (-), in others, no lifelong learning strategies have been implemented, but considerable attention has been given to adult learning (-/+). With regard to special laws for adult education, it is assessed whether specific laws have been mentioned in relation to adult learning (+). When this is the case, either a year is mentioned in which a law has passed, or it is written that laws pass on an ongoing basis. Where no laws have been passed (-), it is often the case that adult learning is integrated into legislation governing other educational sectors.

**Table 5.1** Lifelong learning strategies and legal frameworks

	AT	BE	BG	HR	CY	CZ	DK	EE	FI	FR	DE	EL	HU	IS	IE	IT
Lifelong Learning Strategies	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	-	+	+	-/+	-
Special laws for adult education	+	+	-	+	-	-/+ <sup>1</sup>	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	0	0		'07			0	'93	0	0 <sup>2</sup>	0	'05	'01, '05, LLS	0	'00	'97, '00
	LV	LT	LI	LU	MT	NL	NO	PL	PT	RO	SK	SI	ES	SE	TR	UK
Lifelong Learning Strategies	+	+	-	+	-	+	+	+	-/+	-	+	+	-	+	-	+
Special laws for adult education	-	+	+	+	-	+	+	-	+	-	-	+	- <sup>4</sup>	+	+	+
		'98	'79	0 <sup>3</sup>		0	0		0			'96, '06		0 <sup>5</sup>	'06	0

Source: *Research voor Beleid*

<sup>1</sup> There are laws on verification and recognition of further education results.

<sup>2</sup> Within the framework of vocational education, giving the individual right to training (*droit individuel à la formation*), the possibility workers have to attend vocational training outside of work time and the involvement of entrepreneurial and professional sectors in this domain.

<sup>3</sup> Very much vocationally oriented

<sup>4</sup> Adult learning is the responsibility of the different territories; therefore, no laws on federal level have been implemented.

<sup>5</sup> It must be emphasised that the educational system in Sweden is considered to be adult-proof: educational laws are applicable to adults in every sector.

On the basis of table 5.1, it can be concluded that adult learning is frequently covered by a legal framework. Of the 32 countries in this study, 23 have embedded adult learning in legislation. However, the impact of the legislation varies widely: first of all, legislation does not cover the whole sector and leaves large parts unaccounted for (for instance, private providers, non-formal education, quality of staff, etc.). Secondly, the laws may not be suitable for current and future developments, for instance there is a lack of emphasis on guidance and distance learning.

Policies and legal frameworks are in place in most countries. However, as we have seen, differences exist between countries. In a first group of countries, the developed policies and legal frameworks go hand-in-hand (see AT, BE, CZ, DK, EE, PT, LT, LU, NL, NO, LI, FI, FR, DE, IS, IE, SI, SE and UK). In other countries, there are legal frameworks but adult education is not incorporated in recent policy plans (HR, EL, MT and IT). In a third group of countries, although adult learning is not fully covered by legal frameworks, policies have been developed to improve the sector (CY, LV, PL, HU, ES). In Slovakia there are policies implemented, but legal frameworks are lacking. In a last group, both legal frameworks and policies are not very well developed (BG, RO, TR).

As we have seen in chapter 4, the social and historical contexts of different countries is very important in determining how the adult learning sector is responding to social developments and initiating relevant policies and practices. Long-standing traditions are often shaped by the emancipation movements in the 1970s, and are, therefore, informed by the liberal adult education and the second chance provision of general adult education. In countries where these traditions have survived, mainly in the Nordic countries, policies and the legal framework have continued to incorporate these elements. In other countries, these traditions have slowly blurred and have largely disappeared from educational policies (for instance in The Netherlands). The new Member States shared long-standing traditions of adult education, but this was interrupted by major societal and economic changes during the 1990s. The socio-economic context shows that more and more attention is being paid to vocational education and training in order to promote the employability of the work force. New skills are needed to overcome socio-economic demands in national economies such as the ageing of the population, and the need for high qualified workers. In the contemporary situation, the economic crisis demands action to help adults to work on their employability in order to maintain their jobs or to re-enter the labour market. These developments affect the policies and laws developed for the adult learning sector in order to learn the way out of economic crisis.

## 6 Measures for increasing participation of adults

Chapter 4 examined the historical-ideological and socio-economic context in which adult learning is embedded. In addition, structural and financial frameworks have been mapped and barriers and major weaknesses in systems are identified. In the previous chapter 5 the lifelong learning strategies that have been implemented in the countries were reviewed. In this chapter, we proceed by exploring mobilisation strategies and specific initiatives which have been deployed in the different countries. Such strategies and initiatives are intended to both raise the levels of participation in adult learning, and to widen the participation by those groups at particular risk of exclusion from adult learning activities which may result in their social exclusion.

### 6.1 Overview of different mobilisation strategies

Given the significant variety of barriers to learning, a wide range of different policy measures and specific instruments can be deployed at the national level in order to remove prevailing barriers and to increase the participation of adults in all kinds of formal, non-formal and informal learning. The core understanding is that policy measures and instruments should be seen as involving the articulation of both the demand-side and the supply-side of adult learning. In order to increase the participation of adults in learning activities, it is necessary to seek to influence the complex patterns of interaction between the demand from the target groups and the structure of provision within integrated strategies.

The available policy measures and specific instruments can be distinguished in terms of 6 broad categories which tend to reflect the general tendencies within a country's lifelong learning policy addressing adult learners. In this study, national policies for widening participation in adult learning have been understood in terms of so-called 'mobilisation strategies' intended to raise levels of participation. With reference to the identification, description and analysis of 'mobilisation strategies' at national level, the following categories of relevant policy interventions can be identified:

- **Strategy 1:** information, counselling and guidance services
- **Strategy 2:** flexibility of learning trajectories;
- **Strategy 3:** quality management;
- **Strategy 4:** outreach work to specific target groups, community-based learning environments;
- **Strategy 5:** acknowledgement, recognition and accreditation of prior (experiential) learning;
- **Strategy 6:** financial instruments.

It must be stressed however, that these mobilisation strategies should not be considered as stand-alone strategies. In most cases there is substantial overlap between the strategies and often approaches combine elements from different mobilisation strategies. In fact, as will be made clear in section 6.7, combined approaches are often more effective than single approaches. In the Annex Report examples will be provided of different measures that have been identified in the countries.

## 6.2 Information, counselling and guidance services

The need to provide information, counselling and guidance services for potential adult learners was one of the key messages in the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning and has been essential to the Action Plan. In the Memorandum, under the key message rethinking guidance and counselling, the objective was raised to ensure that everyone can easily access relevant quality information and advice about learning opportunities throughout Europe and throughout their lives.<sup>1</sup> The Action Plan on Adult Learning emphasises that information and guidance have a critical role to play in reaching and motivating identified target groups. The role of the media and their capacity to address hard-to-reach groups should be taken on board.<sup>2</sup> The common element in all such measures is that institutional providers should be stimulated to make their provision of learning opportunities more accessible for adult learners.<sup>3</sup> This has been traditionally achieved by improving the provision of information about available courses, together with the provision of counselling and guidance services for potential learners. Provision of information about courses provided by specific institutions has traditionally taken the form of printed information in annual brochures, and publicity in local and regional publications. More recently, there is a trend towards making use of other media such as one-stop information desks, radio, TV and internet and organising special events such as adult Learners' Weeks.

Guidance and in particular lifelong guidance has become a policy issue in recent years. The definitions of guidance adopted by the Council refers to "a continuous process that enables citizens at any age and at any point in their lives to identify their capacities, competences and interests, to make educational, training and occupational decisions and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which those capacities and competences are learned and/or used. Guidance covers a range of individual and collective activities relating to information-giving, counselling, competence assessment, support, and the teaching of decision-making and career management skills."<sup>4</sup> Priority areas that are identified to foster lifelong guidance in Europe are:<sup>5</sup>

- Priority area 1: Encourage the lifelong acquisition of career management skills
- Priority area 2: Facilitate access for all citizens to guidance services
- Priority area 3: Develop quality assurance in guidance provision
- Priority area 4: Encourage coordination and cooperation among the various national, regional and local stakeholders

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<sup>1</sup> Commission of the European Communities (200), COMMISSION STAFFWORKING PAPER: A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, SEC(2000) 1832: <http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/pdf/MemorandumEng.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Commission of the European Communities (2007), Action Plan on Adult Learning, COM(2007) 558 final: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/adult/com558\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/adult/com558_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> See for instance: OECD (2004), Career Guidance, a handbook for policy makers: <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/53/53/34060761.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Council of the European Union (2008), Draft Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies: <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/08/st15/st15030.en08.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Council of the European Union (2008), Draft Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies: <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/08/st15/st15030.en08.pdf> and: CEDEFOP (2010), Access to success: Lifelong guidance for better learning and working in Europe: [http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/4092\\_EN.pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/4092_EN.pdf)

Furthermore, a network has been established that provides support for Member States and the European Commission in “moving European cooperation on lifelong guidance forward in both the education and the employment sectors”. The purpose of the **European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network** is “to promote cooperation at Member State level on lifelong guidance and to propose appropriate structures and support mechanisms in implementing the priorities identified in the Resolution on Lifelong Guidance (2004). The ultimate aim of the network is to provide added value to the participating countries for the development and implementation of their lifelong guidance policies, systems and services. This should benefit stakeholders, providers and users”.<sup>1</sup>

The information collected on country level indicate that the provision of information, counselling and guidance services for **both young people and adult learners has gained in significance as a policy priority in recent years.**

In the sphere of adult education, the provision of **information** has traditionally involved the dissemination, by both public and private providers, of announcements about their provision of courses and other organised learning activities. These informational activities are intended to inform the general public and specific target groups about what is on offer, what might interest them, and to encourage them to participate in these adult learning opportunities. The traditional channels utilised by institutional providers of adult learning include an annual prospectus containing detailed information about their courses, course descriptions, often the names of the teachers involved, times and locations, and any enrolment fees charged to participants. Informational leaflets, brochures and posters are usually distributed via a variety of intermediary organisations frequently visited by the general public among adults such as schools attended by their children, public libraries, local authority offices, social welfare agencies, employment services, and the waiting rooms of family doctors and dentists. Information about what is on offer is also disseminated via announcements in newspapers, and local radio and television stations. Most providers organise “open days” when interested adults are able to visit the institutions involved, and can acquire information, talk with teachers, and enrol themselves for a range of specific adult learning activities such as a course of formal learning, seminars, study circles, workshops, and, in some cases, residential weekends organised for individuals and families by folk high schools. Significant developments in this regard are identified by the country analyses.

In terms of the provision of information about the adult learning opportunities available, country documents refer to the development of virtual information systems. These comprise national and institutional **virtual portals** providing information about providers and their courses at the national, regional and local level. On the whole, however, informational activities, particularly in the sphere of liberal adult education and leisure activities, remain very local in terms of bringing adult learning “closer to home”. Providing institutions thus tend to emphasise provision in the neighbourhood which is easily accessible to adult learners. Virtual portals can, besides providing solely information, also involve **interactive online guidance and counselling** for individuals (as reported in the Netherlands, Norway and the United Kingdom). There has been a significant expansion of information disseminated via awareness-raising campaigns directed to the general public via television and ra-

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<sup>1</sup> The European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network: <http://ktl.jyu.fi/ktl/elqpn/aims/principles>

dio, and increasingly via internet, at national, regional and local levels. Most frequently mentioned in the documents assessed on national level are **Adult Learners Weeks** or Learning Festivals which are devoted to the popularisation of adult learning as a meaningful activity in the lives of adults (such as in AT, BE (Flanders), BG, CY, EE, FI, IS, IT, HU, LT, NL, NO, RO, SI, SK, ES, UK).

Guidance and counselling services have in the past largely focused on public support for young people, and their parents, in making decisions about the all important transitions from initial formal education via academic/vocational/ professional preparation for their future occupations. The provision of occupational and career guidance within the formal system of education and training for young people has been characterised by the provision of information about occupations, the necessary qualifications, together the provision of information about the acquisition of the diplomas required. For many years, this has continued to be the major characteristic of the guidance and counselling provided for adults. This still appears to be the case in many countries (e.g. Iceland, Hungary, Malta, and Poland).

In the sphere of adult education and training, the provision of public and private counselling and guidance services has been fragmented, but it is now more effectively organised in the sphere of secondary-level formal qualifications for adults. Also, national strategies for lifelong learning now give greater priority to the efficient and effective organisation of counselling and guidance for adults.

There is evidence of improved co-operation between agencies in the areas of general education, vocational training, labour market and social welfare services. Significant emphasis is placed upon the reintegration in the labour market of the unemployed, immigrants, and those dependent on social benefits.

In some countries, information, guidance and counselling services support the enhancement of "one-step up" opportunities for adults to gain formal educational qualifications at primary and secondary levels, while they increasingly support adults in gaining access to higher education. A number of countries report the transition from the emphasis on formal qualifications towards the additional component in counselling and guidance embracing the recognition of the competences acquired by adults through their participation in working and social life. This marks a shift from the traditional focus on future occupations for life, towards counselling and guidance for career development throughout the life course, even into retirement.

The formulation of national competence agendas in some countries has contributed to the refocusing of counselling and guidance upon providing information about the national, regional and local labour markets, together with the screening and certification of the competences of individuals.

The development of Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) has resulted in many countries in the development of guidance and counselling towards individualised trajectories for the maintenance and improvement of personal employability. This has contributed to greater emphasis upon the lifelong formation of competences, awareness of changes in the labour market, the reality of flexible careers, and the role of guidance and counselling in supporting sustainable employability. Such developments are demonstrated in one-stop desks and

competence centres which provide integrated support at the local level for the employed, the unemployed and job-seekers in identifying education and training opportunities which facilitate recurrent cycles of entry, re-entry, and employability in the labour market (such as in Belgium (Flanders) and the Netherlands). Growing emphasis upon work-based learning has also enhanced the significantly important responsibilities of employers, the social partners, and the education and training funds in different sectors in terms of their roles as providers of career advice, counselling and guidance, and training opportunities for their own employees. The importance of the EU's Euroguidance programme<sup>1</sup> for the development of National Guidance Centres is reported in a number of countries together with the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN) (for instance in Cyprus and Hungary).

The availability of dedicated personal counselling and guidance services for adults with an interest in furthering their learning is characterised by a highly varied history in the Member States. On the one hand, such services have been provided by national and local authorities, while, on the other hand, they have constituted part of the provision by educational institutions as part of their recruitment and intake of potential adult learners. Given the development of internet and broad-band technology, there is a trend towards national, regional and local systems of guidance and counselling based upon interactive websites. It must be noted, however, that public investment in counselling and guidance has been increasingly devoted to promoting access to the labour market, those dependent on social welfare benefits, and the acquisition of competences related to paid employment. The privatisation of guidance and counselling services, such as the reintegration programmes in the Netherlands for those excluded from the labour market, is an issue to be explored in relation to financial instruments and the market place for learning.

There are reports of specific measures to improve the training of counselling and guidance personnel together with their continuing professional development to maintain standards of provision (such as in Austria, Germany, Latvia and Lithuania). Country documents suggest that improvement in guidance and counselling services for adults have been announced in policy strategies, but that little has been implemented in practice (such as in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, and Turkey).

To conclude, guidance at all stages of the learner's journey is necessary in getting adults 'one-step-up', particularly for the low skilled. In this learner's journey three stages of guidance can be identified:<sup>2</sup>

- Stage 1 is at a general, societal level where guidance providers **raise awareness of the importance of basic skills** for individual, social and economic purposes through publicity campaigns; adult learning weeks; local clubs and churches; information provision and the identification of role models and learning ambassadors. Ambassadors can be important motivators but they must acknowledge different personal circumstances that learners bring to the learning situation. Therefore different kinds of ambassadors should be available to learners.
- Stage 2 is at a personal level where individuals are **given opportunities to explore** the issue of raising their own basic skills levels. At this stage a multi-actor approach is re-

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.euroguidance.org.uk/index1.htm>

<sup>2</sup> European Commission, DG EAC (2010), SUMMARY REPORT ON THE PEER LEARNING ACTIVITY ON BASIC SKILLS OSLO, 22- 24 MARCH 2010: [http://www.kslll.net/Documents/PLA\\_Basic%20skills\\_March%2010.pdf](http://www.kslll.net/Documents/PLA_Basic%20skills_March%2010.pdf)

quired to reach potential learners in different situations. In the workplace it could be provided by union representatives and parents could be reached by the teachers of their children. Leisure courses could also be used as entry points.

- Stage 3 is at the **action/implementation stage when the individual seeks to improve his/her basic skills**. At this stage a multi-agency but co-ordinated, one-door (one-stop shop) approach will deliver the best results. The focus should not just be on the learning opportunities available but also on the support measure which enable/support people to learn. Thus, a 'one-stop shop' would not only coordinate a variety of advisors and guidance sources and help identify relevant courses for learners, but also advise on financial support and other instruments at national/regional level which could be of help.

These three stages can be regarded as core generic stages in providing guidance for adult learners: 1) raise awareness of the importance of learning, 2) create opportunities to explore learning possibilities and 3) support individuals in taking action. These must be regarded as reiterative, recurring stages at different periods in the life course of the individual. The evidence from the analysis of country-specific documents suggests that guidance practices are reasonably well developed throughout Europe. In countries where this is not the case, steps are currently undertaken to improve guidance practices. It is clear a lot of emphasis is placed on the first stage of guidance, namely raising awareness of the importance of learning, while less emphasis is placed upon the all-important guidance during decision-making and taking action.

