



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
Directorate-General for Education and Culture



Action plan on adult  
learning: *from policy  
to practice*

Regional Meetings  
October & November 2009



# Contents

<b>1 BACKGROUND .....</b>	<b>3</b>
This paper is a final report on the regional meetings on the Action Plan on adult learning <i>It is always a good time to learn</i> organised by the European Commission in October and November 2009. ....	3
1.1 Regional meetings .....	3
1.2 Background papers.....	3
1.3 EU policy background on adult learning .....	3
1.4 Participation in adult learning .....	4
<b>2 GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE REGIONAL MEETINGS BY COUNTRY GROUPS .....</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1 Regional Meeting in Germany .....	6
2.2 Regional Meeting in Norway.....	7
2.3 Regional Meeting in Spain.....	9
2.4 Regional Meeting in Slovenia .....	11
<b>3 AREAS OF COMMON CONCERN AND DISCUSSION IN THE REGIONAL MEETINGS.....</b>	<b>13</b>
3.1 The impact of the Adult Plan on adult learning in participating countries.....	13
3.2 Reaction to the Competence Profile for adult learning professionals .....	14
3.3 The impact of the financial and economic crises on adult learning in participating countries.....	16
3.4 The role of the Grundtvig Action in supporting the Action Plan.....	18
3.5 Recommendations for action in relation to adult learning in the post-2010 period .....	19
<b>4 CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>ANNEX 1- BACKGROUND REPORTS FOR THE REGIONAL MEETINGS .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>ANNEX 2- LISTS OF PARTICIPANTS .....</b>	<b>74</b>

# 1 BACKGROUND

This paper is a final report on the regional meetings on the Action Plan on adult learning *It is always a good time to learn* organised by the European Commission in October and November 2009.

## 1.1 Regional meetings

The regional meetings which brought together adult learning stakeholders took place as follows:

- **Germany**, 7 – 9 October – eight Western European countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom).
- **Norway**, 14 – 16 October – eight Nordic and Baltic countries (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden).
- **Spain**, 26 – 28 October - seven Southern European countries (Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain and Turkey)
- **Slovenia**, 4 – 6 November – nine Central and Eastern European countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia).

The aim of the meetings was to enable adult education and training stakeholders in each region to engage in discussions, knowledge-transfer and other exchanges about topics and developments of importance to participating countries in the context of the Action Plan. Specifically, the meetings aimed to:

- Strengthen intra-country and inter-country co-operation on adult learning at regional level
- Build confidence and possibilities to establish networks and partnerships
- Review developments to date on the implementation of the Action Plan at regional level
- Arrive at conclusions about the current situation of adult learning in the countries
- Identify possible means of co-operation between adult learning actors and institutions in different countries in the region
- Develop recommendations for future actions in the field of adult learning.

## 1.2 Background papers

Background Papers were prepared for participants in each regional meeting (see Annex). The aim of the papers was to set the scene for and stimulate discussion in, the regional meetings. Each paper gave a brief overview of progress made in the region on the five priority areas set out in the Action Plan (see Par. 1.3) and discussed some of the trends and challenges emerging in that context. The papers also began a discussion on the implications of the current economic crisis for adult learning. Those issues were debated further at the meetings and the conclusions arrived at are included in this overall final report on the four meetings.

## 1.3 EU policy background on adult learning

The 2006 Communication on adult learning *It is never too late to learn* highlights the essential contribution of adult learning to employability, labour market mobility and social inclusion. The Communication underlines the importance of removing barriers to participation and emphasises the need to invest in the quality of adult learning provision and the development of systems that recognise learning gained outside the formal education and training sphere. The Communication identifies low-skilled individuals, migrants and older people as priority groups and highlights the urgent need to develop better monitoring systems for adult learning.

The 2007 Action Plan on adult learning *It is always a good time to learn* builds on the 2006 Communication and defines five priority concrete actions which Member States should seek to implement in order to increase participation in adult learning and develop efficient systems that reach all adults and involve all relevant stakeholders. The actions are as follows:

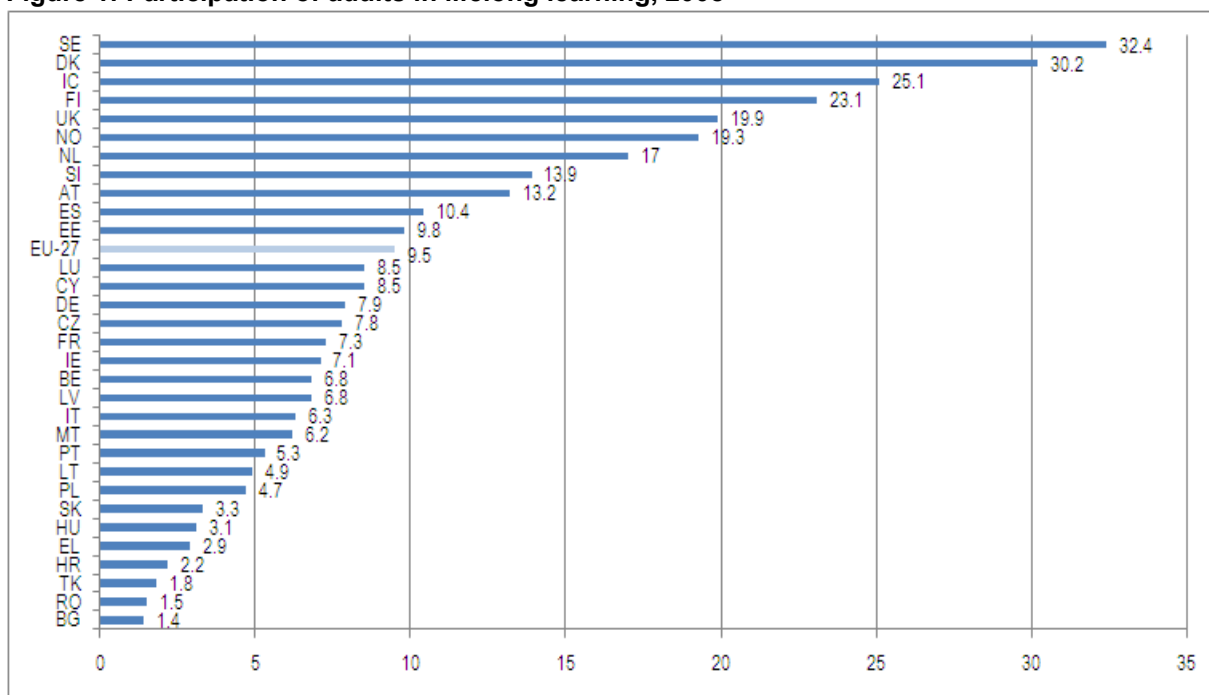
- Analyse the effects of reforms in all sectors of education and training on adult learning
- Improve the quality of provision in the adult learning sector
- Increase the possibilities for adults to achieve a qualification at least one level higher than before ('go one-step-up')
- Speed up the process of assessment of skills and social competences and have them validated and recognised in terms of learning outcomes
- Improve the monitoring of the adult learning sector.

Since the publication of the Action Plan in late 2007 a range of actions has taken place at EU level to support development in these areas, including Europe-wide surveys and studies, working group and focus group meetings and peer learning activities which provide an opportunity for participating countries to discuss challenges and successes, compare progress and exchange good practice. The regional meetings represent a further set of actions launched by the European Commission in this regard.

#### 1.4 Participation in adult learning

In 2008, 9.5% of the EU adult population aged 25-64 participated in learning on a four-week reference period.

**Figure 1: Participation of adults in lifelong learning, 2008**



Source: Adapted from *European Commission Staff Working Document: Progress towards the Lisbon Objectives in Education and Training; Indicators and Benchmarks 2009*.

The recent Adult Education Survey indicates that more than one-third (35.7%) of the EU's population aged 25-64 participated in formal or non-formal learning in the 12 months preceding the survey<sup>1</sup>. Job-related non-formal learning is where the majority of adults participate and participation rates decrease with age. The survey reveals significant country differences in participation, with participation highest in the Nordic countries and the UK.

Moreover, the survey found that education levels and occupational status have a strong impact on participation in adult learning. Highly-skilled white-collar workers, including legislators; senior officials and managers; professionals and technicians and associate professionals; and persons with professional, administrative and service sector jobs have the highest participation rates. On the other hand, low-skilled blue-collar workers, including plant and machine operators and assemblers and elementary occupations and high-skilled blue collar workers, including skilled

<sup>1</sup> Boateng, S. K. (2009) Significant country differences in adult learning. Eurostat Statistics in Focus. 44/2009.

agricultural and fishery workers and craft and related trades workers tend to have equally poor chances of participating in structured learning in every country surveyed.

## 2 GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE REGIONAL MEETINGS BY COUNTRY GROUPS

This section provides general information on the presentations, characteristics and concerns specific to each of the four regional meeting. Section 3 covers presentations and discussions common to all four meetings.

Participants in the meetings comprised the same range of stakeholders across all four meetings. However, the proportions of the different categories of participants were reflective of the different governance approaches in different countries, for example, the importance of dialogue with the social partners. Participants included combinations of the representatives of: national ministries of education and, in a few cases, labour; national education agencies; qualifications and validation agencies; local education authorities; public adult education providers; popular universities; national non-governmental associations and organisations involved in adult learning; research institutes; trainers of trainers/teachers; higher education bodies; a Business School; national ESF agencies; national Grundtvig agencies; employers/enterprises representatives, national and European; trade unions; the EAEA (European Association for the Education of Adults) and EURYDICE.

The following **expectations** emerged from the regional meetings:

- to learn more about the Action Plan and take the information and ideas for greater awareness, greater involvement and new strategies/approaches back to one's own country;
- to discuss and learn from what countries are doing to implement the priorities of the adult learning Action Plan and to discuss the impact of the Action Plan on adult learning in Europe with a view to strengthening that impact in the future;
- to learn in detail from other countries' experience and to transfer and/or exchange implementation strategies for policy and practice;
- to learn how to integrate adult learning policies with other human/demographic policy fields;
- to learn how to integrate more and different stakeholders/sectors in adult learning in the next period (2011 – 2020) of European co-operation in adult learning;
- to discuss and transfer appropriate strategies and approaches in relation to what is happening in adult learning in Europe, especially in relation to: maintaining core services at a time of recession; national qualifications frameworks, credits and validation; quality; social inclusion; increasing participation; classroom practice; training of trainers; adult learning for specific groups, including young adults, low-skilled individuals, workers/older workers; migrants, minorities, offenders/ex-offenders; adult learning on specific topics, including citizenship;
- to discuss how to increase the impact of adult learning on active citizenship in the years ahead;
- to build up confidence and capacity for future common actions; and
- to discuss how the Action Plan can be disseminated in the time remaining to the end of 2010 so as to prepare for the period 2011 – 2020 and involve more stakeholders in the process of European co-operation for adult learning initiated by the Action Plan.

A key issue that emerged in the regional meetings, particularly in Norway, Spain and Slovenia, was the challenge of ensuring the sustainability of current ESF-funded adult learning structures, systems and provision in the post-ESF period and the contribution of the Action Plan to this endeavour.

Participants emphasised the importance of the regional meetings as "sounding boards" to make adult education more visible in every country. But it was underlined that the function of "sounding board" could be achieved only if more sustainable structures for this sort of meetings were in place. The Commission explained that thematic workshops are planned for 2010 in Brussels and that the need for a sustainable working structure at regional/country level would be taken into account in the planning for 2011.

## 2.1 Regional Meeting in Germany

Eight Western European countries, Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, came together in Berlin, Germany, 7 – 9 October (see Background Report in Annex).

### Presentations

A range of formal presentations was made by participants in the meeting. The following points were made in the presentation from the UK, *Improving the monitoring of the adult learning sector - presentation of a tool to measure progress*: research is an intrinsic part of development; teachers and their qualification levels have an impact on learning outcomes; embedding literacy improves learning outcomes; progress in adult basic education is multifaceted, complex and holistic.

This presentation was important in the context of Priority Action 5 of the Action Plan, *Improve monitoring of the adult learning sector*. At regional, national, European and global levels there is a lack of reliable, timely data on the adult learning sector to allow an informed assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the sector, as well as ensure policy is evidence-based and addresses the needs (and the progression) of learners, providers, employers and other key stakeholders.

The ensuing discussion emphasised that time is a key ingredient in the achievement of learning goals and progression by those with low education levels. Progression is not linear; rather it may be upwards, across and downwards, with multiple starts and stops to accommodate important life events. This is a critical message for those involved in the design, planning and delivery of adult learning opportunities. Stakeholders' need for 'numbers and stories' (quantitative and qualitative data) was emphasised as well as the need for policy-makers and practitioners to use the results of research to avoid 'reinventing the wheel' or reproducing policy and/or practice without proven efficient results and good returns on investment.

The host country, Germany, made two presentations on practices successful in developing and documenting adult basic competences, one on achieving one-step up through second-chance basic education for adults entitled *Funding Initiative in Adult Literacy/Basic Education* and one on the self-documentation of generic competences and professional abilities through the ProfilPASS system entitled *ProfilPASS – self documentation of generic competences and professional abilities*.