### 6.3 Flexibility of learning trajectories

Formal systems of general (adult) education and vocational (adult) education and training in the Member States are characterised by highly structured trajectories from primary, through secondary to higher education. Trajectories are determined by the acquisition of diplomas that function as the entry requirements for subsequent levels. These trajectories have featured variable ages of selection and transfer between general and vocational educational routes. General and vocational routes available to adult learners have largely replicated these pathways through the formal system based upon the acquisition of diplomas. The development of second-chance and second-way trajectories for adults during the 1970s and 1980s did not fundamentally modify this structure but served to reinforce it in the widening of access to educationally disadvantaged adults. Traditional forms of provision of (liberal) "adult education" in folk high schools and study circles, etc., have tended to follow the route of the "mainstreaming" of adult learning, for instance in Sweden and the emphasis upon publicly recognised outcomes as a condition of public funding. Developments during the last ten years, however, have lead increasingly towards greater emphasis on the relevance of acquiring either general and/or vocational qualifications for adults. Second-chance and second-way trajectories throughout the life course have now become the norm rather than the exception within the context of lifelong learning policies for employability. This is the core of the flexibility debate.

There have been significant developments towards improved flexibility in the provision of adult learning by educational institution; this is particularly the case of higher education institutions, but it also plays an important role in VET institutions. Flexibility applies not only with regard to entry requirements and qualifications, but even more so with regard to

'vertical flexibility' and pathways between general and vocational education.<sup>1</sup> "Flexibility in the context of widening participation refers to both spatial and temporal matters, namely changes that allow students access to education in locations and modes, and at times that, to at least a certain degree, are of individuals' rather than institutions' choosing."<sup>2</sup> This definition of flexibility is very broad and includes numerous dimensions. However, a number of categories of flexibility in educational provision have been identified in the literature:<sup>3</sup>

- 1 **flexibility of admissions:** meaning different entry routes into educational systems;
- 2 **flexibility of attendance and of delivery:** meaning the provision of non-traditional educational courses in both real and virtual time, together with programmes specifically designed for adults including blended learning formats;
- 3 **flexibility of location:** including local learning initiatives providing learning "closer to home", together with distance, and more especially distributed forms of e-learning from home, at work, in the community, clubs, churches, etc.;
- 4 **flexibility of duration:** such as flexibility in duration of courses and programmes, including part-time learning alongside full-time courses, associate or foundation degrees in higher education, links to RPL procedures; and,
- 5 **flexibility of recruitment:** targeted groups are given preferential treatment, for example, with the provision of access courses for those without the necessary entry qualifications.

The study 'Learning through Life' indicates that more flexible provision, leads to decreasing numbers of drop-outs in adult education.<sup>4</sup>

Lowering of the barriers inhibiting adults from participation in adult learning has now become an important priority in national strategies of many Member States. The objective of raising levels of participation is frequently associated with the aspiration to widen participation to groups at risk of exclusion. In many Member States this is currently reflected in concerted efforts to lower the institutional, situational and dispositional thresholds which potential adult learners continue to systematically encounter. Strategies to widen access are increasingly formulated in most Member States in terms of measures to facilitate greater flexibility in the provision of adult learning. Flexibility refers, on the one hand to, improving the flexibility in the learning trajectories available to adults, and, on the other hand, to recognition of the need for greater variability in the learning careers of individuals throughout life. In the main, the promotion of greater flexibility is focused on the re-organisation of the traditional relationships between formal and non-formal formats for adult learning.

There have been significant strategic and policy developments to facilitate improved flexibility in adult learning in those countries which have strong traditions in the provision of adult learning. These countries have relatively decentralised systems which are based upon the key roles of regional and local authorities together with autonomous private institutions in the provision of general education and vocational training for adults. The social partners

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<sup>1</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/vetreport\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/vetreport_en.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Osborne, Micheal. (2006), Flexibility and Widening Participation.

<sup>3</sup> Osborne, Michael, (2010), The contribution of flexible and lifelong learning to widening participation. p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> Schuller, Tom, David Watson (2009), Learning through Life, Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning, Summary.

are also recognised in these Member States as important stakeholders in social dialogue with regard to the development of work-based learning, together with the significance of national qualification structures and the promotion of the accreditation of prior learning. This has resulted in the implementation of greater flexibility in the delivery of adult learning in e.g. Belgium (Flanders and Walloon Region), Denmark, Finland, France, Iceland, Italy, Portugal, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. Less has been achieved elsewhere with regard to systematic innovations of educational sector to promote greater flexibility for adults to participate. This is the case of Member States characterised by centralised systems of formal education and vocational training like e.g. Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Malta, Poland Romania, Slovakia, and Turkey. With reference to the modalities of flexibility employed in this report, data on country level indicate a wide range of cases with reference to the development and implementation of policies and specific policy measures to promote enhanced flexibility. We refer to the following modalities:

- **Entry requirements and preferential access for specific target groups:** There is clear evidence that current policy initiatives are seeking to introduce more flexible entry requirements for adult learners at different levels of general and vocational education and training. These initiatives also tend to offer preferential treatment for specific target groups who do not possess the appropriate formal qualifications and diplomas. Validation and recognition of non- formal and informal learning can be regarded in this perspective as well as the work done in the field of one step up, on which a separate section is devoted (see 6.5). Recognition and validation processes could be based on the European and National Qualification Frameworks, stimulating comparability and alignment of qualifications within and across the Member States, addressing learning outcomes.
- **Distance, blended, distributed and e-learning media:** The almost immediately obvious form of flexibility implemented throughout Europe involves the wide-spread availability of (open) distance learning, blended, distributed, and e-learning learning. Open Universities (as described in national documents of Belgium (Flanders), Cyprus, Denmark, Greece, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom) have constituted a prominent example of distance learning since the late 1960s. Given the growing access to internet in Member States, despite the variable availability of broad-band services, the modality of open learning is increasingly available and much wider applications are being developed to enhance flexible adult learning for diverse target groups in different areas of learning. Other countries (such as Sweden, Finland and Norway) make use of distance learning due to the low density of their populations and the need to reach isolated rural areas. In Spain, Aula Mentor is a good example which has been used in the study of the University of Florence on enabling the low skilled to take their qualifications “one step up”<sup>1</sup>, while Catalonia also has an Open University providing open learning at lower levels of qualification.
- **Modularisation and credit transfer:** One of the most widely discussed modalities of flexibility comprises the modularisation of curricula and systems for credit accumulation and transfer. Both in higher education and VET modularisation has become an issue on the European agenda. Although documentation on country level refer to numerous practical examples, it is obvious that much has yet to be achieved in this specific area. Modularisation is very much linked to the focus on the measurability of learning out-

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<sup>1</sup> University of Florence (2010), Enabling the low skilled to take their qualification “one step up”, Implementation of the Action Plan on Adult Learning (EAC/27/2008).

comes. The ECTS implementation paves the way for more modular approaches towards study programmes increasing accessibility of higher education for adults. Within the VET sector, the introduction of ECVET does a similar thing for the vocational education. Combined with validation of prior experience, modularisation can be a powerful tool for making formal learning programmes more attractive for adults.<sup>1</sup>

- **Temporal factors such as full-time and part-time learning:** Adult learners are in their everyday lives engaged in a wide range of social activities. This applies in particular to well-known multiple responsibilities of women, who need to integrate their participation in adult learning with their own complex and flexible lives. Learning often has to be combined with paid work, unpaid work in the form of caring tasks in families and households, leisure-time, hobbies, social participation in the neighbourhood, and civic participation in community life. This means that participation in adult learning must be organised in part-time modalities and this is still not always the case. However, there is adequate evidence that formal educational institutions are increasingly changing their formats of delivery in order to take account of the complex lives of adult learners (see for instance the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Ireland, United Kingdom, Iceland, Sweden, and Norway). Of some significance here is that the more traditional forms of adult learning provision have always departed from and have been based upon the recognition of the complex lives of adults, and the subsequent need to organise learning activities when adults can access learning in terms of place and time. It is not for nothing that the “evening class” was the standard format of adult learning throughout Europe for more than a century. However, the increasingly complex lives of adult learners, together with opportunities provided by new technologies including social networking, are now leading to new formats of flexible provision which recognise these realities in the social lives of adult learners. The temporal factors are interwoven with other forms of flexibility, such as modularisation and validation of prior learning experience. Moreover, flexibility in terms of distance learning and distributed learning through internet can be considered to form an important opportunity to lower the barriers dealing with the lacking time.
- **Spatial factors in terms of the location of learning:** Legislation on adult learning in the Member States is influenced by the significant differentiation in terms of their unitary, federal, and regional constitutional frameworks. Subsequently, this has important consequences for the allocation of responsibilities for the governance of adult learning policies. In the United Kingdom, for example, there are significant differences between the legislation in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England. Spain is characterised by the responsibilities of five autonomous regions, while policy in Belgium is determined by the division of responsibilities between the Dutch, French and German-speaking communities. Member States vary, moreover, in terms of the “geography of adult learning” with specific regard to the “spatial availability” of adult learning opportunities in urban and rural areas. There are significant differences in the participation in adult learning between the populations in urban and rural areas. The recognition of the impact of adult learning on regional development is an increasingly important factor in many Member States. The use of distance, distributed and e-learning is frequently mentioned in order to overcome the spatial barriers to learning with specific reference to the emerging problems of rural decline and urban agglomeration (for instance in LT, BE, SK, PL, FI, IS, SI, ES, TR, BG and LV).

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<sup>1</sup> Cedefop (2005), European approaches to credit (transfer) systems in VET.

To conclude, flexibilisation of educational provision can take a variety of forms dependent upon the particular barriers that need to be overcome. It is also important that specific forms of flexibilisation are often accompanied by other mobilisation strategies, such as information, guidance and counselling, validation processes and outreach strategies. In conclusion, flexibility comes down to the issue of making provision more learner-centred.

## 6.4 Quality assurance and management

Quality assurance measures are intended to improve the quality of provision and was a key priority in both the Memorandum on lifelong learning and the Action Plan on Adult Learning. It has been the subject of various studies, workshops and working groups.<sup>1</sup> Among else a workshop on improving the quality on adult learning, organised by the European Commission, was especially devoted on this theme<sup>2</sup>. Research shows that not only more flexible forms of provision, but also the enhanced quality of provision and staff can lead to decreased numbers of drop-outs in adult learning.<sup>3</sup> Quality assurance measures can involve a variety of initiatives to improve the quality of staff in working with more flexible trajectories and making use of innovative learning methods, but this also has implications for the quality of the organisation of provision.

The information collected on country level indicate that **quality assurance measures** have been introduced in a number of Member States in order to improve the quality of the provision of the learning activities available to adults. This is for instance the case in the Nordic countries, Portugal, Austria and the United Kingdom. When adult learning is provided by formal initial education institutions, quality assurance measures are more developed throughout Europe. Given the current policy context in the Member States, the introduction of quality management has tended to focus more on quality control with regard to the accreditation of public and private providers of learning activities, together with the quality of the **competences possessed by the staff** employed by providers. The intention is to enhance the quality of the learning experiences available to adult learners in order to promote their sustainable participation in adult learning and to encourage the successful completion of their engagement in learning activities provided for them. In more general terms, quality management is necessary to ensure that adult learning providers acquire institutional, organisational, and professional recognition in terms of their provision of adult learning experiences. Within the overall structure of educational and vocational training, quality management demands that the adult learning sector, including both public and private providers, is expected to establish its transparency through demonstrating the quality of provision.

One particular measure to improve the quality of provision is finding the right indicators to measure the quality of the adult learning provision and setting up a monitoring system to this end. In a study of the European Commission<sup>4</sup> a number of quality assurance measures were identified that institutions can take in order to improve the quality of their staff:<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See: Research voor Beleid, (2008), *Adult Learning professionals in Europe (ALPINE)*; Research voor Beleid (2010), *Key Competences for Adult Learning Professionals*; and European Commission, DG EAC (2010),

<sup>2</sup> WORKSHOP ON QUALITY BRUSSELS, 30TH JUNE – 1ST JULY 2010 BACKGROUND REPORT

<sup>3</sup> Schuller, Tom, David Watson (2009), *Learning through Life, Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning, Summary*.

<sup>4</sup> Research voor Beleid, (2008), *Adult Learning professionals in Europe (ALPINE)*

<sup>5</sup> See: Research voor Beleid, (2008), *Adult Learning professionals in Europe (ALPINE)*

- Setting entry requirements (for instance, admission requirements, accreditation of prior learning of staff);
- Continuous professional development (for instance, induction of staff, in-service training of staff);
- Evaluation and monitoring (including benchmark procedures).

The analysis of country documents provides evidence, albeit variable, with regard to the issues addressed in the Member States with regard to quality management in the adult learning sector. This section focuses on the following issues: a) quality of staff; b) quality of providers.

#### **a) Quality of staff**

The professional development and the improvement of the quality of adult learning staff have been recognised as a priority at European level.<sup>1</sup> After all, it is they who facilitate learners developing their knowledge, skills and attitudes. However, not much is known about this particular group of practitioners.<sup>2</sup> Buiskool et al (2009), based on a European wide study, provided an overview of the variety of contexts in which adult learning staff is working and revealed the factors that promote or affect the quality of work provided by these practitioners.<sup>3</sup> They conclude, among else, that many countries do not have a clear view of the competences needed to fulfil professional tasks in the adult learning sector. In several European countries, competence profiles and standards for adult learning staff have been developed and implemented<sup>4</sup>, although their scope of application differs considerably between institutional and regional levels. They indicate that there is a clear need for a set of key competences at European level to make systems comparable and to sustain or improve the quality of staff. The set of competences proposed could be used as a reference framework for individual countries in developing policy and was recently published by the European Commission.<sup>5</sup> This 'reference framework' can also serve human resource managers to identify blank spots in the competences covered by staff-members in order to provide good quality adult learning provision.

Because of the almost total absence in many Member States of regulations with regard to the entry requirements for those who manage and conduct adult learning activities, work in the adult learning sector is to a great extent an 'open' occupational area which almost any individual can enter and which lacks professional status. In so far as formal general and vocational education and training is concerned, there are formal regulations in most European countries with regard to teacher training qualifications upon entry. In terms of the requirement of qualified teacher training, these are in the main specified for employment in public institutions which organise adult learning leading to formal educational qualifications

<sup>1</sup> See for instance: European Council (2009), Conclusions on the professional development of teachers and school leaders, November 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Eurydice (2007) NVAL in Europe, Executive Summary of National Information on Eurybase. Working Document.

<sup>3</sup> Buiskool, Bert-Jan, Jaap van Lakerveld and Simon Broek (2009), Educators at Work in two Sectors of Adult and Vocational Education: an overview of two European Research projects, in: European Journal of Education, volume 44, number 2, June, pp. 145-162.

<sup>4</sup> Bechtel, Mark (2008), Competence Profiles for Adult and Continuing Education Staff in Europe: Some Conceptual Aspects, in: Qualifying adult learning professionals in Europe, (Bielefeld).

<sup>5</sup> Research voor Beleid (2010), Key Competences for Adult Learning Professionals

(see for instance in Denmark, Finland, France and Ireland). Many other examples of educational programmes for adult learning professionals can be found in the study on Key competences for adult learning professionals (2010) commissioned by the European Commission.<sup>1</sup>

Beyond the requirement for qualified teacher status in this formal component of the adult learning sector, there are few if any entry requirements stipulated for those employed in what constitutes the vast bulk of the adult learning sector. In this sense, the acquisition of professional qualifications in the sector is characterised by “learning to do the job” by way of on-the-job professional development.

“Learning to do the job” is one of the major dimensions of the quality management undertaken by public and private providers which organise adult learning. This involves a diverse range of arrangements in most Member States for the continuing professional development (CPD) of adult learning staff throughout the very diffuse sector of adult learning activities.

National, regional and local associations for adult education play an important role in the organisation of continuing professional development of adult learning staff and the development of professionalism in the longer term (see for instance in Austria and Estonia). National innovation projects can also lead to the need to improve the professionalism of staff in the adult learning sector. This happened in countries such as Portugal, Finland, France, Iceland and Sweden. There is some evidence of the introduction of national data-bases for the recognition and registration of qualified trainers (see for instance in Greece).

#### **b) Quality of providers**

Information collected on country level indicate that there are very significant differences in the quality management systems applied with regard to the accreditation of public providers of adult learning activities. On the one hand, there are Member States in which the public provision of adult education is either integrated within the public system of education (see Iceland), or where the education and training provision for adults parallels the structure of initial education (see e.g. Denmark, Finland, France, Norway, Slovakia, and Sweden). In these countries the same quality measures apply to adult learning providers of general education which also apply to public institutions providing primary, secondary and higher education and vocational training for young people. This also applies where vocational education and training is integrated within formal provision by public institutions such as the municipal schools for adults (such as Sweden). In these countries, the quality of the provision of learning activities for adults is in the main subjected to the system of Inspectors of Education (e.g. Denmark, Finland, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden). The application of standard public quality control mechanisms is also the case, as in most countries, when adult learners participate in formal higher education courses, BA, MA, PhD, including the two-year associate degrees (e.g. Belgium (Flanders), the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom), at publicly funded institutions of higher education. With special reference to accreditation and quality control in the sphere of certificate-related vocational education and training, Finland can be regarded as an example of good practice.

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<sup>1</sup> Research voor Beleid (2010), Key Competences for Adult Learning Professionals

In many other Member States, however, the organisation of the provision of adult learning is not directly connected with the formal educational system. In these countries, the organisation of adult learning comprises a far more disparate system of publicly funded and private non-profit providers of adult learning which comprise the distinctive public system for the provision of adult learning in both the fields of general and vocational adult learning. This has significant consequences for the disparate organisation of quality management in this separate semi-public sector.

In a few countries (such as Austria, Belgium (Walloon Region), and Denmark) associations of adult education providers may be recognised as the responsible bodies for accreditation and quality management.

Elsewhere, **non-mandatory systems** have been used which regulate the accreditation of public, semi-public and non-profit providers of adult learning. In Germany, for instance there are different systems in place. Especially in those areas of adult education that receive public funding, quality management has been very well established. Different systems are used: ISO 9000ff, EFQM, LQW<sup>1</sup>. In Hungary adult education institutions have to enrol in a separate system of registration that involves mandatory rules of operation. Other countries have introduced **mandatory measures** to regulate the **accreditation of licensed providers** and quality control in the field of publicly funded vocational education and training (such as Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Romania, and Turkey).

There has been a significant expansion in the activities of **private for-profit providers** of adult learning from the late 1980s onwards. A number of factors have played a role in this important development in different countries. Perhaps the most remarkable phenomenon in this sector was the period immediately following the independence of the ex-socialist countries. The abolition of most forms of state-financed adult learning together with the introduction of the free market resulted in the almost unhindered expansion of the marketplace for commercial adult learning services geared to the re-qualification of the workforce. During the late 1990s, some of these newly independent states launched initiatives to regulate this volatile adult learning market (such as in Estonia). In other countries, the emergence of the adult learning market place was a result of decreasing public subsidies for adult learning for leisure purposes. This can be seen in the Netherlands, where the state initiated privatisation of public institutions, such as the folk high schools. Other countries (such as Ireland, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom) deregulated the provision of adult learning for both general and vocational education and training. This has brought about quite significant differences in some countries with regard to the balance between the public and private provision of adult learning.

More recently, there is a significant trend in many Member States towards the deregulation of provision and the introduction of competition between public and private for-profit providers. Legislation and the associated regulations now allow the responsible public authorities to put the provision of adult learning activities out to tender for which both public and commercial providers may submit financial tenders (such as in the Netherlands, United Kingdom, and Sweden).

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<sup>1</sup> LQW: learner-oriented-quality-management-system/Lernerorientierte Qualitätstestierung in der Weiterbildung

There is currently some evidence that such reforms have not necessarily resulted in the expected benefits and that the quality of provision, and thus the quality of the learning experiences of adults, may suffer. There is, for example, evidence that commercial providers employ staff that are lower qualified, often on temporary contracts of employment, and thus cost less to the employing company (See for instance in Sweden).

There is also some evidence that dishonest commercial providers may engage in fraudulent practices within these tendering systems. This can result in market failure due to the failure to deliver the adult learning activities for which they are contracted. The classic case occurred in the United Kingdom during the first experiment with Individual Learning Accounts when commercial providers acquired funds from the accounts of individual learners, and subsequently disappeared.

One of the major problems associated with the market place for the provision of adult learning activities is a fundamental lack of knowledge about the market and a significant lack of transparency for the 'consumers' of adult learning, which is the case in for instance Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Germany). Given the existence of problems arising from the introduction of market principles within the adult learning sector, a number of governments have introduced measures to accredit commercial providers and guarantee the quality of provision. They do this in a variety of ways which range from consumer protection legislation to accreditation of providers (see for instance in Estonia, Finland, Denmark, Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland and Iceland).

The outcomes of the Workshop on Quality<sup>1</sup> concluded that cooperation with other education and training sectors could provide good learning experiences about quality structures and processes, such as the higher education sector and the VET sector. Structures, such as the EQAVET and ESGs (European Standards and Guidelines for higher education) could be developed beyond sector models into an integrated learner-focussed model for quality assurance. On the other hand, the distinct characteristics of the adult learning sector should be kept in mind in accessing the quality in the sector: providers should have the opportunity to choose processes and tools that are best suitable with their specific situation. Moreover, the role of stakeholders, such as social partners is stressed in order to ensure confidence in the outcomes of adult learning. In addition to this good quality monitoring is required to review progress in the sector.

In conclusion, this section on quality assurance as a mobilisation strategy, demonstrates that the quality in adult learning provision has increased in the recent past. This is due partially to the fact that it is a specific issue and a key priority in the Action Plan on Adult Learning. Developments in other educational sectors, such as the introduction of EQARF as European Quality Assurance Reference framework for Vocational Education and Training, have also been of influence. It is for this reason that the adult learning domains affiliated with VET and higher education have more advanced quality assurance structures in place than the other adult learning domains, such as private providers, general and liberal adult education, which are less subject to such regulation.

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<sup>1</sup> See: European Commission, DG EAC (2010), WORKSHOP ON QUALITY BRUSSELS, 30TH JUNE – 1ST JULY 2010 BACKGROUND REPORT.

## 6.5 Outreach work to specific target groups, community-based learning environments

“Bringing learning closer to home” is a key message in both the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning and the Action Plan on Adult Learning. Within the terms of the European Commission study on “local learning centres and strategic partnerships”<sup>1</sup>, it was clearly established that the vast amount of non-formal and informal learning in the daily lives of adults, especially the low-qualified and low-skilled, takes place at a considerable distance from formal educational institutions. This non-formal and informal learning takes place primarily in families, households, neighbourhoods, local communities, and regions. Such learning is related to the everyday experiences of adults in relation to issues such as housing, health, transport, pollution and the environment. Such issues are addressed in terms of their potential for learning activities by a broad range of neighbourhood and community centres, community action groups, social movements, etc. The key characteristic of the development of these community-based non-formal and informal learning environments is that the issues and problems arising in daily life are identified as “social spaces for the development of learning questions” and the development of social capital through engagement in learning as individuals or in groups as e.g. organised by TUC in the United Kingdom.<sup>2</sup>

Outreach work can involve, for example, the use of “ambassadors for learning” involving trade union representatives in the workplace, as in the UK; contacting parents via the schools attended by their children; contacting risk groups through frontline health and welfare services via family doctors, dentists, hospitals, social/family services, and services for the homeless or drug addicts; reaching out to “in-debt” individuals and households who are in need of financial literacy education; and outreaching via voluntary organisations. Outreach work can also include targeted public information campaigns such as adult learners’ weeks, adult literacy campaigns, the targeted information work of public libraries and museums, targeted TV spots, for example, Open University spots targeted at men during football matches. Current developments in outreach work now include experiments with broadband communication and the potential of social networking software to reach targeted groups and make learning more accessible in user-friendly formats. Educational institutions, especially higher education, have built up a considerable body of expertise with outreaching activities in the context of Learning Cities and Learning Regions.

Outreach work with regard to participation in adult learning involves pro-active measures undertaken by adult education providers to establish contact with specific target groups who are considered to be in need of these services but do not make use of them (see for instance strategies to reach Roma in Romania and Hungary). Given the dominance in current policies directed to increasing levels of participation in the labour market, providers of adult learning tend to regard outreach in terms of reducing the institutional barriers that inhibit participation. In this respect, outreach strategies tend above all to focus on young drop-outs from secondary and vocational education, low-qualified workers, the unemployed, job-seekers, and, increasingly, older workers, migrants. In most Member States, this tends, on the one hand, to involve closer co-operation between providers of adult edu-

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<sup>1</sup> Research voor Beleid and PLATO (2005), Developing local learning centres and learning partnerships as part of Member States' targets for reaching the Lisbon goals in the field of education and training.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.tuc.org.uk/>

cation, employment and social service agencies in order to reintegrate individuals in the labour market (See for instance in Norway, United Kingdom, Belgium (Flanders and Walloon Region) , and the Netherlands). On the other hand, there is convincing evidence that outreach strategies in the Member States also focus on those groups which face severe problems of exclusion from adult learning as a result of their multiple social exclusion resulting from conditions of poverty, illiteracy, indebtedness, migration, refugee status, homelessness, and alcohol and drug abuse. This leads to the involvement of adult education providers in outreach activities often organised together with intermediaries such NGOs, community services, churches, clubs, and front-line health and welfare support services including family-care workers, community nurses, social workers, and the health services such as family doctors. Through consultation with those in day-to-day contact with at-risk groups, the outreach strategies of adult education providers seek to explore innovative ways of meeting specific learning needs, and to fill the gaps that exist in provision "closer to home". There is substantial evidence on country level and previous studies such as "Enabling the Low Skilled to take their Qualifications "one step up""<sup>1</sup> to support the development of these so-called "hybrid" forms for the provision of adult learning activities for adults in order to support them in learning their way out of the threatening experience of social exclusion.

To conclude, there is a variety of outreach strategies which are targeted at those social groups most at risk of social exclusion and to encourage their participation in adult learning activities. It is significant, however, that these forms of provision are largely the responsibility of NGOs, in some cases supported by funding from international, national, regional and local authorities. While there is evidence of government support for the provision of "basic skills" for adults, there are questions about the contribution of public provision for those groups of adults most at risk with regard to the most fundamental human cultural skill, namely literacy and other basic skills. Systems of adult education can only be regarded as "flexible" when they make a contribution to the capacity of adults to acquire the literacy skills required to participate in the learning society. For all too many, the first step has yet to be taken. In order to reach the low-skills and to get them "one-step-up", a recent European Commission study emphasised the importance of developing an integrated approach, in which multiple actions are involved and several mobilisation strategies need to be combined.<sup>2</sup>

## 6.6 Recognition of prior (experiential) learning

The importance of adult learning, in Europe and world-wide, can be regarded as a response to the need to widen the participation by adults in education and training for both economic advancement and social inclusion. On the one hand, globalisation and technological developments lead to competitive challenges that require raising the skills level of the workforce. On the other hand, social inclusion makes demands upon individuals with few formal educational qualifications as a result of their initial education. One response to this challenge is to encourage individual adults to enrol in adult learning activities in order to raise the level of their formal qualifications. There is, however, convincing empirical evidence throughout

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<sup>1</sup> University of Florence (2010), Enabling the Low Skilled to take their Qualifications "one step up"

<sup>2</sup> University of Florence (2010), Enabling the Low Skilled to take their Qualifications "one step up"

Europe, and indeed world wide, that adults acquire competences in diverse learning environments which are not recognised let alone accredited. This has resulted in the growing recognition that adult learning not only takes place in formal learning environments which lead to formally recognised qualifications in general and vocational education and training. The research evidence demonstrates that most of the learning activities undertaken by adults take place in non-formal and informal learning environments such as the workplace, the voluntary activities of interest groups, and individuals in their leisure time. Adult learners acquire competences in these learning environments often at some distance from the formal systems of general education and vocational training. This has given rise to the policy priority to develop and implement procedures which can facilitate the accreditation of prior (experiential) learning (APL/APEL), and the recognition of prior learning (RPL). In the following text, RPL is used as a generic term to refer to the recognition of prior learning, while APL/APEL is used to refer to a specific set of well-established practices related to access for adults to higher education.

It is, therefore, of increasing importance to provide measures to accredit and recognise (experiential) prior qualification and competences (APL/APEL).<sup>1</sup> AP(E)L systems are now already implemented in a number of countries throughout Europe and the subject is well documented through the European Inventory that has been initiated in 2004 and is regularly updated.<sup>2</sup> Also, the Action Plan on Adult Learning has put validation high on the agenda and states: Recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning form a cornerstone in the lifelong learning strategy.

RPL in Europe was first pioneered at the national level by France with the Law on "Bilan de compétence" in 1985 and the Law on the "Validation of skills acquired by work experience" in 1992. In the past two decades, many Member States in the EU have initiated work to establish institutions, procedures, and instruments to facilitate the identification, assessment and recognition of adult learning taking place outside of formal education and training institutions in non-formal and informal adult learning environments. The growing emphasis on lifelong learning since the mid-1990s implies a stronger focus on the link between the modalities of adult learning in different areas of social activity throughout the life courses of adults. While formal educational systems are still very much focused on initial education and training, the development of lifelong learning systems faces the challenge of linking a variety of formal as well as non-formal and informal areas of adult learning. RPL has now become a common issue in the national systems since European Union Member States agreed the *Common European Principles for Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning* in 2004. They were further developed in the European Guidelines in 2008 in the context of underpinning the European Qualification Framework.

Despite the emergence in recent years of agreed European Union frameworks for qualifications and competences, information collected on country level demonstrate that the development and practices of RPL in Member States have different points of departure, depend-

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Adam (2006), 'The recognition of prior learning in the context of European trends in Higher Education and lifelong learning', in: EULLearN (2006), *Recognising Experiential Learning –Practices in European Universities*: [http://www.lumsa.it/Lumsa/Portals/File/docenti/corradi/Recognising\\_Experiential\\_Learning.pdf](http://www.lumsa.it/Lumsa/Portals/File/docenti/corradi/Recognising_Experiential_Learning.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> See: University of Warwick (2010), *Changing patterns of working, learning and career development across Europe*

ing on historical, political, economic, and cultural forces. Information collected on country level indicate that RPL and APEL systems have already been implemented in a number of countries, but that the progress achieved in other countries varies from promising initiatives to little progress made in a small number of countries. On the basis of country documents this report identifies three basic modalities for the organisation of RPL procedures: 1) Integrated RPL procedures in the formal system; 2) RPL procedures parallel to the formal system and 3) Open RPL procedures.

### **1) Integrated RPL procedures in the formal system**

Recognition of prior learning procedures in some countries is integrated within the formal education and vocational training system with particular reference to the adults who seek entry to the formal educational system, and in particular upper secondary and higher education (e.g. in the Nordic countries). As reported in the section 6.2 on flexibility, many documents on country level refer to the Accreditation of Prior and Experiential Learning (APEL) procedures which are adopted by educational institutions as part of their flexibility strategies. This takes the form of internal accreditation by the institutions themselves with regard to adults who do not possess the formal qualifications for entry to upper secondary and higher education. These procedures can include the recognition of organised prior learning where the learning has been assessed and where certificates are awarded on completion, and learning gained through unstructured experiences and short courses, arising through leisure pursuits, family experience and work. This in effect involves the use of APEL to facilitate the adaptation by adult learners to the demands made by higher education and make it possible for them to gain access to a formal course of 'traditional' adult learning. Within the Bologna Process - the European higher education reform process - there has been a shift in focus towards the importance of recognising non-formal and informal learning in entry procedures to higher education, in other words the competences and skills gained outside of formal learning environments. In most European countries, steps have been taken to formally recognise informal and non-formal learning through RPL certificates and reports with regard to more flexible entrance to higher education.

However, validation processes are also being increasingly used to validate competences at lower levels of education. Validation of non-formal and informal learning is regarded as an effective means to reach disadvantaged groups and low-skilled (see for instance in Portugal, Austria, Cyprus, Finland, Hungary, Ireland and the UK). Equivalent procedures are recognised in many countries with regard to flexible entry to upper secondary education and vocational education in the case of adult learners, to gain exemption from certain parts of a new course of formal study, or indeed to qualify for an award in an appropriate subject in secondary or higher education. In Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, for example, this form of RPL has been widely implemented in the recognition of the vocational competences of adults at the level of secondary vocational education. This is a question of recognising prior learning in order to help the existing labour force to acquire recognition of competences that correspond to a certain level of formal education. This is a widely accepted way of helping the individual to get the documentation he/she requires for further progress in the formal system. The starting point for this form of RPL was in Sweden during the 1990s identifying the specific needs of immigrants and facilitating their access to the formal educational system. Taking part of a supplementary course of formal education is not necessary as follow up of a RPL procedure, but this in practice constitutes the natural

continuation of the recognition process for some adult learners. A wide variety of similar procedures can be identified in many countries.

On the other hand, in some countries, the persistent commitment to the importance of formal vocational qualifications, including apprenticeships and the "dual 'Ausbildung'" pathways, can inhibit the development of RPL procedures (see for instance in Germany and Greece).

## **2) RPL procedures parallel to the formal system**

The organisation of parallel systems for RPL is characterised by procedures which are separated from the formal education and vocational training systems. In parallel procedures, it is not necessary for adult learners to adapt themselves to the demands of formal vocational training providers in the same manner as in integrated systems. Parallel RPL procedures have been developed with particular reference to the acquisition of vocational competences whether in the workplace or elsewhere. RPL in the parallel systems is based upon assessment and recognition of competences with reference to the more or explicit standards required by different occupations. Vocational and trade-based recognition of competences starts from the demands of specific occupations and the focus is on the agreed occupational standards of the trade in question. The occupational and trade organisations are often closely involved in the setting the standards for the RPL process, and these can be included in collective bargaining agreements between the social partners in different sectors. In individual cases, RPL procedures may result in partial recognition of the competences required for an occupation and indicate the need for supplementary training. Such training is not necessarily arranged within the formal vocational education and training system. The focus is on guiding the individual to the supplementary adult learning activities that may be necessary to acquire any additional competences required. By means of different forms of assessment and documentation of competences, the aim is to help the individual to find or keep employment in the occupation in question (examples of this can be found in Belgium (Flanders), Croatia, France, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland and the Netherlands).

There are two main methods employed in the parallel model of RPL. The first is the 'portfolio', and the second is 'authentic' assessment. Reflection and documentation are important parts of the portfolio process focusing on individual 'experiential learning', as epitomised in the 'bilan de competences'. Authentic assessment has the ambition of assessing knowledge and competence in 'real situations' with particular regard to RPL procedures in the workplace. There is, however, a tendency towards forms of RPL where the focus in the assessment of competences is on the testing of the practical competence to perform certain defined occupational tasks (see for instance in Belgium (Flanders) and the Czech Republic).