The second-chance basic education initiative supports 24 joint projects, encompassing more than 100 single projects which combine the expertise of academic institutes and institutions of further education. Project themes include: basic research; research aiming to improve the efficiency and quality of support and guidance mechanisms; research and development activities focusing on literacy and basic education efforts related to the economy and employment; and research and development activities aimed at professionalising teachers delivering adult literacy and basic education. The first results from the initiative include: accreditation of the Master's degree course; publication of the new Alpha-levels for reading and writing, a system of six levels integrating different theories of written language acquisition; specific learning and teaching materials; studies on the requirements for basic education of different sectors; a YouTube-channel for young adults with motivating videos of well-known artistes discussing literacy.

The ProfilPASS functions as a self-evaluation tool that could be annexed to the Europass CV. It provides individuals with assistance for identification of individual competences and promotes self-organised learning and dialogue skills. It is based on a biographical approach with the individual's own life as a source of learning and therefore as a source of competences. ProfilPASS is process rather than results oriented - 'the journey is the reward.' ProfilPASS which is based on the principles of the equality of all forms of learning aims to strengthen an individual's employability

and provide assistance for further life and career planning. Validation is not provided and the outcome is open-ended and depends on the individual. Guidance is a recommended part of the process. Two evaluations show that the ProfilPASS has a useful role to play in transitions. Work on finding acceptance from employers for the ProfilPASS is underway.

These two papers had particular relevance to Priority Action 3 of the Action Plan, *Increase the possibilities for adults to achieve a qualification at least one level higher than before ('go one-step-up')*, which states that it is not enough to simply attract people into education and training, there must also be a real opportunity for them to raise their qualification levels. This applies especially to low-skilled and low-qualified individuals, including early school leavers, many migrants and individuals from marginalised backgrounds, all groups who participate least in formal and non-formal adult learning.

The discussion on the two papers focused on a number of areas including: the overall 'mismatch' in Germany between participation and the need for literacy learning, that is, participation rates in literacy learning in general fall below what might be expected from overall literacy levels; the key role of research as an intrinsic part of the process of development under the funding initiative for adult literacy/basic education; the key role of guidance to support users of the ProfilPASS who include unemployed individuals, women in the home returning to work, individuals going from school to higher education, retired people; the fact that achieving broader use of the ProfilPASS includes issues of data protection and acceptance by employers; the fact that the Copenhagen process needs a stronger emphasis on CVET (Continuing Vocational Education and Training).

### **General overview of meeting**

It is noteworthy that of the four regional meetings, the Western European cluster group could be said to have had the greatest diversity in terms of national/regional/local **priorities, issues of concern** and **stages of development**. However there were areas of common interest and development such as the existence of national qualifications frameworks in three of the countries, namely, France, Ireland and the United Kingdom (England, Scotland and Wales) while implementation is underway in Belgium, Germany and Luxembourg. In addition, Ireland is the first Member State to formally link its national qualifications to the EQF and France is working on aligning its NQF to the Framework for Qualifications of the Higher Education Area (QF – HEA) and the EQF. Similarly, validation of non-formal and informal learning has made advances in a number of the cluster countries, especially in France and the Netherlands. Providing opportunities for the achievement of basic competences and 'one-step up' is identified as a concern in the majority of the region.

Countries are keen to intensify efforts to treat adult learning in the context of the overall *Education and Training 2010* strategy, with fewer tendencies towards segmentation and greater emphasis on placing adult learning within a wider perspective, including family life and children, employment, health and social inclusion.

Countries sent a strong team of participants that have a key role in adult learning in their countries and they were able to bring their rich experiences and research to the discussions. It was clear that the adult learning sector is vibrant and progress is being made in the region. Countries' main interests were to gain new ideas and creative ways to shape policy to take back to their countries and to understand how other countries are working to increase participation and maintain adult learning in the financial and economic crises.

## **2.2 Regional Meeting in Norway**

Eight Nordic and Baltic countries, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden, came together at the regional meeting in Oslo, Norway, 14 – 16 October 2009 (see Background Report in Annex).

### **Presentations**

The first presentation from the host country, Norway, dealt with the *Education Strategy*, the June 2009 White Paper which sets out education policy developments and is a platform from which to move forward as it points to directions and establishes goals. It is the first report to the Norwegian Parliament which presents an integrated overview of society's needs for competence and

discusses the management of the strategic challenges arising. The proposals in the White Paper are to be debated in the Norwegian Parliament (Stortinget) at the end of March 2010.

The overarching measures of the *Education Strategy* include: a more formalised and structured co-operation with working life and the establishment of a National Competence Forum; improved statistics and knowledge at all levels including a system for projecting and analysing future competence requirements; more practical and relevant education; addressing the issue of drop-out at all levels of the education system. The EU *Education and Training 2010* Work Programme has informed national policies and the development of the *Education Strategy*.

The *Education Strategy* seeks to operationalise co-operation among competence policy actors through the National Competence Forum; to improve policy co-operation between the national and regional education authorities; to strengthen and clarify the role of Vox (Norwegian Institute for Adult Learning, an agency under the Ministry for Education) as the national skills policy body; to maintain the grant to the adult education associations; to implement the new Act on Adult Education; to strengthen motivation and information measures; to extend the right to training in basic skills to adults so that it can be taken in combination with upper secondary education; to develop measures to improve senior workers' participation in skill development and workplace learning; to initiate a report on a Norwegian version of a network of union learning representatives; in cooperation with the Ministry of Trade and Industry, to assess measures that could contribute to strengthening skills development in SMEs; to look at better possibilities of financing adults taking primary and secondary education and training; to encourage the development of more adapted technical and vocational training which can be used to a larger extent by jobseekers who have not completed upper secondary education.

This presentation had particular relevance to Priority Action 3 of the Action Plan, *Increase the possibilities for adults to achieve a qualification at least one level higher than before ('go one-step-up')*. In the ensuing discussion it was stated that while adult learning always has a challenge in reaching the highest level of political attention, putting it into a national strategy for knowledge is important. Adult education associations have a key role in reaching out to the low-skilled and Norway recently published a Green Paper on liberal adult education. Adults with the lowest skills and qualifications levels are least likely to avail themselves of the statutory right to complete their education and training.

The host organisation, VOX, made two presentations. The first, *Implementing the European Action Plan for Adult Learning - Norwegian initiatives for Adult learning as expressed in "Education Strategy"*, presented in the opening session, outlined the mechanisms in Norway that facilitate adults to 'go one-step up' in qualifications, namely: a statutory right; study leave; validation of prior learning; financial support in the form of loans and scholarships; flexibility; national primary and secondary school curricula. Twenty-five percent of adults in Norway have no more than lower secondary education and 16% of the workforce need to upskill.

The second presentation, *One Step Up in Norway: Current policy and practice*, described current policy and practice in the context of 'one-step up'. One-step up-related policy in Norway includes: the Competence Reform 1999; the Programme for Basic Competence in Working Life; the Framework for Basic Skills for Adults and the Validation of Prior Learning system.

The Competence Reform (1999-2003/4) led to a national system for the validation of prior learning which includes: access, certification and modular documentation; legislation to secure the right to free primary and secondary education for adults and the establishment of Vox, the Institute for Adult Learning. The Programme for Basic Competence in Working Life (BKA) is a funding programme for which VOX has administrative and academic responsibility and it supports basic learning projects in enterprises, and projects aiming at preparing people for working life in co-operation with the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration. The overall goal is the prevention of exclusion from working life because of insufficient basic competence. Key features of the programme include: co-operation between companies and providers; the provision of guidance and information; and quality assurance for providers. The programme requires close co-operation with employers who agree to the provision of basic skills in the workplace in return for financial compensation for workers' time spent on structured learning. In 2009 there were 270 applications



to participate and 106 were funded, up from 65 in 2006. Since 2008 applicants have had to relate their proposals to the Framework for Basic Skills for Adults.

The Framework for Basic Skills for Adults is a sub-project of the programme Basic Competence in Working Life. Its content and skills levels are comparable to the end of compulsory schooling (lower secondary) adapted to the needs of adults. The framework comprises: competence goals in literacy, numeracy, digital competence and oral communication; guidelines for providers; mapping tools and tests; didactic models and a model for teacher training. The framework provides for competence goals at three levels in three domains, namely, private and social life; working life; and education and training. It operates in three arenas: the education system; working life and voluntary work. Nineteen counties in Norway have centres for assessing all kinds of learning according to national curricula.

The Competence Project 2009 – 2011 will map the status of validation in Norway, identify challenges and present recommendations for the future of the system.

As in the regional meeting in Germany, these presentations on 'one-step up' and developing and documenting adult basic competences were particularly relevant to Priority Action 3 of the Action Plan, *Increase the possibilities for adults to achieve a qualification at least one level higher than before ('go one-step-up')*. The ensuing discussion focused on the details of the various policy and practice initiatives described.

### **General overview of meeting**

The aims of this regional meeting were the same as for the regional meeting in Germany, but the manner in which the meeting unfolded was quite different. It was clear from the outset that participants had experience of working together on common issues and concerns in the region. Participants brought to the meeting a wealth of experience and know-how to share.

A strong theme running through the meeting for the majority of the Nordic countries was how to motivate those who have dropped out to return to learning and, in particular, motivating the attainment of basic, key competences. A key theme in the Baltic countries is the role of the European Social Fund (ESF) in maintaining adult learning services and the challenge of ensuring that structures and services are maintained in the post-ESF period.

Countries sent an experienced team of participants with strong representation from adult learning departments of the education ministries, labour ministries, associations, social partners and representatives of Grundtvig National Agencies.

**Areas of common interest and concern** that emerged during the meeting included a desire to: strengthen evidence-based policy-making; deepen collaboration between participant countries; ensure that validation of non-formal and informal learning is not only for low-skilled individuals; and use the Grundtvig programme to support the mobility of adult education and training personnel in the region, including policy-makers and managerial staff.

## **2.3 Regional Meeting in Spain**

Seven Southern European countries, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain and Turkey, came together in Madrid, Spain, 26 – 28 October (see Background Report in Annex).

### **Presentations**

The first presentation by the host country, Spain, set out the *Steps to an Action Plan on Lifelong Learning in Spain*. Guiding principles to build the National Lifelong Learning Plan in the country include: promotion of a cultural change in Spanish society that includes seeing learning as an enriching process that takes place throughout life; co-ordination of the resources of the different areas related to learning throughout life at local, regional and state level; increasing the participation and involvement of citizens and civil society; encouraging learning throughout life to build citizenship and promote social cohesion and equal opportunities.

The development process for the Lifelong Learning Plan in Spain includes: the collection and analysis of information; a participatory process through five working groups; a Lifelong Learning Congress from which conclusions will be transferred to the participating institutions; development and dissemination of the Plan. The five working groups cover the following areas: professional

development; personal development; civic and social development; educational experiences that develop innovative learning methodologies; representation of the Autonomous Communities.

The adult learning areas where the Ministry of Education plans to make interventions include: public awareness; ensuring access to learning for the entire population; access to ICT skills; a comprehensive network of training centres; training of trainers; citizens' participation; co-ordination of resources; permeability between different training offers; assessment and accreditation of acquired skills.

The second presentation, *Second Chance Schools in Greece*, described the current situation of second-chance schools in Greece and their role in enabling young and older adults who have left initial education and training to go one-step up to achieve the Lower Secondary School Leaving Certificate. The discussion that followed raised the issue of the duration and formality of the second-chance schools and it was pointed out that their recognition and acceptance by Greek society depended on the extended course duration and the structured curriculum. It was also pointed out that second chance education is the government response to motivate citizens with very low qualifications to go back to a school suitable for adult learners who should be empowered by specialised staff to continue their learning.

The third presentation, *AULA MENTOR, A system of online open learning*, described a practice successful in developing and documenting adult basic competences in Spain. The *Aula Mentor* is a publicly-supported training system with over 100 different online courses and open enrolment sponsored by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with a large number of institutions throughout Spain, including ministries; autonomous communities; schools; municipalities; non-governmental organisations. The aim of the *Aula Mentor* which began in 1990 is: to provide people in rural areas and remote towns with an on-line tutor; to meet the demand of the population with challenges related to working hours, family duties or incarceration; to resolve the issue of updating knowledge and the acquisition of basic skills to maintain their jobs.

Course content is appropriate to employment, new jobs and personal development. Trainers are evaluated by participants; impact on trainees is not evaluated. The Ministry of Education and the *Aula Mentor* are responsible for the design of courses and materials are in permanent revision. Completion rates are monitored. In 2008 there were 435 classrooms with 23,900 participants.

Again, as in Germany and Norway, this presentation and the one on the second-chance schools in Greece were particularly relevant to Priority Action 3 of the Action Plan, *Increase the possibilities for adults to achieve a qualification at least one level higher than before ('go one-step-up')*. The ensuing discussion on the *Aula Mentor* focused on: the type of certification available through the system (it is a certificate of participation only); the needs of participants who do not have computer skills (there is a 20-hour course on ICTs for beginners and a manual on how to use the system); issues of trust across the system and difficulties presented by practical courses (video and graphics are used but the examinations have to be theoretical). The role of online learning approaches in reaching people in rural areas and remote towns and people with demanding work and/or family responsibilities was considered an issue that should be addressed in any future Action Plan.