## **3) Open RPL procedures**

While recognition of prior learning involves the knowledge, skills, and competences a person possesses regardless of how they have been acquired, RPL procedures have largely focused on flexible entry to upper secondary and higher education, and the demonstration of vocational competences. However, recognition of an individual's prior learning as a part of their overall competence development can also be a way to build upon the competences acquired through participation in liberal adult education, leisure activities, participation in voluntary work, and civil society participation. In this context, RPL can be put to work in building bridges between these non-formal and informal learning environments beyond the

worlds of formal education and vocational training, and the parallel world of acquiring competences in and/or for the workplace. The data collected on country level show limited, but, nonetheless, important evidence of systematic efforts to develop RPL procedures for this purpose. In the new system for RPL in Denmark, and in some measures in The Netherlands, procedures and tools have been developed in order to help individuals document the competences acquired from leisure activities, liberal adult education, engagement in voluntary work, and civil society activities. In The Netherlands, for example, there is evidence of the use of RPL to recognise the competences acquired by volunteers as a result of their participation in sport, Scouting and Red Cross activities, together with voluntary work in the field of environmental protection and nature preservation. Open systems of RPL may also include appropriate modalities from both the integrated and parallel systems.

To conclude, validation of non-formal and informal learning is becoming more and more embedded in Europe. However, validation comprises not more than the assessment of what knowledge and skills people have acquired elsewhere. As such, validation can therefore be regarded as a mobilisation strategy that creates more flexible and better attuned entrance into learning at all levels and can include the formally low skilled. In itself, it is often not regarded a learning trajectory.

## **6.7 Financial instruments**

Financial instruments can assume various forms in the social policy systems of different Member States. On the whole, they are based upon the assumption that adult learning activities are commodities exchanged in the market place between providers and consumers. Investments in learning are viewed in terms of the returns on learning to individuals and financial instruments are regarded as stimuli for adults to invest in their personal human resources. Financial instruments include public and/or private funding of individual adult learners, grants, subsidies, vouchers, loans and saving systems, preferential pricing policies for specific target groups, individual learning accounts, personal and corporate tax deductions related to investments in learning, levies on employers contributed to training funds, collective bargaining agreements, etc.

Despite differences in the economic and labour market contexts of the Member States, the introduction of financial instruments has been dominated by the need to close the so-called 'skills gap'. This 'skills gap' has been commonly formulated in terms of the 'learning gap' between the needs of the knowledge economy for highly qualified employees and the inadequate educational levels available among the current workforce. A core element in this discussion has been the respective financial responsibilities of governments, social partners and individuals for investments in integrated strategies for vocational education and training which are intended to make a contribution to bridging the 'learning gap'. The closing of the learning gap thus involves the mobilisation of public, semi-public and private resources for funding adult learning and the sustainable employability of the workforce and the unemployed.

The most significant financial instruments identified in the data collected on country level are described below.

### **Supply-side funding: public investments in post-compulsory education and training**

There is a traditional funding responsibility of central government in all Member States for the public financing of initial education and vocational training together with second-chance adult education based upon the guarantee of universal entitlements. In most Member States, individual entitlements include the free provision of primary, secondary and higher education by public institutions, while in a small number of countries individuals are required to pay tuition fees especially for courses in higher education (such as in Ireland, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom). Tuition fees for adult students are in general charged at the same level as for regular students. Part-time adult students usually pay tuition fees as a proportion of full-time fees with the exception of the Netherlands where universities can fix their own, usually higher, tuition fees for students older than 30. Funding of the living costs of individual students is supported in most countries by financial systems involving variable combinations of grants and loans, although there is a tendency in some countries to move towards loans to be repaid in terms of future income from employment (such as the Netherlands and the United Kingdom with the exception of Scotland). In most Member States, arrangements are increasingly put in place which enables individual adults to enrol in full-time and part-time courses while retaining their rights to unemployment benefits, social welfare benefits, and occupational disability benefits. However, in some Member States, this category of adult students must normally remain available for employment when required (such as in Denmark, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom).

Central government responsibility for the investment of public funds on post-compulsory education and training ensures the acquisition of so-called 'start qualifications' as a guarantee of access to the labour market for unqualified young drop-outs and low-skilled adults among the employed, unemployed and job-seekers (such as in Austria, Belgium (Flanders), Denmark, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden). Start qualifications tend to be defined as the acquisition of a general education or vocational qualification at the second level of the European Qualification Framework, which means a lower secondary education or a vocational qualification. Financial arrangements for individual adults are organised via grant/loan systems, labour market agencies and social services, or through collective bargaining arrangements. A major innovation recently introduced in the Netherlands makes it possible for low-skilled workers threatened with redundancy to opt for part-time work combined with part-time unemployment benefits on the condition they must participate in learning activities organised by their employers to improve their future employability and sustainable employment.

### **Demand-side funding: Public/private investments in post-compulsory education and training**

There is a plethora of financial instruments aimed at stimulating the demand for adult learning. These instruments range from individual learning accounts, to tax benefits for employers. In this section, some examples obtained from the analysis of country documentation will be discussed.<sup>1</sup>

- Legislation on public systems for **compulsory levies on employers** regulates the funding of continuing training for employees which was first introduced in France in 1971.

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<sup>1</sup> See for a more elaborated discussion on financing: D. Dohmen and D. Timmermann on behalf of GHK (2010), Background report for the Workshop: Financing Adult Learning in times of crisis (Brussels, 18-19 October 2010)

These arrangements for employers' contributions to fund the costs of education and training are financed by a flat-rate percentage of their wage-bills.

- Collective bargaining agreements between the social partners to establish voluntary para-fiscal arrangements for the **training and development funds** for those employed in specific branches. These are based upon standard levies upon all employers (see for instance in the Netherlands, Iceland, Belgium (Flanders and Walloon Region), and the United Kingdom).
- Agreements between government and the social partners to facilitate arrangements for **paid educational leave**. These vary from income-guaranteed non-work periods of study on full pay to time-guarantees to take a period of non-work financed by loan/grant systems. From the late 1960s and early 1970s onwards, the idea of 'recurrent education' has informed the European policy debate about the funding for adults so that they can engage in recurrent periods of paid work, unpaid caring work in families, and participation in adult learning in order to improve their qualifications and life chances. However, the funding of a system of "individual rights" to paid educational leave has proved to be a major problem because it involves the transfer of public resources between "working" and "non-working" social groups in society. It has proved difficult to arrive at funding mechanisms which can facilitate recurrent periods of paid work, unpaid work, and reinvestment in personal human resources. Some of these issues are illustrated by the following cases (examples can be found in France, Austria, Luxembourg, Estonia, Belgium (Flanders and Walloon Region), and Finland).
- Furthermore, there is the possibility of **unpaid educational leave**. For instance, in Sweden, this gives employees the right to maintain their current job after educational leave with no restrictions to its duration and no restrictions concerning the content of the study.
- Collective bargaining agreements between the social partners increasingly involve the duties of employers to implement **individual competence development plans** for all their employees. These personal plans may be accompanied by agreements regarding "individual development budgets" to finance the training needs of each individual as identified in their development plan.
- **Individual learning accounts (ILAs)**, in the form of 'education and training accounts', 'voucher systems', and 'individual development budgets'. These individual accounts are funded by contributions made by government, employers and, in some countries, by employees themselves. These accounts may result from central government initiatives or collective bargaining arrangements between the social partners. The information collected on country level have identified a number of ongoing reforms in the Member States which involve the implementation of financial measures to support adults including diverse forms of individual learning accounts and voucher systems. Such measures are regarded as financial stimuli for adults to invest in the maintenance and improvement of their personal human resources through participation in adult learning. Individual learning accounts have been explored in the form of experiments in a number of Member States (like e.g. Belgium (Flanders), the Netherlands, Estonia, Germany, United Kingdom, Austria, and Finland). They are now being implemented via legislation and collective bargaining agreements. The basic principle of the individual learning account is that financial resources are made available to low-qualified individuals among both the employed and unemployed. These individual financial resources comprise contributions made by public authorities, the employer, labour market and social welfare agencies, the social partners, and, in some cases, the individuals involved. There are variations in the

degree to which individuals are free to use their individual learning accounts in choosing forms of adult learning activities.

- Other forms of financial support to adults for participation in learning can be found in Denmark. Here, there is a State Educational Support for Adults scheme (SVU) that **compensates the loss on income** due to education and training or the continuing Education Bonus in Germany.
- Fiscal facilities for individuals are available in most Member States which enable them to deduct the costs of their investment in education and training from personal income taxes. The tax deductible costs include the fees paid plus the costs of study materials and travel involved. In the main, tax authorities specify that these costs must be related to education and training activities which are related to maintaining and/or updating of the knowledge and skills needed to perform an individual's current job, or to enhance the possibilities of targeted career development in the future. With regard to such tax reductions, the tax authorities will on the whole accept formal courses of study leading to a recognised qualification whether this is granted by a public or recognised private provider. Alongside these individual facilities, in some countries there are financial facilities provided for specific target groups, such as the low-qualified, the long-term unemployed, older workers to stimulate their investments in adult learning (see for instance in Finland, Ireland, and Germany).

Besides purely financial instruments to enable adults to participate, there are a number of practices to be found in the Nordic countries that support adult learners in another way. For instance, Sweden has a well-developed childcare and care of the elderly. The pre-school is open for children of parents that study.

To conclude, demographic changes, the ageing of the working population, and the extension of working life beyond the standard age of retirement all contribute to a renewed discussion with regard to widely accepted assumptions about the standard life course of initial education, paid work, retraining, and retirement. This raises fundamental policy issues with regard to the organisation of the structure of learning opportunities which are available to individuals throughout the life course. The availability of paid educational leave and the inter-generational transfer of scarce resources between initial and post-initial learning could be the key to the implementation of lifelong learning policies which enhance the competences of different generations.

## **6.8 Concluding remarks chapter 6 on measures for increasing participation**

In this section, we have examined a wide variety of mobilisation instruments deployed to increase the participation of adults in learning or to mobilise specific target groups into adult learning. Broadly speaking, the different mobilisation strategies put in place in different countries focus upon policy perceptions about ways to lower the barriers to participation.

Generally speaking, country documents indicate that most policy initiatives and policy instruments have focused upon the flexibility of learning trajectories - with particular regard to access to upper secondary and higher education, the recognition of prior learning, and

financial support measures. The mobilisation strategies with regard to, information and guidance, outreach strategies to specific target groups, and quality management, in particular, have, on the whole, received less attention in national policies.

The instruments put in place in the different countries are scattered, ranging from small-scale initiatives in almost all the countries, such as developing an online portal to facilitate better access to information on adult learning, to initiatives in a limited number of Member States including more expansive policy reforms to develop separate systems for adult learning, developing RPL/AP(E)L procedures, the development of qualification frameworks and nation-wide provision for adults.





## 7 Assessment of the effects of policies

One of the key questions to be answered, while assessing the different strategies, reforms, and instruments applied on national level, is whether the instruments can be considered as effective and whether they contribute to the achievement of national or EU policy targets. This information is relevant for informing and convincing policy makers and other stakeholders on national level about successful practices to raise the level of participation of adults in adult learning. This chapter discusses some quantitative and qualitative results of adult learning policies across Europe, and goes deeper into the factors for a successful implementation of adult learning policies, based on case study evidence collected during the study.

### 7.1 Problems and solution for measuring effects

As already indicated in a previous study of PPMI (2010), carried out on behalf of the European Commission, the evidence of instruments' contribution to the achievement of EU policy targets remains relatively scarce and impedes country to country policy learning<sup>1</sup>. Often the comparative data on policy and governance in education and training is scarce and therefore opportunities for EU-level comparative analysis are limited. Besides, the situation varies greatly from country to country, thus timing and the nature of reforms vary to a great extent. Moreover, the impacts of these reforms are often under researched and if this is the case results are often only accessible in the national language, employ a variety of methodological approaches and the quality of their delivery differs. Besides, it is hardly possible to identify the impact, and causality, of these reforms / practices on national statistics on adult learning participation, since the initiative always captures a small part of all activities within the adult learning sector. Lastly, a lot of strategies display a large variety of instruments that are not directly aimed at increasing participation, such as initiatives in the field of quality improvement, resulting in problems defining comparable results and impact indicators.

The above mentioned study concludes subsequently that only an in-depth policy analysis at Member State level or on a specific instrument / reform could provide valuable lessons for policy makers. The success of a specific measure is, apart from the instrument itself, also dependent on the specific problems it addresses and the context in which it is implemented, and should therefore be studied more in-depth. Moreover, the lessons learned and results cannot be easily extrapolated to other contexts, and should therefore be carefully studied in terms of transferability to other contexts.

In order to have some idea about the effects and impact of different policy measures, in the context of this study, we selected five cases / interesting practices for in-depth study that were recently launched by different Member States stimulating the participation of adults in learning, addressing different target groups, serving different goals and making

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<sup>1</sup> PPMI (2010), A study on the assessment of the impact of ongoing reforms on education and training on the adult learning sector.

use of different mobilisation strategies. Regarding the later it is important to mention that policy instruments are by no means mutually exclusive, and often “mixed models” of intervention appear to work effectively in securing higher levels of participation in adult learning in the Member States.

All cases selected have a considerable weight and have had a national impact, cover a broad range of mobilisation strategies, and at least include cases with wide geographical scope. The selected practices were carefully studied concentrating on the problems the instrument address, the context in which they were developed and carried out, the objectives, the resources used (financial, human and organisational resources), the implementation, and finally the outcomes, results and impacts. In order to assess the relevance of the case / interesting practice for other learning contexts, and in order to assesses the transferability of the initiative, we clustered the selected practices with similar practices in other countries. In this way the selected cases were not considered as “stand alone” evaluations, but were linked to the rationale, implementation, and results of other similar cases.

The following five cases were selected to get better insight in the effectiveness and impact of different policy initiatives and to test partly the methodology developed in the previous report of the European Commission on the assessment of ongoing reforms in the education and training sector on adult learning:<sup>1</sup>

- New Opportunity Initiative (PT)
- Learndirect (UK)
- The Basic Competence in Working Life Programme (BKA) (NO)
- 'Invest in yourself – project promoting formal continuing education' 2008-2009 (PL)
- Learning & Working: interdepartmental project unit (NL)

A more detailed description of these cases is provided in the box below.

#### **New Opportunity Initiative (PT)**

From 1999 to date, the new adult education (and training) policy has been in effect.<sup>2</sup> By then the Knowing+. Programme for the Expansion and Development of Adult Education and Training (1999-2006) (S@ber+. Programa para o Desenvolvimento e Expansão da Educação e Formação de Adultos) was approved.<sup>3</sup> This programme revealed a clear will to encompass education and training in social policies within Portugal’s economic modernisation objectives, according to economic globalisation trends. This also enabled Portugal to apply for funding from European Union programmes, namely the European Social Fund from 2000-2006 within the III Support Community Framework, which backed Portugal’s launch of innovative policy. Since 2005, following the same principles and the main orientations from the European Union and benefiting from funding programmes (2008-2013), the New Opportunities Initiative (Iniciativa Novas Oportunidades) was launched. Within this programme, two main forms of provision were recovered from the previous programme referred and have been devel-

<sup>1</sup> Detailed descriptions of the selected cases can be found in the annex report of this study.

<sup>2</sup> Barros, R. (2009a). Políticas para a educação de adultos em Portugal – A governação pluriescalar na «nova educação e formação de adultos», vol. I. Braga: Instituto de Educação e Psicologia/Universidade do Minho (PhD Thesis) and; Barros, R. (2009b). Políticas para a educação de adultos em Portugal – A governação pluriescalar na «nova educação e formação de adultos», vol. I. Braga: Instituto de Educação e Psicologia/Universidade do Minho (PhD Thesis).

<sup>3</sup> Melo, A., Coord.; Matos, L. & Silva, O. S. (2001). S@ber+. Programa para o desenvolvimento e expansão da educação e formação de adultos (1999-2006). Lisboa: Agência Nacional de Educação e Formação de Adultos.

oped. First of all the Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competencies (Reconhecimento, Validação e Certificação de Competências) – an offer that aims to recognise and certify knowledge and skills previously acquired throughout life, though this might also require adults to attend short-duration training modules that are geared towards very specific contents, through Modular Actions (Acções Modulares). Secondly by providing Adult Education and Training Courses (Cursos de Educação e Formação de Adultos).

These two programmes (S@ber+ and Iniciativa Novas Oportunidade) represent two phases of a policy that is seen by many as a success, mainly due to educational and pedagogical innovations, to the large number of adults that enrolled and had been certified in activities proposed. Despite that the programme is focussed on basic skills, it can be argued that these two programmes have centred adult education and training policy on an approach oriented towards education for competitiveness, further emphasising the divide between adult non-vocational and vocational learning.<sup>1</sup>

The New Opportunities Initiative's external evaluation, held by an expert and independent team of the Portuguese Catholic University, shows that RPL is not just about recognising prior learning but also about achieving some new competencies. Indeed, there are evidences that through RPL, people improved key competences of primary importance, such as literacy and e.skills (computer use and internet use) as well as learning to learn skills (self-concept, self-esteem, critical thinking, learning motivations and strategies).<sup>2</sup>

#### **Learndirect (UK)**

The University for Industry was created in 1998 by the UK government and its online provider brand Learndirect was launched in 2000 in response to the New Labour concept of a University for Industry. Ufi was given a remit to use new technology to transform the delivery of learning and skills across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Learndirect has become the UK's leading online learning provider, reaching into local communities, the workplace and people's homes with flexible, accessible and supported online learning. It is one of the UK's biggest and most recognised e-learning brands, with a unique infrastructure enabling it claims more than 8,500 learners to log on and learn every day.

Whilst the University for Industry (Ufi), and the Learndirect brand that it uses for the courses it promotes, were set up with the aim of improving the availability and access to workforce skills, much of the work of Ufi is concerned with basic skills. Indeed the principal objective of Learndirect approved and promoted courses is 'to enable adults without a level two or Skills for Life qualification to gain the skills and qualifications they need to find a job or to achieve and progress at work' This further emphasises the divide between adult non-vocational and vocational learning.<sup>3</sup> This original occurred via two principal operations, advice services via telephone and the internet and the delivery of courses using e-learning. Since 2008, advice work has been devolved to other organisation with Learndirect focussing on course provision.

According to the Ufi, some 2.6 million learners have taken Learndirect branded courses since 2000 and there are 770 Learndirect centres in England and Wales. It should be noted that this represents 2.6 million separate pieces of learning which have been taken by a learner - this may be very short and discrete. However, Ufi courses are a brand and have been marketed using a considerable media presence and through online and telephone guidance. Courses themselves are offered in collaboration

<sup>1</sup> Guimarães, P. (2010). Políticas públicas de educação de adultos (1999-2006). A emergência da educação para a competitividade. Braga: Instituto de Educação da Universidade do Minho.

<sup>2</sup> Universidade Católica Portuguesa (2010) < Iniciativa Novas oportunidades: Resultados da Avaliação Externa (2009-2010).

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ufi.com/home2/aboutus/aboutus.asp>

<sup>4</sup> [www.vox.no](http://www.vox.no); Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, Government bill no 1

with Further Education Colleges (FECs), private training providers, voluntary and community sector organisations and Higher Education Institutions. These are branded as Learndirect centres.

#### **The Basic Competence in Working Life Programme (BKA) (NO)**

The nationwide programme Basic Competence in Working Life (BKA) was established by the Ministry of Education and Research in 2006 and is still running. The long-term aim is that no adult should be excluded from working life because of insufficient basic competence. The purpose is to provide more adults with the possibility of getting the basic competence that is necessary to meet the demands and challenges of changing work environments and social life. The target-group is adults that lack competence in reading, writing, numeracy and digital skills corresponding to the lower secondary school level.<sup>4</sup> The programme is composed of two parts: (1) education for employees (the main part) and (2) education for the unemployed (a smaller part). No quantitative goal is set, but so far, 12.500 employed adults have participated in educational activities within the programme and above that a smaller number of unemployed.

The funding of the programme comes from the National Budget, and decisions about the amount are taken every year. The idea is to fund and monitor basic learning projects in enterprises (private as well as public ones). Projects organised outside workplaces can also receive funding if the objective is to prepare people for working life. A small part of the programme is directed towards the unemployed. Enterprises that receive funding are expected to give a contribution of their own, for instance in the form of hours spent on preparing and running the training. Up to now, almost 200 million NKR have been allocated to the programme and approximately 600 BKA-projects have been funded.

The administration of the programme has been delegated to Vox (Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning). Vox is responsible for the process of announcing for applications and selecting the projects that will receive funding. Within the guidelines of the programme, set by the Ministry, Vox works out criteria that have to be considered in the applications. These criteria have slightly been changed over the years. The National unemployment office (NAV) is administrating the part of the programme that is directed towards the unemployed. Vox has appointed a strategy group with representatives from the employers and the workers organisations.

#### **'Invest in yourself – project promoting formal continuing education' 2008-2009 (PL)**

This informational campaign was performed at the Lower Silesia region in Poland because of the discrepancy between average European level of participation in LLL – 10.1% and respectively for Poland – 5.9%. The goal of the campaign is to promote LLL and inform the public about the options in formal continuing education available in Lower Silesia region. In order to increase the possibilities for adults to go one step up and ensure access to good-quality information about learning opportunities the following measures were taken: advertising spots on the radio and in local TV stations; billboards on the streets; press campaign and announcements; public relations measures; distribution of leaflets and brochures (special focus on rural areas); a telephone line with a toll-free number, where a consultant informed people on their options on continuing education and needs for a particular occupation in a region; a website ([www.frdl-cd.org.pl/iws](http://www.frdl-cd.org.pl/iws)) with a database on all regional institutions providing learning opportunities and information on benefits coming from engaging in LLL. The project was carried out directly by the Foundation of Local Democracy Development (Fundacja Rozwoju Demokracji Lokalnej – FRDL) (the branch in Wrocław).

#### **Learning & Working: interdepartmental project unit (NL)**

Despite much talking about lifelong learning and adult learning in the Netherlands, little concrete action was done in this field, causing the occurrence of the phrase 'leven lang leuteren' instead of 'leven lang leren', which means, roughly translated 'lifelong chitchatting'. In recent years, the focus on employment related issues in lifelong learning became more and more dominant in the Netherlands, seeing participating in employment as the final step in social inclusion. Furthermore, clear signals of a

'knowledge shortage' of highly educated workers in the Netherlands grew stronger. In an economy in which knowledge is quickly outdated, it is extremely important that learning and working alternate and reinforce each other throughout a person's career. Learning while working and working while learning increases people's job mobility. It makes it easier to find a job, keep a job, increase job-related competences and fully participate in the knowledge society. Throughout their working lives and in their social activities, citizens should continue to develop themselves through training and education. This, however, requires close collaboration between education providers, employers and other involved parties. Only within a suitable infrastructure adult learning can successfully be implemented.

In 2005 the Dutch government acknowledged that a different approach combined with an additional investment was necessary, if any progress was to be made in adult learning. In that same year the project directorate Learning and Working was launched as a joint effort between the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. This Project directorate Learning and Working coordinates a wide variety of initiatives aiming at increasing the participation of adults in working and/or learning, such as providing opportunities for APL, information and guidance, establishing a regional infrastructure to make dual trajectories (learning & working) accessible and by setting up stimulation subsidies to build cooperation between governments, providers and employees.

## 7.2 Quantitative output of policy initiatives

In discussing the outputs of policies, the quantitative numbers of adults involved in learning due to the initiative, the budget available, and initiative-specific outputs will be taken into account.

The previous chapter on mobilisation strategies displayed a large variety of instruments that are not directly aimed at increasing participation. For instance, initiatives in the field of quality improvement often do not include quantitative objectives of increased numbers of adults in learning. Also, the selected initiatives vary with regard to the approach taken and the objectives selected, however most do have quantified indicators. For example, the UK case, Learndirect indicates that it reached 2.6 million learners and the Dutch case Learning & Working had the objective to get 90.000 adults into learning trajectories. For the researched initiatives, the costs per involved learner are around 1,000 Euro. A summarising overview of the quantitative indicators defined on beforehand in the selected cases is included in table 7.1.

**Table 7.1** Summarising table on quantitative indicators of initiatives

<i>Initiative</i>	<i>Quantitative indicator (increased participation)</i>	<i>Budget available</i>
Learndirect (UK)	More than 2.8 million learners have taken a Learndirect course in the last ten years <sup>1</sup>	Up to 31 July 2005: 1,095 million Euro (930 million Pound)
Learning & Working (NL)	Ambition by 31-12-2010 to create 90.000 dual Learning & Working and RPL trajectories. This is very likely to be reached. <sup>2</sup>	The total initiative had a budget for 2008-2011 of is nearly 80 million Euro. <sup>3</sup>
New Opportunity Initiative (PT)	From 2005 to march 2010, 371,347 adults have been certified <sup>4</sup>	For the period 2005-2009 the total budget of NOI was approx. 753 million Euro <sup>5</sup>
Invest in yourself (PL)	Different outreach targets per promotion and communication channel <sup>6</sup>	approx. 450,000 Euro (PLN 1,720,608)
Basic Competence in Working Life programme (NO)	Between 2006-2010 (August), the programme comprised 12.500 employed participants.	Approx. 25 million Euro (200 million NKR)

Source: *Research voor Beleid*

Many of the selected cases focus on low qualified, low skilled and hard to reach groups to step into learning again. When looking at the disadvantaged groups targeted by the initiatives it can be seen that in the UK, currently 30% of the learners are from minority ethnic backgrounds and 8% of the learners declare a disability. Most learners are aged 24 to 44 years<sup>7</sup>. The House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts reported that it had also been

<sup>1</sup> Other quantitative indicators: 1) 8,200 people log on and learn with learndirect every day; 2) 90 per cent of learndirect learners are qualified below level two or are assessed as having a basic skills need; 3) 433,000 Skills for Life test passes have been achieved with learndirect; 4) Altogether, more than 467,000 online tests in literacy and numeracy have been taken with learndirect; 5) 23,396 people have achieved an NVQ through learndirect; 6) learndirect has worked with over 5,000 businesses through Train to Gain, resulting in more than 10,000 qualifications; 7) Learner satisfaction with learndirect currently stands at 96%. See: <http://www.ufi.com/home2/aboutus/ourimpact/ourimpact.asp>

<sup>2</sup> Per 31-12-2009 the ambition was 40,000, which was exceeded already at 1-7-2009 (44,930): [http://project.lerenenwerken.nl/images/plw/documenten/20090919\\_stavaza-pva-lerenenwerken2008-2011.pdf](http://project.lerenenwerken.nl/images/plw/documenten/20090919_stavaza-pva-lerenenwerken2008-2011.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Especially for creating learning-working trajectories (dual and RPL): 39 million Euro.

<sup>4</sup> Validation and Certification of Competencies (324,370 adults) and Adult Education and Training Courses (46,977 adults). Other quantitative indicators: 1) In March 2010, 456 New Opportunities Centres were established (while in 2004 only 72 had been created); 2) From 2007 to June 2009, the number of employed adults enrolled in New Opportunities Centres was twice the number of unemployed: 457,119 employed adults and 218,481 unemployed adults.

<sup>5</sup> 2005: €20,669,492; 2006: €19,681,012; 2007: €20,280,000; 2008: €140,808,657; 2009: €551,574,994

<sup>6</sup> Other quantitative indicators: 1) establishing an internet educational platform with the outcome of 100 thousand visitors; 2) sending email information to 60 thousand people and sending information leaflets to 300 thousand people; 3) launching the information line and giving six thousand consultations; 4) 1000 people received information sets (brochures, folders, pen drives with conference materials); 5) 80 publications appeared in press and internet and there were 50 advertising spots, 500 broadcasts of radio spots and 100 TV ones, display of 150 billboards and city lights.

<sup>7</sup> Ofsted (2008) Ufi Ltd – Inspection Report – 25 June 2008. London: Ofsted: [http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/oxedu\\_reports/download/\(id\)/99423/\(as\)/55141\\_321502.pdf](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/oxedu_reports/download/(id)/99423/(as)/55141_321502.pdf), p. 4.

successful in attracting adult learners with low skills, and more so than other providers. In 2004–05 about 60% of learners enrolling stated that they were pre-level 2 (compared with around 30% for all adult learners). It substantially exceeded its targets for enrolments by pre-level 2 learners and literacy and numeracy learners in 2004–05, by 220 and 85% respectively.

In Portugal, from 2007 to June 2009, the number of employed adults enrolled in New Opportunities Centres was twice the number of unemployed. In total 457,119 employed and 218,481 unemployed adults participated in the initiative. Still the amount of unemployed adults in the initiative is huge. In Norway, out of the 10.7000 employed participants between 2006 and 2009, 65% were women and 16% had mother tongue other than Norwegian. Furthermore, the participants' educational background varied. Around one third of the participants (32%) had finished lower secondary education and almost half (44%) had an upper secondary school qualification, most often from a vocational programme (38% of the cases). One tenth had a degree at university level. The rest of the participants had less education or no registered education. The participants with a high educational level are mostly to be found within the ICT-projects.

The drop-out rate of the initiatives can be considered a problem. In the UK example, e.g. only 65% of the participants completed their courses<sup>1</sup>, while in Portugal, a large share of adults enrolled in the New Opportunity Initiative do not obtain a qualification, either through dropping out (drop-out rate is 7%) or because processes take now more time to get concluded than in previous years. In Norway the main reasons for drop out from the programme are: (1) too large differences in knowledge levels within the course groups, (2) time constraints of the participants and (3) the complex course material (level to high).

### 7.3 Qualitative results policy initiatives

Each initiative is developed within a specific context, which affect the expected and the obtained results and impact. In the UK, for instance, since the mid 1990s, concerns were expressed that the economic competitiveness of the UK was being challenged by rapid technological change, the increasing importance of a 'knowledge society' and the forces of globalisation. Investment in lifelong learning would be a contributor to economic competitiveness, and to flexibility in the workforce. These are both a challenge for companies, given the changes in the structure of industry and the economy, as well for individuals for whom skills development would be a pre-requisite for employability, both initial and continuing education and training. Lifelong learning thus becomes an individual responsibility to ensure personal competitiveness. In this context there is also a challenge for learning providers to develop a flexible provision that meet the needs of both companies and individuals. The agenda for providers therefore becomes one, which focuses more on individual participation than on institutional structures, on continuing rather than initial 'front-end' (i.e. school and university) provision and from work domain related education and training to skills and competence for lifelong learning.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> MacLeod, Donald (December 10, 2004). "'University for Industry' failed to attract private cash". Guardian Unlimited. <http://education.guardian.co.uk/elearning/story/0,,1370296,00.html> . Retrieved 2008-02-07.

<sup>2</sup> Cloonan, M., Gallacher, J. and Osborne, M (1999). Lifelong Learning – An Introductory Briefing. Glasgow: Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning. At <http://crl.gcal.ac.uk/docs/Firstbrief.pdf>.

Individual effects therefore, were expected within the field of personal competitiveness, skills development and increased employability. The ECOTEC study<sup>1</sup>, which compared learndirect with 32 other online providers internationally, identified a key facet of the initiative in as much as unlike other comparable provision it sought to attract non-traditional learners through an e-learning offer. The report by Tamkin *et al*<sup>2</sup> also stated that that there were a number of positives features of learndirect:

- it contributes to lifelong learning by engaging new learners, and by widening participation by reaching out to traditionally disadvantaged groups
- it leads to further learning progression
- it is helping some learners enhance their employability
- it is contributing to the expansion and diversification of the learning market.

The terminology used in the report by Tamkin et al talks of stepping in, stepping on and stepping up. It suggests that learndirect helps in all of these respects. It helps 'to engage people with learning (stepping in), it helps them continue with their learning (stepping on), and it helps them go on to more complex and impactful forms of learning (stepping up)'.<sup>3</sup>

Concerning the New Opportunity Initiative in Portugal, the specific "lacks" in the Portuguese labour force, e.g. low educational attainment and low qualified personnel, are considered to have an impact on economic growth, employment and salaries, on one hand, as well as on citizenship, social cohesion and personal development on the other. Education (and training) is considered to have major impacts in social and economic terms. Individual effects include therefore, as in the UK, increased skills development and employability. Although the outcomes of the New Opportunity Initiative can be called spectacular, there is a number of doubts concerning the long-term effects on adult learning:

- 1 The focus on RPL runs the risk of transforming an educational policy into solely a validation process
- 2 The strong focus on qualifications entails a shift towards 'vocationalisation' of educational practices.
- 3 The strong link between education and training in adult learning makes that less emphasis is placed on the psychological and individual factors in educational processes. It is argued that through the initiative adults receive the qualification for which they have acquired the competences and skills throughout life, and learn little more in the process of validation.

With regard to the Norwegian initiative, most of the participants become employed or continued learning by starting another course after the BKA-course was finished. The four most common outcomes, mentioned by the participants, were: (1) better basic skills, (2) useful practical experiences,(3) stronger self-confidence and (4) a more meaningful everyday life.

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<sup>1</sup> ECOTEC (2001) learndirect - A Comparative Study - A Final Report to the Department for Education and Employment. Birmingham: ECOTEC

<sup>2</sup> Tamkin P., Hillage J., Dewson S., and Sinclair A (2003) *New Learners, New Learning* a strategic evaluation of Ufi. DFES Research Report RR440. London: DFES

<sup>3</sup> Tamkin P., Hillage J., Dewson S., and Sinclair A (2003) *New Learners, New Learning* a strategic evaluation of Ufi. DFES Research Report RR440. London: DFES

The cases studied involve some large-scale initiatives, affecting organisational structures. For instance, in the Netherlands a new inter-departmental project unit was erected. In the UK the University for Industry was established to facilitate e-learning provision and the network of UfI endorsed learning centre, are based in a wide range of locations, including colleges, libraries, community centres, employers' premises and shopping malls, with the objective to provide public access to UfI learning materials, learning services and ICT facilities. The initiatives also changed existing formal structures. For instance, in Portugal, the New Opportunities Centres were based in existing schools, associations, charitable institutions and others.<sup>1</sup> Despite the heterogeneity of institutions in which the centres are located, they work according to a specific structure involving specific rules and procedures. In Norway VOX was assigned to be administrator of the Basic Competences programme; funding can be applied for by enterprises, education suppliers collaborating with enterprises or labour organisations collaborating with enterprises. In 2010, 29% of the funded projects were hosted by an education supplier and 69% by an enterprise. The programme is all about creating awareness in enterprises of the fact that educating their personnel is a good thing both for them and the company. On average, enterprises contributed with 42% of the project costs.<sup>2</sup> The enterprises own contribution can, except from direct costs related to the courses (for instance course literature), cover costs for the loss of working-hours (if the course takes place on working-hours). In Poland, the initiative evoked institutions of continuous learning (schools for adults) asking to place their educational offer on the project website (in the database).