The fourth presentation, the *Maltese National Qualification Framework 2007 - its impact on the adult learning sector*, covered the recent implementation of the Maltese National Framework of Qualifications (NQF) (2007) and its impact on adult learning. Malta is the second Member State (after Ireland) to link its National Qualifications Framework to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The ensuing discussion focused on: the barriers to the implementation of the framework; technical barriers; how it is ensured that the system is truly competence-based; how the framework meets the needs of a person who has done all his/her learning in a workplace; the attitude of academics to horizontal programmes; the possibilities for validation of non-formal and informal learning.

### **General overview of the meeting**

The composition of this meeting was effective in that participating countries face similar challenges in terms of developing national, regional and local structures and systems for adult learning. Areas of **common interest** and **concern** included: gaining familiarity with the Action Plan; using the

meeting to make contact with national co-stakeholders present at the meeting; inter-ministerial co-operation; putting in place an overall system of lifelong learning, including adult learning; putting in place systems and programmes to enable individuals to go 'one step up' in terms of education and qualification levels; information and guidance; the role of adult learning in addressing current social issues, including health, sustainable development, the elderly, and living and learning in a multicultural society; making progress in the development of a national qualifications framework; finding alternatives to EU funding (which is being phased out in some regions of countries present by the end of 2010). However, there are also many country-specific differences in terms of stages of development and particular issues that require tailor-made responses.

Overall, there was quite a strong emphasis on learning for vocational purposes in many of the discussions during the meeting, but the case for popular education was strongly pressed in the context of the need to find a balance between general and vocational adult learning.

## **2.4 Regional Meeting in Slovenia**

Nine Central and Eastern European countries, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, came together in Ljubljana, Slovenia, 4 – 6 November (see Background Report in Annex).

### **Presentations**

The first presentation, *Quality measures in Austria: current developments*, focused on the quality of adult education staff, managers, teachers, counsellors and librarians (information managers) and the quality of course content. Seven core competences for adult education personnel were outlined, namely: educational theory and practical experience in the field; didactical competences; educational management competences; counselling and guidance competences; library and information management; social competences; and personal competences.

The *Academy of Continuing Education* (Weiterbildungsakademie) is a system for the qualification and recognition of adult educators and it was characterised as an important step towards the professionalising of the adult education sector. Practical experience is a prerequisite and previously acquired qualifications are acknowledged. An adult educator's skills gaps are identified during the process of certification and further education programmes are proposed on that basis. At the end of their studies, adult educators in Austria are, for the first time, able to obtain a widely recognised diploma within the profession, the wba-certificate (certified adult educator) and/or the wba-diploma (graduate adult educator) from the *Academy of Continuing Education* (Weiterbildungsakademie - wba). The diploma is awarded after passing two examinations. Well-known representatives from significant adult education institutions and projects, from the Austrian Federal Institute for Adult Education and the German Institute for Adult Education, as well as from universities and teacher training colleges, are involved in this project.

An Austrian framework to recognise the quality of adult education (QUEB Austria) is being developed by a task force at the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture, and with experts in the field. The target of the framework is the mutual recognition of quality by the federal states and the federal government of Austria. The target group for the initiative is all adult education institutions in Austria. A distinction will be drawn between Level 1: Q-systems without external audit and Level 2: Q-systems with external audit. Ö-CERT (the Austrian Certificate "Quality of Adult Education") will be granted, possibly starting 2010-2011.

The discussion that followed raised the issue of the quality of outputs and outcomes. The focus of the quality initiative in Austria is on the quality of inputs rather than outputs or outcomes. A kind of 'act of faith' is made that if the quality of the inputs is high the quality of the outputs/outcomes will also be high. In addition, learning outcomes are assessed through a separate system.

This presentation was particularly relevant to Priority Action 2 of the Action Plan, *Improve the quality of provision in the adult learning sector*. Quality assurance approaches are important for the professionalisation of the adult education sector, including measures such as setting entry requirements for staff, supporting continuing professional development and external evaluations. In general, QA systems are at different stages of development in Europe.

A range of presentations on policies, practices and institutions in lifelong learning and adult education was made by the host country, Slovenia, including presentations on lifelong learning centres in Slovenia; and presentations on a number of policies and practices successful in bringing learning and high quality information and guidance closer to the learner, including the mobile guidance service for Roma people in the Dolenjska region. The session concluded with a video presentation of a successful learner.

The challenges facing adult education in Slovenia were outlined as: implementation of the Strategy (and Operational Programme) on Lifelong Learning; recognition, validation, certification and equality of qualifications gained through non-formal learning; the need to co-ordinate various lifelong learning activities to achieve greater synergy; the need to achieve real social partnerships in education; the challenge to retain the level of provision (legal, financial, programmatic) achieved so far; making lifelong learning a real need of every individual and making the learning society a reality.

Key national documents on adult education in Slovenia include: Organization and Financing of Education Act (1996); Adult Education Act (1996); National Plan of Adult Education (2004); Strategy on Lifelong Learning (2007). Financing of adult education is by state budget, the budgets of local communities and by individual participants. Basic education is free of charge for all participants.

The National Plan of Adult Education was adopted in June 2004 and its implementation is determined by the Annual Programme of Adult Education passed by the government. The priority fields include: general (non-formal) adult education and learning; raising the level of educational attainment and education and training for the labour market. In Slovenia the development of the lifelong learning concept and practice is closely associated with the adult education field, as well as with social, political, economic, cultural and technological changes. The Strategy on Lifelong Learning focuses on: holistic access and the connectedness of all forms of learning; lifewide learning and the diversity and flexibility of learning; key competences for learning and personal growth; learning for work and the development of society; possibilities for the recognition and validation of learning; appropriate information and guidance infrastructure.

The network of fourteen lifelong learning centres in Slovenia is a key element in the achievement of the objectives of improving the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems. Their activities include counselling services in local communities and on an outreach basis: and independent and organised learning at lifelong learning points. The centres in Savinjska and in Gorenjska Specific provided examples of the activities of the lifelong learning centres.

The Slovenian Institute for Adult Education (SIAE) has been very active in the development of the adult guidance service in Slovenia and it conceptualised the quality evaluation and development model for guidance centres from the point of view of different interests groups in guidance, namely the state, professional institutions, adult guidance providers and the client. In 2009 there were 14 guidance centres (incorporating 59 outreach centres) in 14 folk high schools in 14 different environments employing 40 counsellors on a full or part-time basis. The two mobile guidance services for Roma people in the Dolenjska region (led by RIC Novo Mesto), presented examples of flexible guidance services.

These presentations were particularly relevant to Priority Action 2 of the Action Plan, *Improve the quality of provision in the adult learning sector*; to Priority Action 3, *Increase the possibilities for adults to achieve a qualification at least one level higher than before ('go one-step-up')* and to Priority Action 4, *Speed up the process of assessment of skills and social competences and have them validated and recognised in terms of learning outcomes*.

### **General overview of the meeting**

The composition of participants in this regional meeting again proved to be effective in that the participating countries face similar challenges and, to a large extent, share education cultures and traditions that resemble one another. The stage of the development in relation to the priority areas of the Action Plan varies from country to country.

The majority of participants in the meeting came from education, training, research and adult learning associations. There was only limited representation of the social partners and the non-

formal sector. The representatives of the Grundtvig National Agencies appreciated the opportunity of hearing about and discussing, the policy context for the Grundtvig Action.

**Areas of common concern and development** included: the challenge of maintaining/increasing funding and moving from a project-based to a programme approach to the provision of adult education and training; the challenge of increasing participation in adult education and training through promotion activities to raise public awareness and increase motivation; raising qualifications levels, including for specific groups such as older learners, migrants and socially vulnerable adults; the key role of guidance in supporting learners' access, learning and progression; the importance of language learning and mobility; the issue of quality at practitioner, provider and systems levels; the role of adult learning in addressing current social and economic issues such as health, sustainability, environmental and ecological questions and values; the need to plan for the post-ESF period so as to ensure the maintenance and on-going development of structures and systems for adult learning.

There was a strong feeling that, apart from Priority Action 1, the current priority areas of the Action Plan will remain important in the near-to-medium future and will still need a good deal of work. Priority Action 1, *Analyse the effects of reforms in all sectors of education and training on adult learning*, should be cross-cutting and embedded in all activities.

### **3 AREAS OF COMMON CONCERN AND DISCUSSION IN THE REGIONAL MEETINGS**

A range of presentations, issues and discussions was common to all four regional meetings, namely:

- the impact of the Action Plan on adult learning in participating countries;
- reaction to the Competence Profile for adult learning professionals;
- the impact of the financial and economic crises on adult learning in participating countries;
- the role of the Grundtvig Action in supporting the Action Plan;
- recommendations for actions in relation to adult learning in the post-2010 period.

#### **3.1 The impact of the Adult Plan on adult learning in participating countries**

At the beginning of each regional meeting individual participating countries were invited to consider the following questions in relation to the Action Plan:

- What has been the influence of the Action Plan in your country/sector?
- What is the most relevant Priority Action for your country/sector?
- What is the least relevant Priority Action for your country/sector?

##### **What has been the influence of the Action Plan in your country/sector?**

The extent to which the Action Plan is known varies from country to country. Participants in the Norway meeting distinguished between the Action Plan *qua* Action Plan and its priority actions. The specific areas covered by the priority actions are well-known by a wide range of stakeholders in the majority of countries and, indeed, the Action Plan could be said to provide a framework for such areas of activity in many countries.

Many participants indicated that the Action Plan mirrors adult education and training values, policies, developments, issues and concern in their country and that they 'find' themselves in it. Countries at earlier stages of putting an adult education and training system in place indicated that they are able to use the Action Plan to bring pressure to bear in relation to such developments and/or use the Action Plan nationally and locally to guide such developments.

Specific examples of influence were provided by participants. The Action Plan has been used: to make strong arguments to politicians; to provide inspiration and good models of practice to policy-makers; to set national goals; to influence specific policy and practice developments; to develop the National Plan of Adult Education; to develop a national lifelong learning strategy and system;

to provide support to address the gap between vocational and non-vocational adult learning; to support the development of legislation on adult education.

### **What is the most relevant Priority Action for your country/sector?**

Responses to this question ranged across the priority actions of the Action Plan.

There was a tie between Priority Action 3, *Increase the possibilities for adults to achieve a qualification at least one level higher than before ('go one-step up')* and Priority Action 4, *Speed up the process of assessment of skills and social competences and have them validated and recognised in terms of learning outcomes*, in terms of the number of countries that considered them to be the most relevant priority action for them.

Priority Action 5, *Improve the monitoring of the adult learning sector*, came next followed by Priority Action 2, *Improve the quality of provision in the adult learning sector*.

Only two countries considered Priority Action 1, *Analyse the effects of reforms in all sectors of education and training on adult learning*, to be the most relevant. Accordingly, it will be necessary for the Commission to discuss this priority action with the Working Group on the Action Plan with a view to considering its future feasibility.

### **What is the least relevant Priority Action for your country/sector?**

Countries were reluctant to identify any priority action as being 'least relevant', with many countries saying that all the priority actions were relevant to them. Three countries identified Priority Action 5, *Improve the monitoring of the adult learning sector*, as the least relevant on the basis that although they needed to do so, they were not monitoring adult learning effectively.

Two countries identified Priority Action 1, *Analyse the effects of reforms in all sectors of education and training on adult learning*, as the least relevant. One country stated that adults feature in all their educational reforms and that they did not consider that a national framework of qualifications (NFQ) mentioned under Priority Action 1 would work for adults with the lowest skills levels. The second country stated that it was 'past the analysis stage'. One country stated that Priority Action 3, *Increase the possibilities for adults to achieve a qualification at least one level higher than before ('go one-step up')*, was the least relevant on the basis that if all the other priority actions were addressed 'one-step up' would follow for low-skilled adults.

## **3.2 Reaction to the Competence Profile for adult learning professionals**

As follow-on from the ALPINE (Adult Learning Professions in Europe) study<sup>2</sup> the European Commission launched a study on key competences for adult learning professionals (ALPs). Two researchers from Research voor Beleid presented results from the ongoing study in the form of a Competence Profile for adult learning professionals at the four regional meetings. The methodology to develop the profile included reference to the many Grundtvig multilateral projects on the professional development of ALPs. The goal was to develop an overarching profile of competences with layers of contexts that would embrace adult learning in all its forms and all its settings. Since roles in the sector are extremely diverse, the competences are based on six key activities – teaching; management; guidance and counselling; programme planning; media; administrative support – rather than being located in specific roles, jobs and individuals. Context is important as it will influence the social and other competences needed by the ALP.

Participants were invited to consider the Competence Profile generally and in terms of its potential uses and to make suggestions as to how it might be further developed.

### **General comments on the profile**

The four meetings generated a wide range of general comments on the profile. It was considered that the profile is comprehensive, systematic, well-structured and useful and reflects the diversity of the adult learning field itself. In one meeting it was considered 'an acceptable model for public institutions' and 'a very good model for countries as a starting point' in relation to the professional development of ALPs.