The cases do not provide strong evidence that the initiatives evoked substantial changes in the educational system and employment policies. Projects on the scale of Learndirect and the New Opportunity Initiative, however, contributed to awareness raising of the importance of learning in later life. In particular the Portuguese case stresses that European concepts of qualification have influenced the initiative to such an extent, that it will affect Portuguese concepts of qualification in the formal system as well. The Department for Education and Skills in the UK reported 'that Learndirect is now one of the best literacy and numeracy providers in the country'.<sup>3</sup> The Dutch case Learning & Working strengthened the awareness of the need for a national learning culture to compete in global markets and to combat the socio-economic problems the Dutch economy faces. The Norwegian case argues that lacking basic skills has become more discussable in enterprises, enabling action to be taken to increase the basic competences in company. On a regional scale the Polish case stimulated people to rethink their ideas and preconceptions of formal learning, by presenting the variety of learning opportunities and making clear the advantages learning brings to life.

## 7.4 Strengths and weaknesses of strategies

The variety of initiatives reveals a broad range of strengths and weaknesses in the way they are organised and implemented and their impact on increasing the numbers of adults in learning. These strengths and weaknesses need to be taken into account in developing

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<sup>1</sup> Basic and secondary school (196), Vocational training centre (87), Vocational training school (42), Entrepreneurial association (28), Local development association (25), Training enterprise (15), Charitable institution (14), Other (49): ANQ (Agência Nacional para a Qualificação) (2010). Informação estatística. Retrieved from: <http://www.novasoportunidades.gov.pt>.

<sup>2</sup> Engesbak & Stubbe, 2009, Norway

<sup>3</sup> House of Commons Public Accounts Committee (2006) Extending access to learning through technology: Ufi and the learndirect service. London: HMSO p. 12.

new initiatives. What is implicitly included in the strengths and weaknesses is the feasibility of implementing new initiatives. Three levels of feasibility are identified:

- **Political feasibility:** The implementation calls for a political willingness to invest in the adult learning sector and to defend the position that investments in the sector will have returns in society due to more participation in society and work.
- **Structural feasibility:** The implementation has to be possible given the structural embedding of adult learning in a country. Are there institutions, organisations and structures in place?
- **Practical feasibility:** The implementation can have many practical implications and negative side-effects.

In reviewing the case studies and analysing the reflection from other countries (minor case studies), one can conclude that often similar initiatives are already in place and more importantly, approaches should in the first place be firmly situated in their national/regional context. They should be fit-for-purpose and developed taking into account the special characteristics of the context, target groups, initiatives already available and structures in place.

From the cases, the following strengths deserve attention:

- 1 **Multi-stakeholder approach:** a successful initiative requires the involvement and cooperation of multiple stakeholders, depending on the aims and specific group of learners targeted by the initiative (ranging from NGOs, enterprises, governments (central/decentral), public employment services, adult learning providers, etc.). For more employment oriented adult learning the inclusion of enterprises, labour unions and the state is an important prerequisite, while for stimulating innovations it is important to include higher education institutes. In case other stakeholders are involved, the initiative needs to be firmly anchored in these stakeholders.
- 2 **Tailor made:** a successful initiative needs to be attuned to the specific situation the Learner is in. It needs to address a particular problem, must have a decent intervention logic and a well thought reasoning on what kind of mobilisation strategies can be used to reach the objectives and surmount the particular problem. Furthermore, the initiative needs to be learner-centred, providing enough room for flexibility or the opportunity to design individual learning trajectories.
- 3 **Government support:** A successful initiative cannot do without appropriate government support. This involves not only funding, but also political support. Alignment with government strategies and adjacent initiatives is needed. A downside of strong (political) support is that when initiatives are regarded as the achievement of a certain political party, in times of political turmoil, these projects are the first to be abandoned by other political parties.
- 4 **Branding of the initiative:** to increase the success rate of an initiative, it is important to acquaint the target group and other stakeholders with the initiative, through branding.
- 5 **Combined approach:** a successful initiative combines different mobilisation strategies, including outreach strategies. Furthermore, successful initiatives are able to include relevant innovative practices, without forgetting what has been effective in the past. In addition, in many specific cases, aimed at particular target groups, initiatives need to combine learning and social activities in order to overcome dispositional barriers towards

learning. The combined approach includes the idea that the approach should avoid being too top-down, leaving no room for other stakeholders to make it their own initiative.

- 6 **Monitoring and continuous improvement:** successful initiatives have a clear set of indicators and feedback loops to both monitor progress and to implement improvements to the initiative during the period of the initiative.
- 7 **Competent personnel:** a successful initiative involves competent staffing on each level of the initiative. This includes staff with relevant competences, such as leadership competences, didactical competences, counselling competences etc..
- 8 **Learning for a purpose:** successful initiatives are able to make learning relevant for both the learner and for others (enterprises). For instance, learning contributes to economic developments, safety and health in the workplace etc. On an individual level, learning activities need to align with the demands and desires of the learner.

The weaknesses can be identified as the lack of the above mentioned strengths, such as the lack of government support, lack of anchoring of initiatives with stakeholders, lack of competent personnel and the lack of perceived purpose for learning. In addition, the case studies suggest other, related weaknesses such as the lack of funding other than government funding and the lack of sustainability of initiatives in the future. Furthermore, one should be cautious concerning the scale of initiatives: initiatives aiming at qualifying adults have a downside when it comes to how learning is valued: when learning is primarily seen as a means towards one purpose, namely a qualification, this endangers the ideas of 'learning for the sake of learning' and 'learning for the sake of self development'. Finally, it is mentioned that successful targeted approaches have the danger of being regarded as all-inclusive programmes. For instance, reducing low literacy within the work-place programmes have the danger of being regarded as the official low-literacy programmes and therefore are reducing attention towards low-literacy of people outside work-situations.

## **7.5 Concluding remarks on chapter 7 the assessment of the effects of policies**

The impact of the case studies on the mobilisation of participation in adult learning is hard to assess because most of these measures have been introduced recently, and, in some cases, they are rather experimental. As a result, there is a lack of both quantitative and qualitative data to arrive at firm conclusions. The analysis of the data gathered on country level, have indicated that major directions took place in terms of policies, structures, legislation and financial arrangements, but they have not provided the data needed to provide firm conclusions as to the results and impact of the mobilisation strategies put in place. Nevertheless, based on more qualitative information, we are able to identify some formulas for successful mobilisation strategies.

Initiatives should:

- 1 have a multi-stakeholder approach;
- 2 be tailor made;
- 3 have government support;
- 4 be communicated through good branding of the initiative;
- 5 be a combined approach;
- 6 respect monitoring and continuous improvement;
- 7 be built around good personnel and finally;
- 8 entail purposeful learning, i.e. give a rationale for why the learning is relevant for individuals and other stakeholders.

## 8 What works for whom under which conditions: adult learning domains

This report argues that there is a wide variety of ongoing developments, reforms and modernisation in adult learning in Europe (hereafter referred to as “reform”). This variety depends on the many variables that determine the implementation of reforms and policy measures, such as the historical, political, social, economic and cultural context in which the reform takes place, the aim of the reforms, structures and finances and the mobilisation strategies chosen. In addition, reforms are often broader than strictly the adult learning sector, or cover the sector only partially. It is therefore necessary to make a distinction between different adult learning domains, all having their own specific characteristics in terms of context, objectives, target groups, frameworks and efficient mobilisation strategies.

### 8.1 Introduction: adult learning domains

Adult learning is provided in a wide range of institutions with different goals. Not only the goals of the educational programme differ, but also the *forms* of learning show diversity in the sector. Across the sector different forms of learning are provided: formal learning, non-formal learning and informal learning.<sup>1</sup> All kinds of educational activities are established to meet an even larger variety of educational needs of different groups. Adult learning is provided in a wide range of institutions with different goals. The providers work in different fields, have different target groups and execute different activities. There are different ways of clustering the different activities in the adult learning sector. For instance, the work of van Dellen and van der Kamp (2008)<sup>2</sup> identifies four work domains on the basis of four general aims of adult education: 1) Education aiming at providing qualifications for the labour market; 2) Education aiming at providing basic skills (second chance) not directly related to the labour market; 3) Education aiming to increase knowledge in culture and art and 4) Education aiming at increasing the social cohesion and citizenship.

In this study, we continued this approach by focussing on the aims of different adult learning practices. Furthermore, we add an additional variable, namely the target group of adult learning provision. Therefore, in mapping the various forms of adult learning, we can focus on the general aim of the adult education and the groups targeted by the specific adult education domain. By means of two axes (aim and target groups), adult learning domains can be categorised and compared.

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<sup>1</sup> Distinctions between the three forms of learning vary between the European Commission and the OECD. Furthermore, the Member States use their own principles to determine whether a form of learning is called formal or non-formal. For more information see: Cedefop (2008), Terminology of European education and training policy, Commission of the European Communities (2000), A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, and OECD, Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning – Home: Terminology is being worked upon and developed since then. Statistical collections also use own definitions in order to make collection of data manageable. [http://www.oecd.org/document/25/0,3343,en\\_2649\\_39263238\\_37136921\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_37455,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/25/0,3343,en_2649_39263238_37136921_1_1_1_37455,00.html)

<sup>2</sup> Dellen, Van & Van Der Kamp (2008) Work domains and competences of the European adult and continuing educator, in: S. Lattke & E. Nuissl (Ed) Qualifying Adult Learning Professionals in Europe (Bielefeld, W Bertelsmann).

- The **aim** of adult learning domains runs from an employment focus in aiming at a knowledge economy and a civil society focus, aiming at establishing a knowledge society. The concepts of knowledge economy and knowledge society are widely used in European policy documents and are used to describe two distinct phenomena<sup>1</sup>. The knowledge economy puts emphasis on the economic value of knowledge, fostering competitive dynamics in innovation. The knowledge society emphasises the societal value of knowledge in creating an open, network-society.<sup>2</sup>
- From a lifelong learning perspective, not only including initial/compulsory education, the **target group** of adult learning can be described as those that need and those that want to be involved in adult learning.<sup>3</sup> Adult learning domains that target at people that need, often fall under the responsibility of the state and include targeted approaches to disadvantaged groups. Adult learning that targets people that want to learn, place responsibility for personal and professional development in the hands of individuals.

Along these two axes adult learning domains can be mapped. The categorisation entails four broad categories:

- 1 Adult learning for the **learning society**; Obtaining skills and competences in areas of own interest.
- 2 Adult learning as condition for **innovation and competitiveness** in a knowledge economy; Developing competences serving a high level value in the value chain.
- 3 Adult learning as drivers for **employability**: Obtaining necessary skills and competences for employability.
- 4 Adult learning as provider of **basic skills**: Obtaining necessary skills and competences to participate in society (social inclusion).

Every domain has its own main objective, structures, target groups, stakeholders, finance-structures, policies and arguments to increase attention towards this particular domain. For instance, regarding the employment focus, one could argue that the knowledge economy calls for more qualified personnel, given the ageing society, globalisation and technological developments. Therefore, more people need to obtain competences and skills to enter and remain in employment. When looking at structures related to the specific domains, one could say that the domain aiming at social inclusion involves non-formal adult learning institutions, NGOs, primary and secondary schools and possibly VET centres. The domain focussing on innovation, will involve, in addition to VET centres, higher education institutes, the private sector and institutes providing in-company training. The way we speak about adult learning is therefore for a big part dependent on the specific characteristics of the adult learning domain we have in mind.

The adult learning sector is closely interwoven with other sectors (HE, VET, general education, etc.) Also other policy fields, such as active labour market policies, directly or indi-

<sup>1</sup> Brine, Jacky (2006), Lifelong learning and the knowledge economy: those that know and those that do not – discourse of the European Union, in: British Educational Research Journal, vol 32, No. 5, pp. 649-665.

<sup>2</sup> See: <http://www.slideshare.net/asaito/knowledge-economy-and-society>

<sup>3</sup> Hans Schuetze identifies three different models of education and learning in relation to society. 1) An emancipatory or social justice model: Education for all; 2) An open post-industrial society: Education for those who want and 3). An human capital model: Education for those who need. The first model can be regarded as general aim of educational policies; the last two can be seen as approaches towards this aim. See: Hans G. Schuetze (2007), Individual Learning Accounts and other models of financing lifelong learning, in: International Journal of Lifelong Education, vol 26, no. 1, 2007: 5 -23.

rectly influence adult learning. Also, this is related to the different domains of adult learning. Social inclusion is in general more related to the non-formal adult learning, employment related adult learning is more linked to vocational education and training and in-service training, innovation directed adult learning is more related to higher education and the learning society is linked with the non-formal learning including the liberal and cultural educational sector.

In the remainder of this chapter we will discuss the adult learning domains separately. It should be kept on mind, however, that the domains are not strictly separated from each other. In many situations they overlap.

## **8.2 Adult learning aimed at social inclusion**

Policy measures in this domain have to deal predominantly with dispositional barriers, such as the perception that learning is not for 'us kind of people'. Often these policies are embedded in long-standing traditions and political attention is present given the many socio-economic challenges in Europe. Adult learning policies aiming at social inclusion are often financed or governed by public money / institutes (in most cases on local level) and provided by formal education institutions. The challenge for this domain is to improve information, counselling and guidance and outreach strategies to get people into learning activities. In terms of policies and strategies, this domain receives quite some attention: the issue of basic skills is high on the political agenda in many Member States. The mobilisation strategy most appropriate to target low skilled and low qualified is to invest in information counselling and guidance with outreach strategies, providing information and learning in places where people come, instead of traditional learning places (schools, VET centres, etc.). In addition, it is argued that a multi-actor, combined approach is most effective in reaching disadvantaged groups. On a European level, this domain is well embedded in several European policies and programmes, such as the initiative on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, the ESF programme and the Grundtvig programme.

One specific issue is the use of literacy and basic skills education as a route towards more prosperity both on an individual as on a societal level. This is acknowledged by many sources. The Action Plan pinpoints this in its 'one step up' priority and the UNESCO's Millennium goals and Education For All objectives go in the same direction: increase literacy to foster social and cultural inclusion.<sup>1</sup> One recurring dimension of outreach identified, during the analysis of documents on country level, refers to the persistent problem of literacy throughout Europe together with the continuing need for flexibility in provision in this area. Literacy as the basic threshold to participation in adult learning comprises one of the dominant themes in many countries (such as in Italy, Iceland, Denmark, United Kingdom, Turkey and Estonia). The endemic nature of the severity of the literacy problem even in Member States with high levels of participation in adult learning, above the Lisbon objective of 15%, can be illustrated with the case of Norway and the Netherlands. Globalization has resulted in significant movements of populations from other continents to Europe. Member

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCO (2010), Education For All – Global Monitoring Report 2010; UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2010), Global Report on Adult Learning and Education; See: John Oxenham, UNESCO (2008), Effective literacy programmes: options for policy-makers.

States have developed their responses to this reality in relation to the histories of their relationships with countries in other continents, and their own nationals who have returned from periods living abroad in other countries. This can give rise to quite complex patterns of provision in teaching the native language to others (see for example Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Iceland, and Norway). Examples of mobilisation strategies aimed at social inclusion can be found in most countries and portray a variety of approaches. In the box two initiatives are highlighted aiming at combating illiteracy:

#### **The national agency for the fight against illiteracy (FR)**

This agency was created in 2000 as an outcome of the work achieved by the permanent group for the fight against illiteracy (groupement permanent de lutte contre l'illettrisme) established in 1984 with the aim of implementing the first phase of the national policy against illiteracy. It integrates several organisations engaged in defining and coordinating the achievements and evaluation of the impact of programmes and initiatives against illiteracy. This agency consists of an administration Council, a consultation committee, a scientific and evaluation committee, people in charge of regional programmes, a team responsible for the agency's programmes and a board of directors.

The work achieved by this agency has been part of the government's programme priorities since 2002 and in 2003 the president of the French Republic reinforced the need of fighting against illiteracy. Due to this, the agency aims at defining policy priorities in what concerns illiteracy in the frame of national education and training policies. It coordinates the work achieved by the members it integrates; it defines main programmes to be developed according to researches on illiteracy and it evaluates the impact of programmes and initiatives implemented. This agency is aimed at bringing together and organising institutional, human and material resources that can be used to prevent illiteracy. Three aims orientate the intervention of this agency: a) to measure by promoting nationally, regionally and locally, initiatives that help acknowledge illiteracy in France, prevent and fight illiteracy, and promote access to reading, writing and basic competencies; b) to organise resources available, namely those provided from the state, regional departments, enterprises and civil society organisations, in the implementation of initiatives against illiteracy; and c) to train professionals/trainers/educators that are involved in initiatives to prevent or combat illiteracy, in order to improve quality and efficiency of services offered to the French population.

According to the set of key-competences defined, a specific domain of intervention of the plan proposed by this agency is directed at the basic literacy competences used adults in everyday life. The development of such competencies among adults is aimed at having more autonomous citizens in the context of a knowledge-based society.

A free phone line has also been set-up with the aim of informing people of existing programmes and initiative devoted to combating illiteracy.

Apart from this, there are several initiatives promoted by this agency or that are the outcomes of its induction, among others:

- regional plans in the fight against illiteracy (plans régionaux de lutte contre l'illettrisme);
- permanent forum of practices (forum permanent des pratiques);
- studies and research on literacy;
- publications such as ANLCI infos ([www.anlci.gouv.fr/?id=infospratiques](http://www.anlci.gouv.fr/?id=infospratiques)) as well as many other publications that can be downloaded from this agency's internet site.

#### **Information and media campaign to reach functionally illiterate people (NL)**

It is estimated that there are approximately 1.5 million people in the Netherlands who are "functionally illiterate" (of which approximately 1 million are native Dutch-speakers and approximately

500.000 are non-native Dutch-speakers). Of the 1 million native Dutch-speakers, 250.000 are almost completely illiterate. Stichting Lezen & Schrijven (The Reading & Writing Foundation) was launched on 27 May 2004, its objective being to devote attention to the 1.5 million members of the Dutch population who, due to literacy related problems, are unable to participate fully within society. Stichting Lezen & Schrijven aims to stimulate discussion about this problem and to contribute to its alleviation.