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<sup>2</sup> Research voor Beleid (2008) *ALPINE – Adult Learning Professions in Europe, A study of the current situation, trends and issues*.

In another meeting it was considered that the all-inclusive overarching model presented was not best suited to their needs. More differentiation linked to specific functions and profiles would be required, while countries in other regions felt it would be up to themselves to develop this in their own national context.

There were concerns that the competences are based on six key activities rather than being located in specific roles, jobs and individuals. A concern was raised about how the profile would fit non-formal and informal adult learning, how it would work for ALPs working in enterprises and how it would fit volunteers who might not wish to/not be in a position to gain a qualification.

A concern was expressed that the profile reflected 'a rather traditional view of adult learning' and did not appear to capture what is innovative and creative in adult education. A concern was also expressed that the profile was mainly based on a liberal model of adult education and lacked adequate emphasis on adult learning for a wide range of purposes.

It was commented that the profile appeared to be 'very ambitious' and that it would be challenging in many countries to find people with the range of competences set out. The amount of time it could take to achieve the full range of competences was raised.

The question of how the competences might be validated and their relationship to the EQF and the key competences for lifelong learning was posed.

Participants in one meeting were concerned that the profile might be too top-down and speculated as to whether such a profile should not be developed by ALPs themselves, in a bottom-up way.

### **Suggestions for improvement of the profile of competences**

Participants made a number of suggestions for the improvement of the profile of competences. There could be a stronger emphasis on adult learning, as opposed to general education, competences. The profile could distinguish between different levels – classroom (micro); institution (mezzo) and systems (macro) levels as a context for the competences described.

To address the apparent complexity of the profile, it might be brought 'back to earth' by focusing on, for example, just seven competences for ALPs as in the *Academy of Continuing Education* in Austria.

The context for the exercise of the competences in the profile could be more clearly spelt out. The profile requires clear diversity, interculturalism, equality, democratic participation, sustainability, social and co-ordination competences.

The profile has a lot of emphasis on organisational skills and could have a stronger learner/client focus. Competences in relation to monitoring could be added. The profile needs to place more emphasis on the following elements: roles and qualifications; the quantity and quality of the body of knowledge of ALPs; learning outcomes of participants in adult learning; monitoring of results; links to NQFs (national qualification frameworks) and EQF (European Qualifications Framework); links to the labour market; the relationship with TTnet (Training of Trainers Network) and CEDEFOP.

The specific competences could be more tailored to roles/functions in the competences – for example, guidance counsellor; co-ordinator; evaluators etc.

The profile should be translated into Member State languages and tested by eligible institutions and other stakeholders in the participating countries with the support of the Grundtvig Action.

### **Possible uses of the profile**

In general it was considered that the very different adult learning contexts and career structures for adult learning professionals would mean that the profile would be used differently in different countries. The point was made that the usefulness of the profile depends on what a country is already doing; how far advanced it is in this regard. It will be more useful in countries only starting on this road. Some countries have already done a lot in the area as part of overall quality frameworks and approaches to professionalising the adult learning sector.

In some countries the profile could provide transparency by being used as a springboard for national/regional discussions. The profile could offer a template and contribute to a model of

growing professionalisation and could provide a model for the development of competence and as a framework for qualifications.

Academics could use the profile as it stands in higher education institutions. A simplified profile could be used for a mapping exercise to identify the current state of competences of ALPs in an institution, a region, a country. Following on from this, it could be used to identify opportunities for staff training at individual, provider and sectoral levels and to develop training courses. The profile could also be used as a framework for Grundtvig in-service training.

The potential role of the profile in quality assurance was emphasised. It could be used in an institution to: move to common understandings of what it is to be an ALP; as a self-assessment tool; for collective self-reflection; for the assessment of personnel.

### **3.3 The impact of the financial and economic crises on adult learning in participating countries**

To frame the discussion on the impact of the financial and economic crises on adult learning a paper was presented at each regional meeting on the impact of the financial and economic crises in a specific participating country.

At the meeting in Germany the presentation *The economic crisis: measures in the lifelong learning area in the Netherlands* described measures put in place to respond to the crises in the Netherlands. Responses include increased funding for training courses and validation of non-formal and informal learning and subsidies and tax breaks to employers to maintain employment. The Netherlands recognises that there is need for special protection for unemployed people and that there is an ongoing need to address issues of social inclusion.

At the meeting in Norway the presentation *Swedish action within adult education in response to the economic downturn* set out the measures employed to respond to the crises. Bridging policies are in place and there is a change in incentives to get back to work. There is a big focus on adult learning as a response. Education and training provision has increased and there are new grants for higher education and to communities for secondary education. Target groups and curricula remain as before the crisis. Two agencies will follow and evaluate the measures.

At the meeting in Spain the presentation *The Portuguese New Opportunities Initiative: Adults Axle* described the New Opportunities (NO) initiative in place in centres throughout Portugal. The centres provide low-qualified and low-skilled adults with opportunities to achieve basic education and secondary education competences and qualifications through validation of non-formal and informal learning, through a combination of validation and training courses and/or through training courses only. There is a large and increasing involvement of employers in the NO initiative and its methodologies may be used as appropriate as part of lay-off processes in enterprises. Investment in the NO initiative has increased in the current crisis. Seventy-one percent of the adult population in Portugal are potential clients for the initiative and with the current crisis the NO centres are now getting 20,000 new enrolments per month. The national goal is to have 500 NO centres throughout the country.

At the meeting in Slovenia the presentation *How the Czech Republic is dealing with the recession: Impact of developments in recent years to restructure and revitalise industry and the special measures taken during economic turndown* described a range of measures put in place collaboratively by the Ministry of Education and Sport and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. The former ministry is responsible for systems, structures and supports and the latter for programmes and actions. The work of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs is focused on maintaining and creating employment through programmes for the support and stabilisation of enterprises and the initiative 'Educate yourself' which combines short-term working and training. The Ministry of Education and Sport is supporting the programme PIVO 'Support for Individual Learning Skills'; courses in languages, ICTs and entrepreneurship. Emerging tasks for the Czech Republic include co-operation with employers regarding the NQF; alignment of the NQF with the EQF; putting in place a lifelong learning guidance system; needs analysis and the prediction of future skills needs.

Following discussion on the presentation, participants in each meeting were invited to consider the following questions in country groups:



- What is the impact of the crises on funding for adult learning?
- What is the impact of the crises on demand for adult learning and guidance?
- What is the impact of the crises on disadvantaged groups?
- Is there any change in the balance of support for vocational and non-vocational adult learning?
- What are the general tendencies in relation to adult learning?

### **The impact of the crises on funding for adult learning**

Unemployment is rising in the vast majority of the countries which participated in the regional meetings. General comments on the impact of the crises on funding for adult learning included the fact that a crisis has an impact on decision-making processes. Many of the responses to the crises are short-term measures, targeted mainly at unemployed individuals and those needing to change occupational sectors.

Given the wide range of funding sources for adult learning in any one country, it is difficult to get a complete picture of the situation with regard to funding. Not all participating countries provided information on the impact of the crises on funding. Funding appears to have increased in at least fourteen of the participating countries. It stands at the pre-crisis level in at least eight countries. Funding has been cut in at least two countries.

A number of countries are concerned that as the crises continue investment and services will be cut and squeezed. The European Social Fund (ESF) is playing a critical role in maintaining adult education and training provision in countries where national funding may have decreased. One country made the point that the crises provide an opportunity to reframe adult education and training via other policy arenas, such as health, environment, schools and families.

### **The impact of the crises on demand for adult learning and guidance**

Participants reported that demand for adult education and training is up in the majority of countries. Unemployed individuals, those on short-time and those in danger of losing their job are seeking structured learning and/or validation opportunities to increase their qualifications levels. Demand is also increased by the fact that a number of countries have tied social welfare payments for specific, usually young, adults to participation in education and training. In addition, young adults are staying on in higher education and other education and training provision to delay their entry to the labour market. Demand remains at pre-crisis levels in at least three countries and demand is declining in at least three countries due to public, employer and individual financial constraints.

Demand outstrips supply in many countries and in some countries this is leading to competition for places between newly unemployed and more long-term unemployed and other disadvantaged groups and competition between high-skilled and low-skilled individuals. In general, the majority of countries were unable to provide clear information on measures combining short-time work and training.

Demand for educational and vocational guidance is up in many countries and at least four countries reported that demand outstrips supply. A number of countries are extending the role of existing agencies such as job centres to enable them to offer guidance.

### **The impact of the crises on disadvantaged groups**

The crisis affects not only those closest to the labour market but also the more disadvantaged who become even more disadvantaged. While many of the recent measures are directed to the recently unemployed, countries did not have a clear picture of whether adult learning for economic purposes for recently unemployed individuals is displacing adult learning for social inclusion for the 'most disadvantaged' individuals. Some countries indicated that they are still supporting low-skilled individuals in adult education and training provision.

### **The balance of support for vocational and non-vocational adult learning**

The role of adult learning in the crises was characterised by participants as reskilling and upskilling; as an element of flexicurity; as 'management' of the labour force and as addressing social inclusion issues. While the vast majority of recent measures are labour-market related, at least eight countries indicated that they have not changed the balance of support for vocational and non-vocational adult learning. At least four countries indicated an increase in funding for and/or participation in, non-vocational adult learning. Two countries indicated that funding for liberal adult education could be under threat if the crises persist.

### **General tendencies in relation to adult learning in the crises**

While countries recognised that adult education and training do not create jobs, many identified an emerging closer alignment of labour market, education/training and social policies. Many also noted that it was too early to be able to assess the impact of measures taken to date.

Many countries were unsure how adult learning would fare if the crises were to endure for an extended period. As one country had debated in 2008, would adult learning become a 'victim' or continue to be seen as a 'solution' in such a scenario?

## **3.4 The role of the Grundtvig Action in supporting the Action Plan**

Following a presentation by European Commission, DG EAC staff on the *Supports available to adult learning stakeholders through the Grundtvig Programme*, participants in each regional meeting were invited to consider how the Grundtvig Programme might be used to build synergies and cross-border co-operation in relation to developing the adult learning sector within and beyond the context of the Action Plan. It was pointed out that the Grundtvig Programme is getting c. 5.8% of the overall Lifelong Learning Programme budget in 2009 and the bigger part of that budget goes to the countries involved through the National Agencies.

**General comments/suggestions** to the Commission from participants included the following:

- Social inclusion, the professionalising of the adult learning sector and mobility should remain at the heart of the Grundtvig Action.
- Ensure greater coherence between any future Action Plan and the Grundtvig Action.
- Consider replacing the many small Grundtvig multi-lateral projects with a number of larger projects.
- Work on how grass-roots actions and policy-making can work in tandem in the Grundtvig Action.
- Use any future Action Plan to showcase successful projects (Grundtvig and Leonardo da Vinci) that work for adults.
- Consider organising a network to enable us to maintain contact and keep updating ourselves.
- Ensure a greater dissemination of the findings of the Grundtvig Action.
- Provide more money for the Grundtvig Action.
- Consider how the Grundtvig and Leonardo da Vinci Actions could be linked.

Suggestions for specific actions/projects/themes/topics in the Grundtvig Programme to **support the adult learning sector** in the future included the following:

- bi-lateral co-operation at policy level
- motivating adults to participate `
- key competences for adult learners
- information and guidance, including for migrants
- quality

- interculturalism
- language learning
- testing the Competence Profile for adult learning professionals
- partnerships of adult learning professionals
- Universities of the Third Age
- transnational mobility for personal development, including for migrants and for associations of adult education institutions
- ensuring learners' voices are heard at policy and practice levels
- Adult Learning Week
- regional PLAs/ building on the regional meetings through the Accompanying Measures
- work at regional levels on the priority actions relevant to countries involved.

### **3.5 Recommendations for action in relation to adult learning in the post-2010 period**

The European Commission presented a brief overview of adult learning in the context of EU education and training policy to date and going forward. Higher education (HE) has the Bologna process; vocational education and training (VET) has the Copenhagen process; school education has the Education Committee process and adult learning has the Action Plan process. The role of the Action Plan is to keep a focus on adult learning. Every element of the Action Plan already appears in the *Education and Training 2010 Work Programme*.

The key challenge of keeping adult learning visibly and firmly on the European agenda will continue in the post-2010 period. While the Renewed Framework for European Co-operation in Education and Training makes little explicit reference to adults, the framework does include broad themes/initiatives that support the promotion of adult learning, for example, the EQF, NQFs and ECVET. In addition, the second priority of the framework, namely, "improve the quality and efficiency of provision and outcomes" is highly relevant to adult learning. The current benchmark of 12.5% participation has been superseded by the benchmark of 15% for 2020 set by the Council Conclusions of May 2009. The renewed framework is the broad strategy which will be translated into two to three-year programmes where it will be possible to locate adult learning and give it visibility. Adult learning is also in the *New skills for new jobs* agenda.

#### **Suggestions in relation to adult learning in the post-2010 period**

Participants in the regional meetings were invited to present recommendations on what actions might be taken by the European Commission DG EAC in relation to adult learning in the post-2010 period. There was unanimous support in all four meetings for continued action on the part of the European Commission in relation to the development and promotion of adult learning at all levels to inspire and support developments at Member State level. The point was made that three years is very short for an Action Plan but that to keep the agenda active it needs to be refreshed every three years or so. By 2010 most of the good initiatives under the Action Plan will still be in their infancy. It takes a longer period to show real results.

Specific suggestions in relation to a future Action Plan/actions included the following:

- Develop a strategic document rather than a list of activities that should be carried out and provide a framework for themes and priority areas.
- Keep a balance between vocational, general and liberal adult learning – growth is needed but so is active citizenship
- Avoid duplication; link an action plan to other frameworks – Copenhagen, EQF, Quality, Key Competences - and to other agendas such as migration; health; unemployment; equality; climate; pre-schooling.
- Turn Priority Action 1 of the current Action Plan into a horizontal priority.
- Focus on the governance of adult learning at all levels.

- Focus on different approaches to funding adult learning, including co-financing and demand-side funding.
- Focus more on the demand side than in the current Action Plan which focuses very strongly on the supply side. For example, focus on specific strategies (outreach, guidance etc) for the promotion of adult learning. Re-focus on vulnerable social groups and give a high profile to migration.
- Give more priority to guidance (came from all four meetings).
- Make a clearer distinction between informal and non-formal learning and place a greater emphasis on informal learning.
- Provide a clearer definition of competences and include labour market-related competences as well as socio-competences.
- Continue the focus on 'one-step up' initiatives and on progression.
- Focus on flexible learning, peer learning, family learning and learning for seniors. Identify ways in which the competences of retirees could be harnessed for the mutual benefit of themselves and younger generations.
- Focus on adult learning in a range of areas, including: media literacy/digital literacy; environment; sustainable development; health; media; equality; digitality; music; creativity through culture; consumer affairs; interculturalism.
- Work on a reference framework for quality in adult learning, including for the validation of non-formal and informal learning.
- Maintain the focus on the continuing professional development of adult learning professionals. Continue work on the profile of competences for adult learning professionals and send it to stakeholders for review and testing.
- Focus on the role of non-governmental organisations in adult learning.
- Work on indicators and benchmarks, including an indicator for digital literacy, a quality indicator for empowerment and a strong indicator for the wider benefits of adult learning. Formulate benchmarks in a more output-directed way. For example, monitor the outcomes of 'one-step up' initiatives. More evidence, quantitative and qualitative, is needed on: the impact of adult learning on human and social capital and on the return on investment in adult learning.
- Continue to focus on monitoring and focus on the need for education and training personnel for upskilling in monitoring and evaluation.
- Focus on the important link between research and practice improvement and stress the link between research and policy.
- Explore the needs of adult learning structures and systems in countries in a post-ESF scenario.
- Showcase successful Grundtvig and Leonardo da Vinci-funded activities.
- Give a new action plan more publicity, more quickly.

## 4 CONCLUSION

This final report has sought to bring together the wide ranging discussions and outcomes of the four regional meetings in relation to an extensive array of adult learning issues.

The aims of the regional meetings as set by the European Commission were:

- Strengthen intra-country and inter-country co-operation on adult learning at regional level

- Build confidence and possibilities to establish networks and partnerships
- Review developments to date on the implementation of the Action Plan at regional level
- Arrive at conclusions about the current situation of adult learning in the countries
- Identify possible means of co-operation between adult learning actors and institutions in different countries in each region
- Develop recommendations for future actions in the field of adult learning.

Participants in the meetings actively engaged in all the discussions and expressed appreciation of the opportunity to come together to discuss the Action Plan, the Competence Profile, the impact of the financial and economic crises on adult learning, the role of the Grundtvig Programme in the development of the adult learning sector and topics/issues for the adult learning agenda going forward. In addition, the opportunities to hear about adult learning initiatives in the host and other countries and to share experiences received a positive response from participants. All involved considered that they had a lot to take back to their respective ministries, institutions and organisations.

A sample of comments from participants bears testimony to their reactions to the meetings:

- 'Very interesting, a lot of information.'
- 'Very rewarding, inspiring.'
- 'Very interesting, inspiring. Much to take back to colleagues.'
- 'We all learned a lot. We really learned about the Action Plan, the practical side of it.'
- 'A good example of the Open Method of Coordination.'

On the basis of the activities and outcomes of the regional meetings, it would seem fair to say that their aims as set out above, were achieved and that participants worked intensively in all four meetings to strengthen intra-country and inter-country co-operation on adult learning at regional level; to identify possible means of co-operation in different countries; to build their possibilities to establish networks and partnerships in the future; and to develop recommendations for future actions in the field of adult learning at European, regional and national levels.

## **ANNEX 1- BACKGROUND REPORTS FOR THE REGIONAL MEETINGS**



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
Directorate-General for Education and Culture



# Action plan on adult learning: *from policy to practice*

## Regional Meeting Background Paper

Germany, 7 – 9 October, 2009



# 1 BACKGROUND

## 1.1 Regional meetings

The European Commission is organising four regional meetings on the Action Plan on Adult Learning *It is always a good time to learn* between October and November 2009. The meetings which will bring together adult learning stakeholders will take place as follows:

- Germany, 7 – 9 October – a cluster of eight Western European countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom).
- Norway, 14 – 16 October – a cluster of eight Nordic and Baltic countries (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden).
- Spain 26 – 28 October - a cluster of seven Southern European countries (Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain and Turkey)
- Slovenia, 4 – 6 November – a cluster of nine Central and Eastern European countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia).

The aim of the meetings is to enable adult education and training stakeholders to engage in in-depth discussions and exchanges about topics and developments of importance to participating countries in the context of the Action Plan. Specifically, the meetings aim to:

- Strengthen intra-country and inter-country co-operation on adult learning at regional level
- Review developments to date on the implementation of the Action Plan at regional level
- Arrive at conclusions about the current situation of adult learning in participating European countries
- Identify possible means of co-operation between adult learning actors in different countries
- Develop recommendations for future actions.

## 1.2 Background paper

This paper is one of four Background Papers prepared for participants in the regional meetings, one for each meeting. The aim of the paper is to set the scene for and stimulate discussion in, the regional meeting in Germany, 7 - 9 October 2009, which brings together key stakeholders to review progress on the implementation of the Action Plan on adult learning in Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom (UK). The paper gives a brief overview of progress made in these countries on the priority actions set out in the Action Plan and discusses some of the trends and challenges emerging in this context. The paper also begins a discussion on the implications of the current economic crisis for adult learning. These issues will be debated further at the meeting and the conclusions arrived at will be included in the overall final report on the four meetings.

## 1.3 EU policy background on adult learning

The 2006 Communication on adult learning *It is never too late to learn* highlighted the essential contribution of adult learning to employability, labour market mobility and social inclusion. The Communication underlined the importance of removing barriers to participation. It also emphasised the need to invest in the quality of adult learning provision and the development of systems that recognise learning gained outside the formal education sphere. The Communication identified migrants and older people as priority groups and emphasised the urgent need to develop better monitoring systems for adult learning.

The 2007 Action Plan on Adult Learning *It is always a good time to learn* builds on the 2006 Communication and defines five concrete actions which Member States should seek to implement in order to increase participation in adult learning and develop efficient systems that reach all adults and involve all relevant stakeholders. The actions are as follows:



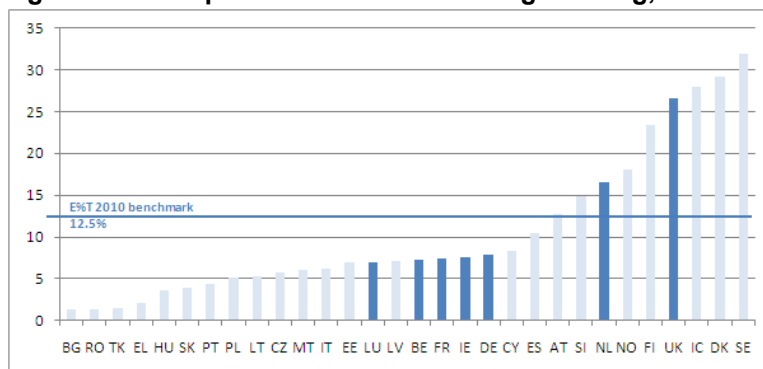
- Analyse the effects of reforms in all sectors of education and training on adult learning
- Improve the quality of provision in the adult learning sector
- Increase the possibilities for adults to achieve a qualification at least one level higher than before ('go one-step-up')
- Speed up the process of assessment of skills and social competences and have them validated and recognised in terms of learning outcomes
- Improve the monitoring of the adult learning sector.

To date a range of actions has taken place at EU level to support development in these areas, including Europe-wide surveys and studies, working group and focus group meetings and peer learning activities which provide an opportunity for participating countries to discuss challenges and successes, compare progress and exchange good practice on a range of topics.

#### 1.4 Participation in adult learning

In 2007, 9.7% of the EU adult population participated in learning on a four-week reference period. Only two of the countries participating in the regional meeting in Germany (NL and UK) have exceeded the European target that 12.5% of the population aged 25-64 should participate in lifelong learning by 2010. The rest remain below the target and the European average, although they have made good progress on their 2000 participation rates.

**Figure 1: Participation of adults in lifelong learning, 2007**



*Source: Adapted from European Commission staff working document: Progress towards the Lisbon Objectives in Education and Training; Indicators and benchmarks 2008. The Statistics cover EU countries and Iceland, Norway and Turkey. Seven of the eight countries participating in the regional meeting in Germany have been highlighted in dark blue. 2006 data for SE and UK.*

The recent Adult Education Survey indicates that more than one-third (35.7%) of the EU's population aged 25-64 participated in formal or non-formal learning in the 12 months preceding the survey<sup>3</sup>. Job-related non-formal learning is where the majority of adults participate and participation rates decrease with age. There are significant country differences in participation, with participation being highest in the Nordic countries and the UK, closely followed by Germany.

The survey also found that persons with low education levels tend to have low participation rates in all surveyed countries. For example, persons with high-skilled white collar jobs have the highest participations rates, while low and high-skilled blue-collar workers tend to have equally poor chances part of participating in learning in every country surveyed.

## 2 TRENDS AND PROGRESS RELATED TO THE PRIORITY ACTIONS OF THE ACTION PLAN

This section gives a brief overview of developments in relation to the priority actions of the Action Plan, with particular emphasis on developments in the countries participating in the regional meeting in Germany.

### 2.1 PRIORITY ACTION 1 – Analyse the effects of education and training reforms on adult learning

In early 2009 the European Commission launched a study to develop a methodology for the analysis of the effect on adult learning of reforms in the wider education and training system.

<sup>3</sup> Boateng, S. K. (2009) Significant country differences in adult learning. Eurostat Statistics in Focus. 44/2009.

A specific reform referred to in the Action Plan is the development of **national qualification frameworks (NQFs)** and the **overarching European Qualifications Framework (EQF)**. The EQF provides an opportunity to improve the transparency of qualifications across Member States and it is also expected to increase access to and participation in, lifelong learning<sup>4</sup>. The impact of the EQF on adult learning is expected to be far-reaching. By establishing a common European reference point, it will be easier to combine what has been learned in diverse settings, such as different countries, sectoral education systems or informal learning environments.

The NQFs are expected to facilitate progression routes in the education and training system, thus opening up qualification systems to adults, facilitating valuing of a broader range of learning outcomes and addressing the transparency of systems and qualifications<sup>5</sup>. According to information provided by Cedefop in December 2008, the Netherlands has made limited progress towards implementation of an NQF, while implementation is underway in Belgium, Germany and Luxembourg and the NQF is in place in France, Ireland and the UK (England, Scotland and Wales). England, Scotland and Wales are now focusing on adopting more consistent approaches to learning outcomes, credit transfer and recognition of non-formal learning and are testing an eight-level framework. In Liechtenstein, achieving ownership and consensus among all relevant parties is a key challenge<sup>6</sup>.

Member States have been invited to relate their national qualifications systems to the relevant levels of the EQF by 2010. From 2012, all new qualifications should carry a reference to the EQF, so that employers and institutions can identify a candidate's knowledge, skills or competences across regional and/or national boundaries. Ireland is the first Member State to formally link its national qualifications to the EQF. France is working on aligning its NQF to the Framework for Qualifications of the Higher Education Area (QF – HEA) and the EQF<sup>7</sup>.

The development of the EQF and the NQFs is driving a shift towards learning outcomes with consequences for the adult learning sector. This is particularly significant for a priority action area of the Action Plan, namely, the validation of non-formal and informal learning, since a learning outcomes approach focuses on the outcomes of a learning process rather than the particular features of the process itself. General developments in this regard and developments in the cluster countries are set out below under Priority Action 4.

In addition, reforms in relation to quality assurance in other sectors of the education system are spilling over into adult education and training. Again, general developments in this regard and developments in the cluster countries are set out below, this time under Priority Action 2.

In relation to reforms in education and training, it is worth noting that in the current financial and economic crisis budget cuts are most likely to occur in areas such as development and 'project' work or administrative costs, thus mainly influencing (or potentially delaying) planned reforms in the education and training sector overall, including in the adult education and training sector.