Stichting Lezen & Schrijven was founded to serve a single purpose: preventing and reducing low literacy. Actions are:

- 1 to ensure that illiteracy is recognised as an essential socio-economic problem throughout society, both nationally and internationally;
- 2 to help prevent and reduce illiteracy by bringing together experts, interested individuals and organisations, from both the public and the private sectors, who will tackle the problem structurally, pragmatically and jointly;
- 3 to unite strengths by stimulating and, wherever necessary, creating a collaboration between organisations and relevant actor and literacy organisations, ranging from governmental institutions, social organisations to companies.

The foundation encourages anyone with difficulties in reading, writing or doing arithmetic, or anyone who knows someone with problems in these areas, to call the toll-free telephone hotline to obtain information on where to join a course.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of 2005 the Dutch Ministry of Education Culture and Science launched the Action Plan Illiteracy to 'attack' illiteracy during the years 2006-2010 ('Aanvalsplan Laaggeletterdheid 2006-2010'). This plan focused on an intensified campaign, the prevention of illiteracy and includes measures to stimulate people to read or visit the local library (special collections for people with low skills).

The government action plan to combat poor literacy made an investment of 4 million Euro a year and consisted of a wide spread of informal learning materials to help people improve reading and writing skills, a media campaign and agreements between employers, employees and government. A long-term approach is negotiated to low literacy in society and in trade and industry during the years 2007 – 2015.<sup>2</sup>

### 8.3 Adult learning aimed at employability

Policy initiatives in this domain are often related to employment policies instead of educational policies. In many countries a large share of non-formal education is provided by employers, as well as the costs. Education of the unemployed often involves state funding. The challenge for this domain of adult learning is to stimulate work-based learning and the validation of prior experience. Increase guidance and counselling services to let people see the added value of learning. Policies and strategies in this domain are related to both vocational education and training policies and employment policies. Collective labour agreements play an important role in stimulating learning at the work place. These finding affects the way to mobilise learners and stakeholders. It is argued that there are various routes to mobilisation of the learning potential. It involves increasing employer support for learning by providing reasonable arguments for employers to invest in their personnel (in terms of health, safety, efficiency and effectively) by means of information and guidance

<sup>1</sup> More information on <http://www.lezenenschrijven.nl/en/home>

<sup>2</sup> Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (2009), Policy developments adult learning sector The Netherlands 2008-2009

activities and providing financial incentives for employers (tax measures etc). Secondly, in addition, it includes raising the awareness of employees of the value of learning both in terms of career and personal development. Thirdly, it is important to value and accreditate prior experiences, in order to assure learning-centred provision, adapted to their wishes and learning needs. This involves good quality guidance and counselling and flexible provision to overcome time-related barriers. On European level different DG are involved in this domain and more cooperation and coordination should be sought. In addition, there should be more attention towards adults participating in post-initial vocational education and training.

Mobilisation strategies aimed at raising employability can be found in all countries. A wide diversity of measures is taken, of which the box provides an example from Norway.

**The Basic Competence in Working Life Programme (BKA) (NO)**

The nationwide programme Basic Competence in Working Life (BKA) was established by the Ministry of Education and Research in 2006 and is still running. The long-term aim is that no adult should be excluded from working life because of insufficient basic competence. The purpose is to provide more adults with the possibility of getting the basic competence that is necessary to meet the demands and challenges of changing work environments and social life. The target-group is adults that lack competence in reading, writing, numeracy and digital skills corresponding to the lower secondary school level.<sup>1</sup> The programme is composed of two parts: (1) education for employees (the main part) and (2) education for the unemployed (a smaller part). No quantitative goal is set, but so far, 12.500 employed adults have participated in educational activities within the programme and above that a smaller number of unemployed.

The funding of the programme comes from the National Budget, and decisions about the amount are taken every year. The idea is to fund and monitor basic learning projects in enterprises (private as well as public ones). Projects organised outside workplaces can also receive funding if the objective is to prepare people for working life. A small part of the programme is directed towards the unemployed. Enterprises that receive funding are expected to give a contribution of their own, for instance in the form of hours spent on preparing and running the training. Up to now, almost 200 million NKR have been allocated to the programme and approximately 600 BKA-projects have been funded.

The administration of the programme has been delegated to Vox (Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning). Vox is responsible for the process of announcing for applications and selecting the projects that will receive funding. Within the guidelines of the programme, set by the Ministry, Vox works out criteria that have to be considered in the applications. These criteria have slightly been changed over the years. The National unemployment office (NAV) is administrating the part of the programme that is directed towards the unemployed. Vox has appointed a strategy group with representatives from the employers and the workers organisations.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.vox.no](http://www.vox.no); Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, Government bill no 1

## 8.4 Adult learning aimed at innovation and creativity

Policies in this domain are predominantly covered by higher education policies. There is a strong political awareness of the value of highly qualified personnel in combating severe socio-economic challenges. The reforms identified in this sector offer opportunities to make provision more adjusted to the needs and demands of adults. The challenge for this domain is to stimulate formal institutions to adjust provision to the needs of older students: develop flexibility of provision in terms of time, place, modular forms and funding. It is also important to increase vicinity of higher education institutes to the labour market. The policies and legal framework depend for a large part on educational policies and in particular on policies in higher education. In addition, the emphasis on high qualified personnel makes employers aware of the value of high-level education and training programmes. To stimulate learners to start or re-start these studies, there is a need for more flexible and adult-learning-friendly provision and distance-learning opportunities. This involves amongst others, the establishment of validation processes of prior experience in higher education. Moreover, demand-side funding for individuals (vouchers, learning accounts etc.) and financial incentives for employers (tax reductions on learning activities etc.) are considered appropriate measures to stimulate participation in this adult learning domain. On a European level, more attention can be given towards the accessibility for adults of higher education. The Bologna-process and the current reforms in higher education systems, create opportunities for more flexible provision, aligning the needs and demands of adult learners with the supply of provision.

In countries where initiatives are taken to make higher education better accessible for adults, this is mostly done by increasing flexibility in formal higher education provision, given due regard to flexibility of access, flexibility of provision, modularisation etc. In Denmark a parallel system is established aimed at provision of tailor-made higher education for adults. The box gives some details about this initiative. Voucher-initiatives, to stimulate the demand-side, can be found in Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Sweden.

### Higher education for adults (DK)

The parallel system covers the entire educational system at all levels. The reform of lifelong learning introduced in 2000 (Act no. 488 of 31 May 2000), introduced three advanced levels of open education qualifications at levels comparable to mainstream higher education, although not identical:

- videregående voksenuddannelse (Advanced Adult Education) – comparable to a short-cycle higher education level (programmes at this level are yet to be elaborated);
- Diplomuddannelse (Diploma programmes) – comparable to a medium-cycle higher education level;
- Masteruddannelse (Master's programmes) – comparable to a long-cycle higher education level, e.g. Master of Business Administration (MBA), Master of Public Administration (MPA) or Master of Public Health (MPH).

Most programmes consist of 2 years of part-time study, equivalent to 1 year of full-time study. The admission requirements are a relevant prior qualification and at least 2 years of professional experience. Institutions may accept applicants on the basis of other relevant qualifications.

## 8.5 Adult learning aimed at the learning society

This domain is facing chiefly situational barriers (costs, distance, the lack of time). As system weakness it can be mentioned that countries often lack a proper learning culture advocating the importance of self-development, furthermore, the lack of policies in this field is seen as a weakness to develop effective provision. The challenge for this domain is to increase awareness of the value of personal development and transparency of the educational offer. To face this challenge, the most important mobilisation strategies include stimulating the demand-side through financial incentives (vouchers, individual learning accounts etc.), increasing quality of provision and providing information and guidance services. In addition to this, the availability of accessibly non-formal provision is an important condition for further developing the learning society. One can think here of study-circles, folk-universities and e-learning possibilities. At European level, it is mainly the Action Plan on Adult Learning that evoked policy attention to this domain. In order to keep this domain on the agenda, a new strategic document is needed, communicating the importance of this domain. It is namely the pinnacle of all adult learning activities: If people are encouraged to take up learning activities for their own interest, all other adult learning domains will benefit.

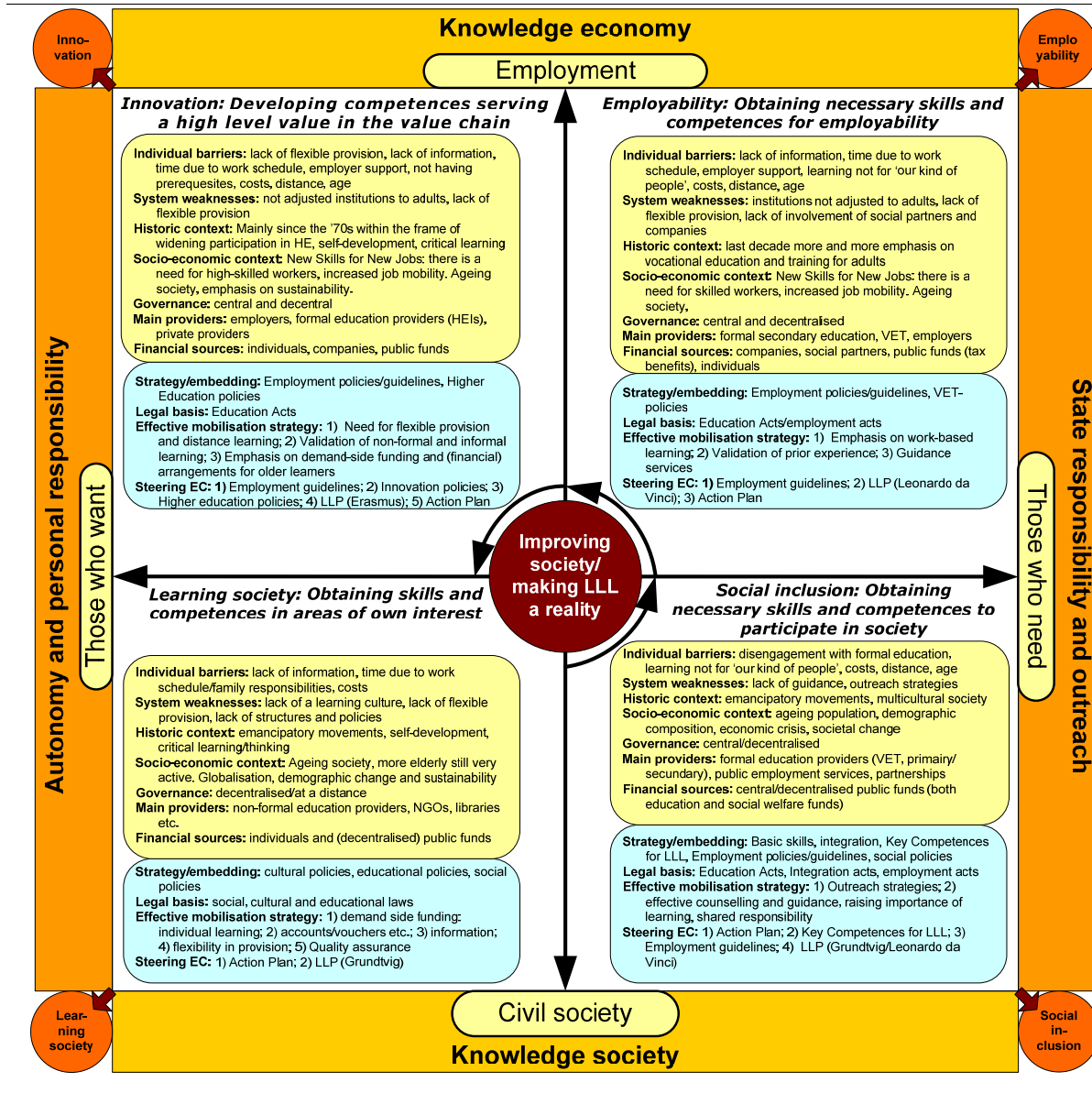
Mobilisation strategies aimed at developing the learning society can be mainly found in the Nordic countries, where this 'learning society' is most developed. One major outreach initiative to enhance the learning potential of adults was the LearnDirect initiative in the UK (as already presented in the previous chapter). A second example contains the Belgium case of open learning centres and learning points.

### **Open learning centres and open learning points (BE)**

To lower the threshold for the course participants, some centres for adult education and adult basic education in Flanders have set up open learning centres and open learning points. The open learning centres are located in the larger central municipalities, the open learning points in the smaller municipalities. The student will find at the learning points a one-stop shop for secondary adult education and adult basic education. The open learning point provides adults with learning needs in their own cities a limited number of courses. They can learn on an individual basis, with the necessary guidance and support. The open learning centres and open learning points encourage people to study and joint calls for new students are published regularly. The open learning point helps the student in finding an appropriate learning pathway. The open learning point is a sort of outpost in close liaison with the headquarters; it is a clear example of 'outreach work'. Several groups of people find it difficult to find their way into an appropriate learning provision. The open learning points lower the thresholds. The Flemish government has provided extra financial means for the open learning centres and open learning points to develop a model to be useful for several regions. According to the Minister for Employment, Education and Training the project is a success.

Figure 8.1 gives a concise summary of the above findings.

Figure 8.1 Overview adult learning domains



Source: Research voor Beleid



## **Part C: Final conclusions and recommendations**

*In Part B we gave first a general assessment of favourable conditions for implementing effective lifelong learning policies in the countries and second we have looked at lifelong learning strategies, mobilisation strategies and to what works for whom under which conditions. In Part C conclusions will be drawn from the outcomes of the study and recommendations will be presented.*



## 9 Final Conclusions and recommendations

### **The importance of investing in adult learning**

In summary, the Lisbon strategy and subsequent policy developments marked a turning point by: (a) establishing E&T as one of the top priorities of the EU; (b) widening the scope of Community policies in this area as well as providing new instruments (the OMC) for policy implementation; (c) proposing that reforms of European E&T policies should be based on the principle of LLL. The role of adult learning in this context, in addition to its contribution to personal development and fulfilment, is increasingly recognised at European as well as national level in Members States' National Reform Programmes.

Recent research confirms the importance of investing in adult learning. Public and private benefits include greater employability, increased productivity and better-quality employment, reduced expenditure in areas such as unemployment benefits, welfare payments and early-retirement pensions, but also increased social returns in terms of improved civic participation, better health, lower incidence of criminality, and greater individual well-being and fulfilment. Research on older adults indicates that those who engage in learning are healthier, with a consequent reduction in healthcare costs.

Adult learning could help overcoming the following European-wide challenges:

- Rapidly accelerating skills redundancy, while more jobs are in need for high skills
- The high number of low-skilled workers in Europe
- high level of early school leaving, while a substantial number of adults have reading and writing problems, encouraging the need for second chance opportunities
- Growing challenges of ageing population and migration
- High incidence of poverty and social exclusion
- Widely varying participation rates in lifelong learning across the EU
- Need for active engagement of citizens with Europe

In order to surmount these challenges it is needed that both the European Commission and the Member States need to take action to improve their adult learning systems. Increasing and widening participation of adults in learning should therefore be on the foreground of European educational policies.

### **The role of this study**

This study sought ways to increase and widen participation of adults in learning, overcoming particular barriers for participation and system weaknesses. In order to do so, the study aimed at providing:

- A thorough analysis of ongoing developments, reforms and modernisation in the adult learning sector in the countries participating in the Education and Training 2010 process;
- An assessment of the role of the European Commission in stimulating adult learning;
- Identify conditions for successful and effective adult learning policies on EU and Member State level.

### **Bringing solutions for a wide range of adult learning domains**

The adult learning sector is not a homogeneous sector and contains different forms of education, all having their specific characteristics and objectives. Generally, four different domains can be identified, all important for overcoming the main challenges Europe is facing:

- Adult learning aimed at **social inclusion** can help to overcome the main challenges related to demographic change, incidence of poverty, social exclusion, early school leaving and low literacy;
- Adult learning aimed at increasing **employability** can help to overcome the accelerated skills redundancy and decrease the number of low-skilled workers;
- Adult learning aimed at **innovation and creativity** can increase the general educational level and provide the highly skilled work force for the future;
- Adult learning aimed at establishing the **learning society** is essential in dealing with problems occurring in relation to the demographic changes, such as the ageing society. In addition, the learning society could actively engage citizens with Europe

## **9.1 Conclusions**

### **9.1.1 Conclusions on Member State level**

What can be concluded from the statistical data on participation of adults in education and training is that the Lisbon objectives will not be reached and that there are big disparities between the countries, both with regard to participation and educational attainment. The new E&T2020 benchmark of 15% participation presents severe challenges for policy makers to reach these participation rates in 2020.

There are huge differences in terms of favourable conditions for increasing participation between countries. In some countries, mainly the New Member States, there is not a long-standing continuous tradition in adult learning. In these countries individuals face severe barriers to participation, and structures and finances are not in place to overcome these barriers. In other countries, such as the Nordics and some other Western European countries, a more positive picture occurs. Although a lot has happened in recent years and adult learning presents itself as a strong 'medicine' for current socio-economic challenges, the adult learning sector is in danger of losing momentum to increase policy action and commitment. Converting this negative development into chances and opportunities for the sector is the subject for this final chapter.

In analysing barriers encountered in different EU countries roughly three clusters of countries can be identified.