## **2.2 PRIORITY ACTION 2 - Improve the quality of provision**

Although the **contribution of staff to the quality of adult learning provision** is widely recognised, the 2007 Action Plan identified that so far many countries have paid little attention to the training (initial and continuing), the status or the career development of adult learning staff.

The ALPINE (Adult Learning Professions in Europe) study launched by the European Commission identified a number of key characteristics of the adult education and training sector and staff, across Europe<sup>8</sup>. The sector is diverse. Providers differ in size, the type of learning they provide, the way they are funded/governed, their target groups and the learning methods used. Staff within the sector has different employment conditions, ranging from permanent, full-time contracts to more precarious, freelance contracts. Staff has a variety of backgrounds, work on short-term contracts or in addition to another job and tend to join the profession later in life after

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<sup>4</sup> European Commission, DG Education and Culture (2008), The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning. Internet: [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/publ/pdf/eqf/broch\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/publ/pdf/eqf/broch_en.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Cedefop (2009) Continuity, Consolidation and Change, Towards a European era of vocational education and training, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Research voor Beleid (2008) *ALPINE – Adult Learning Professions in Europe, A study of the current situation, trends and issues*.

gaining work experience elsewhere. This means that the provision of training to personnel within the sector needs to be particularly flexible and there is more emphasis on continuing professional development (CPD) through short courses, work-based learning and induction programmes than on initial training. Generally, the professions of teaching or training in adult learning are poorly regulated.

In recent years countries are beginning to respond in different ways to the need to ensure the quality of staff in the adult learning sector.

The **introduction of definitions, legislation and regulations** can help to improve the status and quality of adult learning. A number of countries have recently introduced regulations defining adult learning and what adult learning practitioners should do for their professional development (including BE, DE, FR, UK). France has developed a competence profile with a focus on vocational adult learning and competence profiles also exist in Germany. In the UK, more formal qualification requirements for teachers in all phases of post-school education have been introduced in the period since the late 1990s. Regulations are set at sectoral level. Lifelong Learning UK, the sector skills council for lifelong learning, has set specific standards which adult learning teachers, trainers and tutors must meet.

Outside of 'second-chance' general and vocational adult learning in mainstream schools and other public institutions where staff are frequently required to hold the same qualifications as school education staff, there are **many educational and professional routes** to becoming a teacher or a trainer in the adult education sector<sup>9</sup>. In many countries there are no specific initial qualification requirements for adult education teaching staff.

Undergraduate courses in adult education exist in a number of countries (including DE and FR). Apart from higher education, there is a number of other pathways to working in the adult education sector. In Germany, for example, the Course Teachers Academy provides a systematic range of training and retraining courses to give part-time and freelance teaching staff access to a basic teaching qualification. Furthermore, evidence from the latest *Education and Training 2010* progress reports suggests that the initial education for trainers in craft areas which are often provided through apprenticeships or other vocational qualifications is typically of a lower standard, at ISCED level 5. VET teacher training reforms are underway in countries such as the UK and planned in Germany and the Walloon region of Belgium.

The **variety of qualifications** on offer means that the market for professionals is not transparent for employers. In Germany, the Institute for Adult Education has established a database in order to increase transparency and enable systematic research of all the training on offer. Furthermore, the Continuing Education Training Qualification Initiative brings together a working group of practitioners, providers, universities and the German Institute for Adult Education to develop a comprehensive, modular qualifications framework for adult education employees.

In a context of diverse, limited or, indeed, no specific pre-service professional training or qualifications, **in-service training** or **continuing professional development (CPD)** is important to ensure the quality of provision. In Belgium, France and the UK there are associations which offer training to their members. UK teachers and trainers are required to undertake at least 30 hours of professional development a year. In some countries (including DE), organisations establish their own in-service programme. Learning networks can help to encourage learning among staff within the sector. In some countries (including DE and FR) expert institutes or bodies have been set up to assist adult learning providers by developing teaching resources or staff training opportunities. In Germany, CPD for administrative staff is growing in importance as their role evolves. European funding, such as the Grundtvig programme, can be used to facilitate CPD at an international level.

**Quality assurance** approaches are important for the professionalisation of the adult education sector, including measures such as setting entry requirements for staff, supporting continuing professional development and external evaluations. In general, QA systems are at different stages of development in Europe. Ireland and the UK established advanced quality assurance

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<sup>9</sup> Keogh, H (2009), *The state and development of adult learning and education in Europe, North America and Israel. Regional Synthesis Report. UNESCO CONFINTEA vi.*

systems and independent evaluation bodies several years ago. In Belgium there is a legal requirement for all formal adult learning centres to have a quality assurance system which addresses the education of the centres' staff.

The **accreditation of providers** according to explicit quality criteria is a key quality measure. Such quality control measures are in place in at least 15 EU countries (including DE, FR, IE, and UK). Quality labels exist in Germany (LQW®) and France (GretaPlus). Quality assessment by national education agencies or centres of adult learning expertise takes place in many countries (including DE, IE, and UK).

### 2.3 **PRIORITY ACTION 3 - Increase the possibilities for adults to go 'one step up'**

The Action Plan states that it is not enough to simply attract people into education and training, there must also be a real opportunity for them to raise their qualification levels. This applies especially to low-skilled and low-qualified individuals, including early school leavers, many migrants and other individuals from marginalised backgrounds, all groups who participate least in formal and non-formal learning. To support the development of 'one-step up' policies and practices a Peer Learning Activity (PLA) was organised jointly by the European Commission, the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, UK and the National Research and Development Centre, UK in London in April 2009<sup>10</sup>. Three cluster countries (DE, IE, UK) participated in the PLA. Overall the eight cluster countries have implemented various measures to increase possibilities for low-skilled adults to achieve higher level qualifications.

Measures to ensure **the development of key competences for all adults are stipulated in legislation** in the majority of European countries<sup>11</sup> (including BE, DE, IE and LU). In Ireland, the National Framework of Qualifications offers two new levels (1 and 2), which are of particular relevance to adult literacy practice.

Countries (including BE, DE, FR, IE, UK) have expanded **programmes to support the development of key competences for adults with low basic skills or who are unemployed**. These aim to provide the target group with the skills needed to be able to participate fully in the labour market, as well as support their personal and social development. For example, the area-based Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy provision in the UK is focused on the most disadvantaged local authority wards and targeted at people who are often low-skilled and furthest from the labour market. The Literacy Research and Development/Basic Education for Adults initiative provides a total of EUR 30 million to research projects to improve literacy work in Germany. In Belgium, the June 2007 decree on adult education redefined and emphasised the mission of the Centres for Basic Education. In late 2008, 13 regional Centres of Basic Education were in place, providing broad basic education programmes which integrate key competences.

**Flexible and/or individualised learning pathways** have recently been developed by at least 13 European countries (including BE, DE, FR, IE, LU, NL, UK). In Belgium, (Flanders) the 2007 decree on adult education established a modular structure for adult education which encourages movement 'one step forward' and gradually builds up self-esteem through regular achievement. Course organisation takes into account the needs of adult learners and there has been investment in open learning centres and e-learning pathways. In Germany, funding is being made available to develop flexible, modular and degree-oriented courses for young adults.

Measures to support the **development of key competences among migrant/bilingual adults** have been implemented by a number of the cluster countries. Some have established initiatives to improve migrant/bilingual adults' competence in the official language national language (FR, LU, UK). The development of key competences can encourage migrants to learn new competences for the labour market or to improve their participation in society. Germany and Luxembourg have integrated language learning for immigrants with learning of vocational skills.

**Guidance services** have been strengthened in some countries (including DE, IE, LU, UK). In France, opportunities for **low-skilled individuals to obtain VET qualifications** have been increased through social partnership whereby trade unions and employers have agreed that an

<sup>10</sup> Reports from the Peer Learning Activity can be found at: <http://www.ksll.net/PeerLearningActivities/PlaDetails.cfm?id=89>

<sup>11</sup> Austria, Belgium, Germany, Greece, Croatia, Ireland, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, Romania and Sweden.

additional 500 000 low-qualified workers and 200 000 jobseekers should benefit from VET opportunities each year. To this end, a dedicated fund will be established in 2010.

Measures that **combine work and learning** are used by Belgium and the UK to encourage more people to participate in adult learning. Many of the cluster countries help socially and economically disadvantaged individuals to obtain qualifications through **financial incentives** (including BE, DE, NL and UK). In the Netherlands, financial incentives have been introduced to encourage individuals, employers and regional partners to co-operate to increase participation in education and training. Germany has seen a growth in demand-led financing schemes for adult learning. In October 2008 the Continuing Education Bonus, a new demand-orientated financing instrument for continuing vocational training, was introduced by the Federal Government to motivate and enable people to finance their participation in continuing training.

Countries such as Ireland, the Netherlands and the UK have accompanied investment in adult learning with **advertising** and **information campaigns** to engage low-qualified and low-skilled individuals. Since March 2008, the *Get On* advertising campaign in England which promotes free mathematics courses for adults has generated 19,613 phone calls and over 70,000 visits to the campaign website, with 20,662 adults requesting a free *Skills for Life* DVD.

#### 2.4 **PRIORITY ACTION 4 - Speed up the process of assessing and recognising non-formal and informal learning for disadvantaged groups**

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is central to the EU lifelong learning strategy. Validation is highlighted in the *Education and Training 2010* Work Programme and was selected as a priority for 2009 and 2010 in the updated framework for European co-operation in education and training.

**Common principles for validation** were adopted in 2004 to encourage and guide the development of high-quality, comparable approaches and systems by Member States. In 2009 more detailed guidelines<sup>12</sup> have been developed for policy makers and practitioners.

To support the exchange of good practice on validation policies and practices a Peer Learning Activity (PLA) was organised jointly by the European Commission and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic in Prague in June 2009<sup>13</sup>. Three cluster countries (DE, LI, NL) participated in the PLA which focused on validation for low-qualified and low-skilled groups.

The European Qualifications Framework supports the development of validation systems by virtue of its basis in learning outcomes. Mutual co-operation has been encouraged through a Cluster on Recognition of Learning Outcomes.

Many countries have established a **legal framework** to formalise the system for validation and individuals' right to access validation. Others remain at the stage of implementing and/or learning from pilot projects. Cluster countries are at varying stages of developing a validation system. In France, for example, legislation relating to a validation route to an engineering diploma on the basis of professional experience dates to as far back as 1934. Today, validation of prior learning is a legal right for all individuals with at least three years work experience<sup>14</sup>. In Belgium all workers have a legal right to undertake a skills audit. 'Experience certificates' can be obtained by workers seeking formal recognition of their ability to discharge the duties of particular occupations<sup>15</sup>.

In the Netherlands where validation has seen substantial development at sectoral level, the national framework for validation is less structured. The initial approach enabled experimental pilots to take place without any formal regulation as to how these should be implemented<sup>16</sup>. This led to diverse practice and today, there is a national Quality Code for validation which has been signed by all stakeholders. The *EVC Kenniscentrum*, a national Knowledge Centre for Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) has been in operation since 2000. In the UK, while there is no national system for the validation of non-formal and informal learning there has been a number of pilot projects and there are plans to develop validation systems alongside the national

<sup>12</sup> Cedefop (2009), European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning, Internet: [http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/Upload/Information\\_resources/Bookshop/553/4054\\_en.pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/Upload/Information_resources/Bookshop/553/4054_en.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> The report will soon be available online: <http://www.ksll.net/>

<sup>14</sup> ECOTEC Research and Consulting (2007), European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning: France.

<sup>15</sup> ECOTEC Research and Consulting (2007), European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning: Belgium.

<sup>16</sup> ECOTEC Research and Consulting (2007), European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning: Netherlands.



qualifications frameworks<sup>17</sup>. In Liechtenstein, a national system for validation of non-formal and informal learning is still in development. In Ireland a number of education and training providers have been approved by the Further Education and Training Awards Council to provide validation of non-formal and informal learning.

It is well-recognised that validation can present an opportunity for people from disadvantaged groups, such as low-qualified, low-skilled<sup>18</sup> and/or unemployed individuals, early school leavers and migrants, to (re-)integrate into the labour market, to access formal education or to progress within their career pathway. In the UK, for example, validation has been used to **widen access to higher education** and also to **help unemployed persons to return to work**<sup>19</sup>. In the Netherlands, validation can lead to **shorter study periods**. In Luxembourg, job-seekers can undergo a 'skills audit' in order to increase their **awareness of their skills** and to **develop their self-evaluation skills**<sup>20</sup>. In Germany, validation methods and processes are still 'work in progress'. A number of initiatives are in place, including the ProfilPASS system which offers an opportunity to explore and document competences acquired outside of formal learning.

**Guidance** is critical to the validation process, in particular for low-qualified and low-skilled candidates.

**Training of validation personnel** varies from country to country. In the Netherlands, the national quality code for validation requires all assessors to undertake specific professional training. Awarding bodies check the quality of this training and recognition as a certified provider of validation is dependent on the quality of the assessors.