- A first group comprises countries that face only minor barriers to increasing participation (DK, FI, NO, LU and SE). Of course, improvements can be made, but in general adults can access education fairly easily. Barriers mentioned include for instance costs for individuals.
- A second group of countries face medium barriers (AT, BE, EE, FR, DE, IS, IE, LI, NL, PT, SI and UK). These are barriers that can be overcome by targeted programmes. Often, there is a good infrastructure for adult learning in these countries, but for certain parts of the sector, there is a lack of policy attention. There are certain disadvantaged groups

and target groups that are in danger of exclusion because of the lack of possibilities to combining learning, work and family-duties.

- The last group of countries face severe barriers in increasing the participation of adults in learning (BG, HR, CY, CZ, EL, HU, IT, LV, LT, MT, PL, RO, SK, ES and TR). These countries are characterised by the fact that extensive programmes need to be developed to overcome these barriers. The severe barriers can be of different nature and include barriers such as the lack of good structures for adult learning, lack of finances to boost participation, large share of illiterate people, and lack of a learning culture etc.

When looking at opportunities for participation, many positive elements are mentioned. Most of them have to do with institutional elements: accessible learning opportunities, transparency of the provision, quality of the provision, attuned offer on different levels, possibilities for recognition and accreditation of prior learning, the existence of a learning culture. Other opportunities are dealing with making learning more accessible for learners, for instance by providing educational vouchers, possibilities for educational leave, or by anchoring educational provision in local and regional structures.

In this study we have examined a wide variety of mobilisation instruments deployed to increase the participation of adults in learning or to mobilize specific target groups into adult learning. Generally speaking, most policy initiatives and policy instruments have focused upon the flexibility of learning trajectories - with particular regard to access to upper secondary and higher education, the recognition of prior learning, and financial support measures. The mobilisation strategies with regard to, information and guidance, outreach strategies to specific target groups, and quality management, in particular, have received less attention in national policies.

The impact of these policy instruments on the mobilisation of participation in adult learning is hard to assess because most of these measures are under-researched. All in all, each barrier and target group has its own 'cocktail' of mobilisation strategies, but for all counts that initiatives should respect the following ingredients:

- 1 **Multi-stakeholder approach:** a successful initiative requires the involvement and co-operation of multiple stakeholders, depending on the aims and specific group of learners targeted by the initiative (ranging from NGOs, enterprises, governments (central/decentral), public employment services, adult learning providers, etc.). For more employment oriented adult learning the inclusion of enterprises, labour unions and the state is an important prerequisite, while for stimulating innovations it is important to include higher education institutes. In case other stakeholders are involved, the initiative needs to be firmly anchored in these stakeholders.
- 2 **Tailor made:** a successful initiative needs to be attuned to the specific situation the Learner is in. It needs to address a particular problem, must have a decent intervention logic and a well thought reasoning on what kind of mobilisation strategies can be used to reach the objectives and surmount the particular problem. Furthermore, the initiative needs to be learner-centred, providing enough room for flexibility or the opportunity to design individual learning trajectories.
- 3 **Government support:** A successful initiative cannot do without appropriate government support. This involves not only funding, but also political support. Alignment with government strategies and adjacent initiatives is needed. A downside of strong (political) support is that when initiatives are regarded as the achievement of a certain political

party, in times of political turmoil, these projects are the first to be abandoned by other political parties.

- 4 **Branding of the initiative:** to increase the success rate of an initiative, it is important to acquaint the target group and other stakeholders with the initiative, through branding.
- 5 **Combined approach:** a successful initiative combines different mobilisation strategies, including outreach strategies. Furthermore, successful initiatives are able to include relevant innovative practices, without forgetting what has been effective in the past. In addition, in many specific cases, aimed at particular target groups, initiatives need to combine learning and social activities in order to overcome dispositional barriers towards learning. The combined approach includes the idea that the approach should avoid being too top-down, leaving no room for other stakeholders to make it their own initiative.
- 6 **Monitoring and continuous improvement:** successful initiatives have a clear set of indicators and feedback loops to both monitor progress and to implement improvements to the initiative during the period of the initiative.
- 7 **Competent personnel:** a successful initiative involves competent staffing on each level of the initiative. This includes staff with relevant competences, such as leadership competences, didactical competences, counselling competences etc..
- 8 **Learning for a purpose:** successful initiatives are able to make learning relevant for both the learner and for others (enterprises). For instance, learning contributes to economic developments, safety and health in the workplace etc. On an individual level, learning activities need to align with the demands and desires of the learner.

The following table provides an overview of what kind of measures can be taken to overcome certain barriers and weaknesses in relation to specific domains of adult learning (social inclusion, employability, innovation and learning society):

Do-mains	Barriers and weaknesses	Measures and opportunities
<b>Social inclusion</b>	<p>The most important individual barriers that potential participants face are situational and dispositional barriers, such as bad experience with previous education, language difficulties, costs, distance to learning opportunities and the idea that education is 'not for our kind of people'.</p> <p>Regarding the system weaknesses, one can mention lack of effective outreach strategies and the lack of guidance opportunities.</p>	<p>The most appropriate combination of mobilisation strategies to overcome these barriers is <b>joining information counselling and guidance with outreach strategies</b>, providing information and <b>learning in places where people come (social and working environment)</b>, instead of traditional places.</p>
<b>Employability</b>	<p>Barriers are related to the specific situation the potential participant is in, for instance, the lack of time due to family responsibilities and work schedule, lack of employer support, age and finally costs can be regarded as important barriers for individuals to take up learning activities.</p> <p>When system weaknesses are taken into account, the main weaknesses that educational systems aimed at raising employability need to overcome are the fact that traditional institutions (VET-centres) are often not adjusted to adults, there is a lack of flexible provision and a lack of the involvement of social partners and employer support for learning.</p>	<p>The most appropriate method of overcoming these barriers includes various routes: it involves <b>increasing employer support</b> for learning by providing <b>reasonable arguments</b> for employers to invest in their personnel (in terms of health, safety, efficiency and effectiveness), but also providing <b>information and guidance</b> and certain <b>financial incentives</b> for employers (tax measures etc); in addition, it includes <b>raising awareness of employees of the value of learning</b> both in terms of career and personal development. Furthermore, valuing and <b>accreditation of prior experiences</b> is necessary to provide <b>learner-centred provision</b>, adapted to their wishes and learning needs.</p>
<b>Innovation and creativity</b>	<p>Often institutional barriers prevent adults from participation, such as the lack of flexible provision, distances from educational provision, costs and not having the right prerequisites. Other barriers can include lack of information, time and employers support.</p> <p>As system weaknesses it can be mentioned that traditional institutions are not always adjusted to receiving adults and therefore lack flexible provision for adults.</p>	<p>In general it can be concluded that these barriers can be overcome when systems invest in developing <b>more flexible and adult-learning-friendly provision and distance learning opportunities</b>. This involves the establishment of procedures for <b>validation processes of prior learning and experience</b>. Moreover, <b>demand-side funding for individuals</b> (vouchers, learning accounts etc.) and <b>financial incentives for employers</b> (tax reductions on learning activities etc.) are considered appropriate measures to stimulate participation in this adult learning domain.</p>
<b>Learning society</b>	<p>Barriers include individual barriers, such as costs, distances, lack of time due to family responsibilities and work schedule and the lack of information.</p> <p>As system weaknesses it can be mentioned that countries often lack a proper learning culture advocating the importance of self-development, furthermore, the lack of policies in this field is seen as a weakness to develop effective provision.</p>	<p>For a large part, the same measures to overcome barriers are applicable for this domain as for the domain aiming at innovation and creativity. The main difference is on a structural level: the liberal adult education domain is less embedded in formal structures and often the provision has already a high degree of flexibility and adult learner focus. Therefore the main approach to increase participation in this field might be to <b>stimulate the demand-side though financial incentives</b> (vouchers, individual learning accounts etc.), <b>increased quality of provision and information and guidance services</b>.</p>

### **9.1.2 Conclusions on European level**

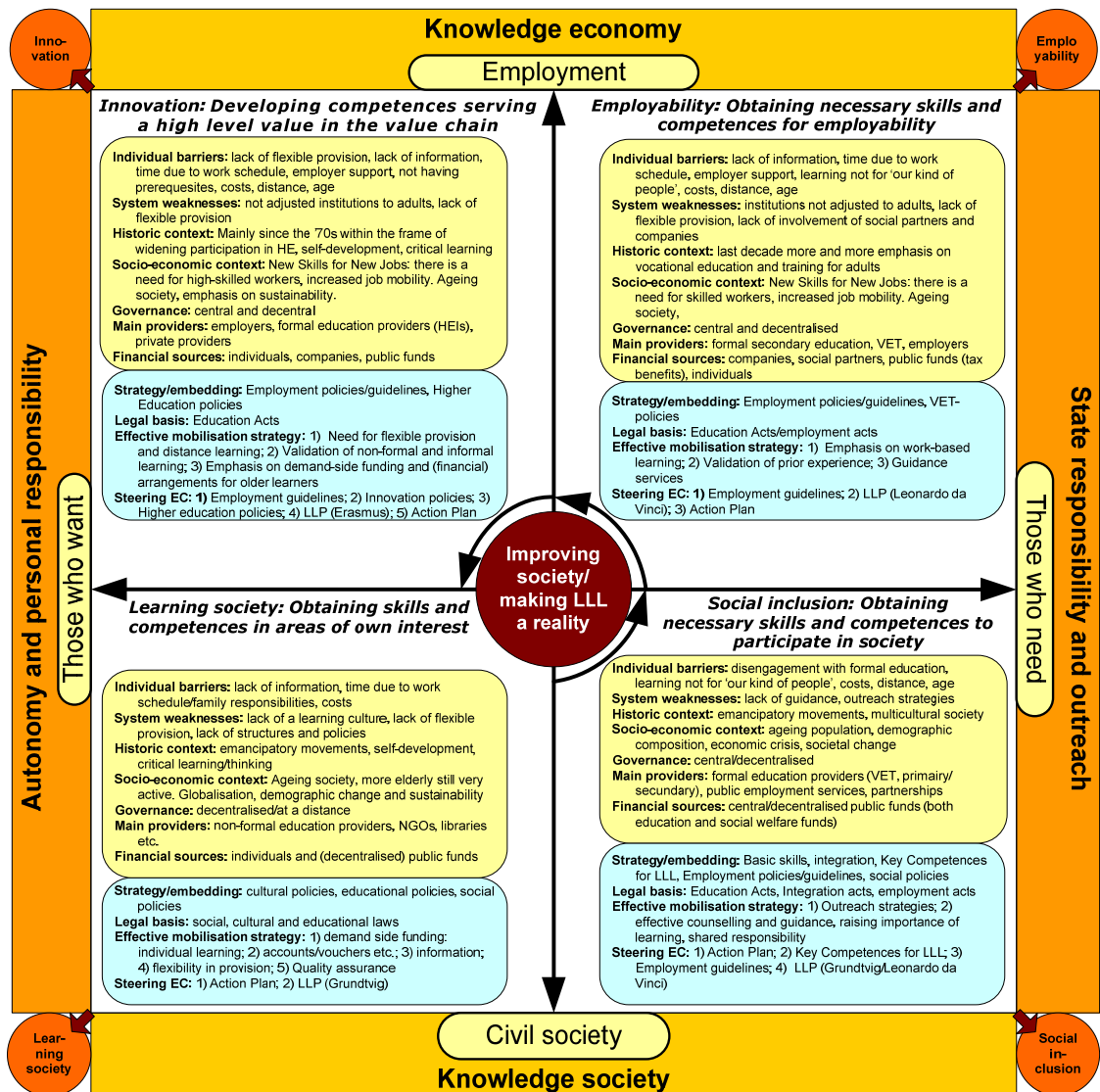
The following can be concluded in relation to the European level:

- The activities of the European Commission have contributed to the increase of policy awareness of adult learning in the Member States; however this has not yet resulted in higher institutionalisation of adult learning at Member State level. In other words, although policy initiatives are taken, it is questionable whether policy attention and commitment is sustainable in the Member States.
- The lack of sustainability of policy attention on Member State level causes instability in Member States' commitment to the European agenda on adult learning, making it harder for the European Commission to communicate its messages on the importance of adult learning in the future.
- Since adult learning is not a separate policy field but is – by its nature – interwoven with many other policy fields, it can be concluded that cooperation with other Commission DG's is not yet optimal and could be improved. It is argued that the adult learning sector would benefit from more alignment of policies and programmes at European level.
- As studies and policy documents clearly underline, adult learning has extrinsic values, which remain valid, or even become more valid in times of crisis.
- Finally, the OMC working methods within the adult learning sector need improvement to continue the work done in the field of adult learning.

### **9.1.3 Summarising overview of the key conclusions per adult learning domain**

To summarise the findings according to the different adult learning domains, the following picture is presented. For each work domain the barriers, system weaknesses, historic context, socio-economic context, governance structure, main providers, financial sources are summarised. In addition to this background information, the main strategies relevant to this work domain, the legal basis for policy action, the most effective mobilisation strategies and the most appropriate steering mechanisms for the European Commission are presented.

Figure 9.1 Overview adult learning domains



Source: Research voor Beleid

## 9.2 Recommendations

Given the main socio-economic challenges Europe is facing and the role adult learning could play in overcoming these challenges, this section will provide recommendations for further developing the adult learning sector in Europe.

- 1) Increase attention to adult learning within all educational sectors (Vocational Education and Training, Higher Education, primary and secondary education).

In order to do this, it is recommended that the European Commission:

- 1a) **Better align initiatives** and coordinate policies, preferably within the EU 2020 and E&T 2020 framework, with other policy fields with a learning dimension such as social economic (DG EMPL and DG MARKET), cultural (DG EAC), environmental (DG ENVIRONMENT), regional policies (DG REGIO) and innovation policies (DG RESEARCH);
- 1b) **Study the different adult learning domains** to determine what measures are working for whom, under what conditions and in what context;
- 1c) **Develop better and more suitable monitoring** instruments to facilitate policy-makers in implementing effectively their policies and to measure policy impacts. The European Commission could think of initiating an **observatory on adult learning**, funded out of the Lifelong Learning Programme.
- 1d) **Initiate further comparative studies and policy dialogue** with the UNESCO Institute for lifelong learning and the OECD Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) and attach follow-up mechanism to better monitoring of Member States' actions in the field.

In order to do this, it is recommended that the **Member States**:

- 1e) stimulate the **accessibility of adults in higher education and Vocational Education and Training** by improving the flexibility of provision, increasing distance learning opportunities, and including APL procedures.
- 1f) **reconsider the balance between budgets spent on initial and post-initial education and training.**

**2) Identify and communicate more clearly the extrinsic values of adult learning and present this as an argument for stronger political support and for increasing funding for adult learning policies and practices.**

In order to do this, it is recommended to both the **European Commission** and the **Member States** to:

- 2a) **Study and present the added value of adult learning in terms of effects external to learning self** (increased employability, efficiency, adaptability, social inclusion, creativity, health etc.);
- 2b) **Argue the value of liberal adult education in terms of return investments.** If adults take up learning by themselves through self-directed learning and self-development, less emphasis is needed within the other adult learning domains to stimulate potential learners to step in.

**3) Assure the development of an (adult) learning culture in countries and develop effective mobilisation strategies**

In order to do this, it is recommended that **Member States**:

- 3a) **Respect the formula for successful strategies.** Effective interventions should be joint, tailor-made, have government support, entail good branding, combine different mobilisation strategies, include monitoring and continuous improvement, have good personnel and advocate learning for a purpose (see formula for successful approaches in chapter 6).
- 3b) Establish and **streamline structures and legislation** where needed,
- 3c) Secure **sustainable financing** and reconsider shifting budgets between initial and post initial learning, and finally,
- 3d) **Involve more effectively social partners, civil society organisations** and other stakeholders in policy development and implementation, especially the employers side.

In order to do this, it is recommended that both **European Commission** and **Member States**:

3e) Develop a **clear intervention logic** of national and European adult learning policies by determining the **objectives of specific policies** (social inclusion, employment, innovation and / or creating a learning society) based on a **problem analysis** of barriers, and identify the **problem owners, system weaknesses**, and link these to concrete **policy options** (measures / mobilisation strategies) and set **indicators and monitor** the progress / outcomes of policies.

**4) Keep adult learning on both national and European policy agenda, create a legal basis for further cooperation and use the LLP and ESF to further develop the adult learning sector**

In order to do this, it is recommended that both the **European Commission** and **Member States**:

4a) Find a new legal basis to work on adult learning on European level. This can be either a Communication, Council conclusion or presidency conclusion.

Additionally, it is recommended that the **European Commission**:

4b) **improve the alignment** of Commissions activities related to adult learning in specific fields (for instance, in higher education, Vocational Education and Training, adult initial education (second chance education), employment policies, social inclusion policies and other policies containing a learning element).

4c) Both **foster and increase attention to adult learning within the Lifelong Learning Programme and the European Social Fund**.

**5) Improve the working methods within the OMC for adult learning**

In order to do this, it is recommended that both the **European Commission** and **Member States**:

5a) make sure that Member States are **involved more actively** in the OMC procedure, implementation of future actions in the field of adult learning, for instance during meetings, visiting Member States more often etc.;

5b) Have **more educational sectors involved in the OMC on adult learning**: increasing attention towards the participation of adults in all educational sectors;

5c) Stimulate **thematic exchange of knowledge** taking into account the different adult learning domains.



## Annex: Literature used

*This annex includes only the general literature used. The sources used for country analysis are included in the annex-report.*

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Research voor Beleid  
Bredewater 26  
P.O. box 602  
2700 MG Zoetermeer  
tel: +31(0)71 322 22 22  
fax: +31(0)71 322 22 12  
e-mail: [info@research.nl](mailto:info@research.nl)  
[www.research.nl](http://www.research.nl)