Sufficient **financial resources** are necessary to mainstream and consolidate validation. Public funding is essential for the promotion of validation, for funding low-qualified and low-skilled groups and for monitoring and evaluation. In the Netherlands, a nationwide publicity campaign aims to increase the number of people who are aware of validation. Unemployed people, or those in low-paid employment, may not be able to afford validation processes so a contribution to the cost of the validation process is given to employees or employers who buy validation from a certified supplier. Funding for validation providers is also important. In the UK (England) where the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) provides incentives to universities to implement widening participation policies, the accreditation of prior learning can form an important part of such policies<sup>21</sup>.

## 2.5 PRIORITY ACTION 5 – Improve monitoring of the adult learning sector<sup>22</sup>

At regional, national, European and global levels there is a lack of reliable, timely data on the adult learning sector to allow an informed assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the sector, as well as ensure policy is evidence-based and addresses the needs of learners, providers, employers and other key stakeholders. Relevant evidence can also help to promote equitable access to and participation in, adult education and training<sup>23</sup>.

It is essential that monitoring processes within the sector are considerably strengthened. Evidence is required on a wide range of indicators, not only on participation rates but also on, for example, the availability of learning opportunities, the profile of adult learners, the benefits and outcomes of adult learning and the barriers to participation.

There has been a number of actions at European level to improve the availability of data, including the pilot of the Adult Education Survey (AES) in the period 2005-2008. The survey gathered information on adult participation in non-formal and informal learning, obstacles to participation

<sup>17</sup> Leney, T and Ponton, A (2007), OECD Thematic Review on Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning, Country Background Report, United Kingdom. Internet: <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/19/4/41782373.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> While participants in the PLA in the Czech Republic, June 2009, preferred the term 'low-qualified' to 'low-skilled' they were of the opinion that individuals who were actually 'low-skilled' could, with the strong support of information and guidance, actually undertake a validation process which would most likely need to be supplemented with additional learning before a qualification would be achieved.

<sup>19</sup> Leney, T and Ponton, A (2007), OECD Thematic Review on Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning, United Kingdom.

<sup>20</sup> ECOTEC Research and Consulting (2007), European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning: Luxembourg.

<sup>21</sup> Leney, T and Ponton, A (2007), OECD Thematic Review on Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning, United Kingdom.

<sup>22</sup> Data for this section of the report has been extracted from the background and summary reports from a Peer Learning Activity on Adult Learning Monitoring held in Bratislava in March 2009 (<http://www.kslll.net/PeerLearningActivities/PlaDetails.cfm?id=83>) and the Draft cross-country analysis 2009 on countries' implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme, as well as the national country reports.

<sup>23</sup> UNESCO Institute for Education (1997) Monitoring Adult Learning.

and the costs of learning, within a 12-month reference period. In addition, the Eurostat Labour Force Survey gathers information on adult participation in education and training and the Continuing Vocational Training Survey provides data on investment by enterprises and participation in continuing vocational training<sup>24</sup>.

To address monitoring-related issues the European Commission launched a study in late 2008 entitled 'Study on adult learning terminology and adult learning monitoring'. The purpose of the study is to develop a glossary of agreed terminology for adult learning and to propose a set of core data to facilitate a two-yearly monitoring of the sector.

To support the exchange of good practice on monitoring policies and practices a Peer Learning Activity (PLA) was organised jointly by the European Commission and the Academia Istropolitana in Bratislava in March 2009<sup>25</sup>. Four cluster countries (FR, LI, NL, UK) participated in the PLA.

Monitoring of the sector faces a number of challenges, not least **the diversity of the sector**. Providers are dispersed, of different natures and often operate outside the public sector. There are also complications associated with issues of ownership and privacy of data and rights and obligations at all levels. Furthermore, questions of definitions present a significant problem for the production of consistent, comparable data. For instance, the definition of both 'adult' and 'adult learning' varies across and even within countries. In addition, many countries have different understandings of what monitoring itself should encompass and which types of learning it should cover (e.g. non-formal / informal learning, or learning recognised through validation).

In most European countries, including the cluster countries, **different sources of data exist** and the outputs do not necessarily harmonise across surveys because of different concepts and definitions, differing data collection protocols and differing reference periods. In France, for example, there are different sources of data and the outputs do not necessarily harmonise with the Labour Force Survey. Other countries face more specific challenges, such as Liechtenstein, where participation data cannot be collected in full, as people from Liechtenstein mostly participate in lifelong learning in neighbouring Austria and Switzerland.

In addition, education and **training personnel in most countries may need upskilling** in relation to all aspects of monitoring. Other challenges include: the cost of implementing monitoring systems, failure on the part of providers to return data, 'survey fatigue' and the fact that, traditionally, monitoring has not been strong within the adult learning sector.

Countries are at quite different stages in terms of the **development of national monitoring systems** for adult learning. Data are collected in all the cluster countries but in many countries **data tend to focus on basic information** such as overall numbers of participants, rather than detailed information by target group, by types of setting or programme and by outcomes etc. Twelve countries which participated in the PLA on adult learning monitoring in Bratislava, March 2009, confirmed that they do not have a unified national methodology for recording the participation of adults in education and training. Furthermore, in the majority of countries there is **no data chain** whereby data collected at different levels feed into the data needs of the next level of data collection.

Data for measuring participation of adults are usually collected by the National Statistics Offices (through the labour force survey and countries also contribute to the EU studies mentioned above). At the aforementioned PLA, a number of countries suggested that the collection of basic data should be obligatory for all providers, public and private, and that the basic data collection format should be provided by National Statistics Offices. **Monitoring is linked to quality assurance** in many of the cluster countries. According to the national reports for the latest *Education and Training 2010* Progress Report, France, together with Croatia and Norway, are among the few countries which are currently implementing measures for a more systematic and reliable data collection. In the UK (England), the emerging Framework for Excellence will set out how each further education college and provider is performing. Participation in literacy courses

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<sup>24</sup> The survey is used to describe the numbers of participants in employer-sponsored training and personnel training days received by gender, organiser of training and field of education, for example. Under examination are also the costs incurred from the training by cost factor, used forms of training, enterprises' personnel training principles, trends of change in training and obstacles to the organising of training.

<sup>25</sup> Reports from the Peer Learning Activity can be found at: <http://www.ksll.net/PeerLearningActivities/PlaDetails.cfm?id=83>

(*Skills for Life*) is measured by the Learning and Skills Council through measures such as the Individual Learner Record, which is a unique number for every learner.

Some countries have a **specific body** with responsibility for the collection and analysis of education and training data, as is the case in Belgium (Flanders), where the Agency for Higher Education, Adult Education and Student Grants, which deals with data concerning adult education. In Liechtenstein, each training provider is required to submit an annual evaluation of the courses offered together with statistical data on participation. In Ireland, data on adult learning are collected by various bodies, including the Vocational Education Committees (VECs) at local level and the Department of Education and Science, the National Training Authority, the Higher Education Authority and the Central Statistics Office (quarterly national household survey) at national level.

Once data have been collected, it is important that they are put to good use. Data need to form part of **structured management information systems** for stakeholders at all levels and to be based on an analysis of the lifelong learning of the entire population, including young people and adults. Furthermore, after data have been collected, **research and analysis** are needed. In the Netherlands, for example, the activities implemented by regional partnerships are monitored by an independent research institute (CINOP). In Germany, a national framework programme for the promotion of empirical educational research<sup>26</sup> was launched in 2007, which aims to strengthen and improve the quality of empirical educational research in Germany, strengthen international networks, deliver knowledge for the reform of education and science systems and provide scientific grounding for central instruments of output- and evidence-based policy.

### 3 THE IMPACT OF THE FINANCIAL AND ECONOMIC CRISIS ON THE ADULT LEARNING SECTOR

Various Europe-wide reports prepared in the early part of 2009 were used to develop this section of the Background Paper but given the pace of recent developments, it is likely that some of the information is already out-of-date. Therefore, the primary purpose of the section is to provide a backdrop to the discussions that will provide updates during the regional meeting. A range of ways in which the financial and economic crisis may impact and is impacting on the adult education and training sector is set out below.

#### 3.1 The level of public spending on the adult education sector

The overall picture of how the financial and economic crisis will impact on education and training budgets is not yet clear. There is a high level of awareness in countries of the urgent need to increase or at least maintain public spending, but the extent to which this is happening depends on how hard government budgets are being hit by the crisis<sup>27</sup>. Indeed, in the face of budget deficits certain countries (including HU and IS) have already announced cuts that are affecting the adult learning sector.

In many other countries the crisis is likely to result in an important increase in participation rates because many countries are integrating training measures into their policy packages to respond to the crisis<sup>28</sup>. According to the information collected by DG EMPL on the impact of the economic crisis<sup>29</sup>, adult learning budgets are being increased in a number of the cluster countries (including BE, DE, IE, UK). In Ireland, almost 7,000 additional further and higher education places are being made available for unemployed people. In Germany, measures are being put in place to support particular target groups to achieve qualifications (e.g. employees over 25 without apprenticeship qualifications) and the Further Education of Low-skilled and Older Workers in Enterprises programme has been extended<sup>30</sup>. Low-skilled employees can receive subsidies to cover course fees and travel/accommodation costs. Employers can also receive financial compensation for the time employees are absent to attend training.

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.empirische-bildungsforschung-bmbf.de/index.html>

<sup>27</sup> Council of the European Union (2009): *Council Conclusions on Flexicurity in times of crisis*. Available from the internet: [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressdata/en/lsa/108369.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/lsa/108369.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> The European Employment Observatory, 2008/2009 – Background paper on measures to deal with the economic crisis. Information as of early April 2009.

<sup>29</sup> A Communication from the Commission (2009) *A Shared Commitment for Employment*. Brussels, 3.6.2009 COM(2009) 257 final.

<sup>30</sup> The European Employment Observatory, 2008/2009 – Background paper on measures to deal with the economic crisis. April 2009



In general terms, in the climate of budgetary constraints many ministries as well as education and training institutions are required to prioritise their spending. Budgets dedicated to developing and stimulating innovative actions in the field of adult learning may, therefore, suffer in order to enable greater investment in retraining unemployed persons.

### **3.2 Employers' investment in skills development**

Previous crises have shown that employers' investment in initial training, mainly through the provision of apprenticeship places, decreases at times of crises<sup>31</sup>. Evidence of the impact of financial crises on employers' investment in continuing training for adults is scarce. There are, however, indications that in some cases the level of investment increases, in order to retain experienced workers whose 'company-specific' competences are valuable in the post-crisis period<sup>32</sup>. Furthermore, a slowdown in economic activity can create 'quiet time' during which training can take place with less cost to the employer in terms of loss of productivity.

On the other hand, the budget cuts of companies experiencing serious cash flow problems are expected to hit activities which are not essential to the core business, such as training and staff away-days. There is also evidence to suggest that employers' investment in co-operation with education and training institutions (e.g. in the higher education sector) is likely to decrease.

Providers offering training to employers during an economic crisis need to maintain a focus on the employer as customer and offer tailored, value-for-money training which meets their needs and offers clear benefits to the employer as well as the employee. Adult learning providers which are 'employer responsive' in this way can help to address the economic crisis by assisting employers to increase their productivity and better manage their resources<sup>33</sup>. Social partners can also play a part in supporting adult education during financial crises. In France, the new agreement on professional training seeks to redirect financial resources to population groups who need it most. The government has also asked the social partners to encourage in-job training and a significant proportion of the EUR 5 billion managed by social partners is to be allocated to the training of unemployed individuals and less-skilled employees.

### **3.3 Supporting the unemployed to re-train or update their skills**

The availability of re-training opportunities is particularly important for workers who lose their job now and may not be able to get back into their old job, occupation, or industry after the crisis<sup>34</sup>. For some others the crisis may be an opportunity to change career direction.

Re-training opportunities and incentives have expanded in most countries (including FR, IE, UK) to address the need for re-training opportunities for redundant workers<sup>35</sup>. Furthermore, 19 EU countries have introduced measures to improve their active labour market policies (ALMPs).

Measures explicitly designed to support and ease the re-integration into the labour market of recently laid-off workers have been adopted in at least ten Member States (including BE, FR, NL, UK)<sup>36</sup>. In the Netherlands, 30 employment service centres are being opened to support people who have become unemployed to find employment as soon as possible<sup>37</sup>. In these centres, the national authorities, employers and vocational educators work together to guide people from job to job or to arrange (re-)training. Extra money is also made available to reinforce the role of training centres in stemming the consequences of the crisis so that cyclically redundant workers use their spare time to get additional training to improve the match between supplied and required skills<sup>38</sup>.

In Belgium, companies with at least 20 employees announcing a collective dismissal are obliged to create a temporary Reconversion Unit which functions like a mini-company which is managed by associations of representatives of the employment services and the social partners and which supports the redundant workers to find a new career and/or new employment. In addition, the

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<sup>31</sup> Brunello, Giorgio for OECD (2009): *Learning for jobs: The Effect of Economic Downturns on Apprenticeships and Initial Workplace Training: A Review of the Evidence*. Available from the internet: <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/51/41/43141035.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Learning and Skills Improvement Service (2009), *Help during the economic downturn*.

<sup>34</sup> Communication from the Commission (2009) *A Shared Commitment for Employment. Volume 2 - Annexes*. Brussels, 3.6.2009

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> The European Employment Observatory, 2008/2009 – Background paper on measures to deal with the economic crisis. April 2009.

<sup>38</sup> GHK and IPISS (2009) European Employment Observatory. Quarterly reports. February 2009. Executive summary

Reconversion Unit encourages priority access to training, especially for those considered to have poorer chances of re-employment due to low qualifications, age and/or other factors.

In the UK (England), the government's new package of support measures for the unemployed launched in January 2009 provides extra support for jobseekers who have been unemployed for longer than six months. For example, under *Employers' Golden Hellos* incentives of up to GBP 2,500 are paid to employers to recruit and train an unemployed person. Furthermore, the *Train to Gain* programme is being expanded to provide more training and support to individuals in pre-redundancy situations to help them develop the skills needed for new employment (GBP 350 million)<sup>39</sup>. There are also guaranteed job training and work placements for all individuals aged 18-24 who have been unemployed for 12 months. Finally, GBP 83 million will be offered to colleges and other training providers to create approximately 75,000 new places<sup>40</sup>. In Wales, the ReAct scheme has been expanded to offer a training grant and wage subsidy to help redundant individuals to train for a new job and for an employer to take on and train a redundant worker.

Previous research indicates that the quality and effectiveness of re-training measures varies greatly and that they are more effective when based on indicators of labour market demand and elaborated in cooperation with employers<sup>41</sup>. In this current crisis, however, information on future labour market demand (in terms of specific skills) is scarce or not directly usable (i.e. the sectors, such as health care and social services, where demand for workers continues even during the crisis often require very specific skills).

### 3.4 Household spending on education and training

Although private investment in education and training is not the main source of funding across Europe, the influence of the economic crisis on households' spending on adult learning cannot be ignored. Some individuals may be discouraged from investing in training due to employment and, thus, financial uncertainty. Furthermore, they may consider that new qualifications are no longer a guarantee of a new job.

There are concerns about the impact of the crisis on equity in terms of access to adult learning. While families tend to protect the budgets dedicated to education and training, these can also represent important sums, especially for poorer families<sup>42</sup>. Training vouchers that target specific groups such as the long-term unemployed can be successful in encouraging people from lower socio-economic households to participate in training. Germany, for example, has established a system of training vouchers to support further vocational training for temporary workers.

### 3.5 Learners' choice of subject or course type

Based on research on previous trends, it is likely that the economic downturn will have an impact on adult learners' choice of subject, course type and/or learning method. Learning for pleasure, which may be considered as lacking a direct impact on employability, may experience a decline in demand as a result of the decrease in disposable household income. Individuals may be more likely to opt for courses which offer a direct route to employment or have a vocational element. In some cases it can be expected that more people will turn towards particular professions as a result of the crisis. (For example, in times of uncertainty, becoming a teacher is viewed as a secure occupational choice<sup>43</sup>). Part-time courses, which can be taken alongside employment, are also more likely to be more popular than full-time training. Flexible learning opportunities such as e-learning, distance learning or blended learning may also show an increase in popularity. Adult learning providers need, therefore, to consider how their supply meets the needs of learners in the current economic climate.

<sup>39</sup> Train to Gain helps employers improve the skills of their employees and business performance through subsidised training for basic skills, individuals studying for their first full Level 2 qualification, apprenticeships, leadership and management training, and sector specific training

<sup>40</sup> OECD (2009) *Competing for Skills: Vocational Education and Training in the 21st Century*.

<sup>41</sup> Walsh, K and Parsons, David J. (2004): *Active policies and measures: impact on integration and reintegration in the labour market and social life in Cedefop (2004): Impact of education and training*.

<sup>42</sup> The Economist 2 July 2009: *Staying on Board* / Ablett and Slengesol (2001): *Education in Crisis: The Impact and Lessons of the East Asian Financial Shock 1997–1999*. Available from the internet: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001233/123331e.pdf>

<sup>43</sup> GHK (2006): *Mobility of Teachers and Trainers*. Available from the internet: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/pdf/doc258\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/pdf/doc258_en.pdf)

### 3.6 Demand for advice and guidance

The demand for information, advice and guidance on areas such as course choice and level, learning methods, financial support and progression options is likely to increase during a period of economic downturn. Individuals who may be returning to structured learning after a break from participation will need advice on how best to address their skills gaps and increase their employability. In the UK (England), for example, the Adult Advancement and Careers Service is currently being developed to support adults to address their skills gaps in order to find employment or to progress in their career<sup>44</sup>.

### 3.7 Demand for validation of non-formal and informal learning

In the Netherlands, validation of non-formal and informal learning is one of the approaches to addressing the economic downturn. The Knowledge Centre for Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) introduced a new financial scheme at the start of 2009 to support individuals who are at risk of losing their job. As part of this package, the government will pay 50-100% of the APL procedure for a person who is at risk of becoming unemployed and does not hold a Level 2 vocational qualification within the Dutch qualification system for VET. Some EUR 57 million is available for the scheme in 2009 - 2010 and an additional EUR 75 million for education and training of people at risk of redundancy.

## 4 CONCLUSION

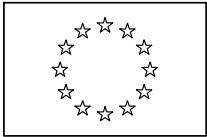
This brief background paper has used broad brush strokes to identify general and country-specific trends and progress in relation to the priority actions defined by the Action Plan on adult learning *It is always a good time to learn*. The paper also sought to kick-start a discussion on the implications of the current financial and economic crisis for the adult learning sector. In doing so, the intention is to enable participants to prepare for the regional meeting in Germany, 7 – 9 October 2009, to contribute to their work during the meeting and to support the achievement of the aims of the meetings. In particular it is intended to contribute to the goals of the meeting in relation to:

- facilitating an exchange of information on the implementation of the Action Plan at regional level;
- arriving at conclusions about the current situation of adult learning in the region;
- advancing co-operation between adult learning stakeholders on an intra-country and inter-country basis; and
- developing recommendations for future actions in relation to adult learning.

It is anticipated that participants in the meeting will add to the detail of the paper with specific updates from individual countries on progress on the priority action areas and on the on-going impact of the financial and economic crisis on the adult learning sector.

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<sup>44</sup> National Learner Panel (2009), Responding to the economic downturn, what learners want to see. Internet: <http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/pdf/NLP%20Economic%20Challenges.pdf>



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
Directorate-General for Education and Culture



# Action plan on adult learning: *from policy to practice*

## Regional Meeting Background Paper

Norway, 14 – 16 October 2009



# 1 BACKGROUND

## 1.1 Regional meetings

The European Commission is organising four regional meetings on the Action Plan on Adult Learning *It is always a good time to learn* between October and November 2009. The meetings which will bring together adult learning stakeholders will take place as follows:

- Germany, 7 – 9 October – a cluster of eight Western European countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom).
- Norway, 14 – 16 October – a cluster of eight Nordic and Baltic countries (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden).
- Spain, 26 – 28 October - a cluster of seven Southern European countries (Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain and Turkey)
- Slovenia, 4 – 6 November – a cluster of nine Central and Eastern European countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia).

The aim of the meetings is to enable adult education and training stakeholders to engage in in-depth discussions and exchanges about topics and developments of importance to participating countries in the context of the Action Plan. Specifically, the meetings aim to:

- Strengthen intra-country and inter-country co-operation on adult learning at regional level
- Review developments to date on the implementation of the Action Plan at regional level
- Arrive at conclusions about the current situation of adult learning in participating European countries
- Identify possible means of co-operation between adult learning actors in different countries
- Develop recommendations for future actions.

## 1.2 Background paper

This paper is one of four Background Papers prepared for participants in the regional meetings, one for each meeting. The aim of the paper is to set the scene for and stimulate discussion in, the regional meeting in Norway, 14 - 16 October 2009, which brings together key stakeholders to review progress on the implementation of the Action Plan on adult learning in Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden. The paper gives a brief overview of progress made in these countries on the priority actions set out in the Action Plan and discusses some of the trends and challenges emerging in this context. The paper also begins a discussion on the implications of the current economic crisis for adult learning. These issues will be debated further at the meeting and the conclusions arrived at will be included in the overall final report on the four meetings.

## 1.3 EU policy background on adult learning

The 2006 Communication on adult learning *It is never too late to learn* highlighted the essential contribution of adult learning to employability, labour market mobility and social inclusion. The Communication underlined the importance of removing barriers to participation. It also emphasised the need to invest in the quality of adult learning provision and the development of systems that recognise learning gained outside the formal education sphere. The Communication identified migrants and older people as priority groups and emphasised the urgent need to develop better monitoring systems for adult learning.

The 2007 Action Plan on Adult Learning *It is always a good time to learn* builds on the 2006 Communication and defines five concrete actions which Member States should seek to implement in order to increase participation in adult learning and develop efficient systems that reach all adults and involve all relevant stakeholders. The actions are as follows:

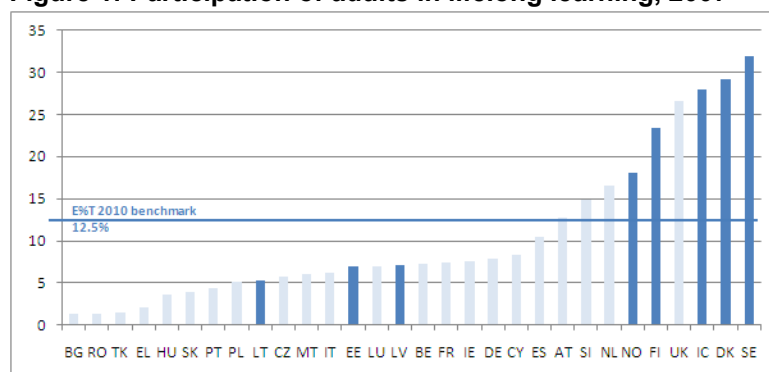
- Analyse the effects of reforms in all sectors of education and training on adult learning
- Improve the quality of provision in the adult learning sector
- Increase the possibilities for adults to achieve a qualification at least one level higher than before ('go one-step-up')
- Speed up the process of assessment of skills and social competences and have them validated and recognised in terms of learning outcomes
- Improve the monitoring of the adult learning sector.

To date a range of actions has taken place at EU level to support development in these areas, including Europe-wide surveys and studies, working group and focus group meetings and peer learning activities which provide an opportunity for participating countries to discuss challenges and successes, compare progress and exchange good practice on a range of topics.

#### 1.4 Participation in adult learning

In 2007, 9.7% of the EU adult population participated in learning on a four-week reference period. The Nordic countries are some of the best performing countries in Europe as all five countries have exceeded the European target that 12.5% of the population aged 25-64 should participate in lifelong learning by 2010. Participation in the Baltic States remains below the target and the European average, although these countries have made good progress on their 2000 participation rates.

**Figure 1: Participation of adults in lifelong learning, 2007**



Source: Adapted from European Commission staff working document: *Progress towards the Lisbon Objectives in Education and Training; Indicators and benchmarks 2008*. The Statistics cover EU countries and Iceland, Norway and Turkey. The eight countries participating in the regional meeting in Norway have been highlighted in dark blue. 2006 data for SE and UK.

The recent Adult Education Survey indicates that more than one-third (35.7%) of the EU's population aged 25-64 participated in formal or non-formal learning in the 12 months preceding the survey<sup>45</sup>. Job-related non-formal learning is where the majority of adults participate and participation rates decrease with age. There are significant country differences in participation, with participation being highest in the Nordic countries and the UK, closely followed by DE, SK and EE.

The survey also found that persons with low education levels tend to have low participation rates in all surveyed countries. For example, persons with high-skilled white collar jobs have the highest participations rates, while low and high-skilled blue-collar workers tend to have equally poor chances part of participating in learning in every country surveyed.

## 2 TRENDS AND PROGRESS RELATED TO THE PRIORITY ACTIONS OF THE ACTION PLAN

This section gives a brief overview of developments in relation to the priority actions of the Action Plan, with particular emphasis on developments in the countries participating in the regional meeting in Norway.

<sup>45</sup> Boateng, S. K. (2009) Significant country differences in adult learning. Eurostat Statistics in Focus. 44/2009.



## 2.1 **PRIORITY ACTION 1 – Analyse the effects of education and training reforms on adult learning**

In early 2009 the European Commission launched a study to develop a methodology for the analysis of the effect on adult learning of reforms in the wider education and training system.

A specific reform referred to in the Action Plan is the development of **national qualification frameworks (NQFs)** and the **overarching European Qualifications Framework (EQF)**. The EQF provides an opportunity to improve the transparency of qualifications across Member States and it is also expected to increase access to and participation in, lifelong learning<sup>46</sup>. The impact of the EQF on adult learning is expected to be far-reaching. By establishing a common European reference point, it will be easier to combine what has been learned in diverse settings, such as different countries, sectoral education systems or informal learning environments.

The NQFs are expected to facilitate progression routes in the education and training system, thus opening up qualification systems to adults, facilitating valuing of a broader range of learning outcomes and addressing the transparency of systems and qualifications<sup>47</sup>. The implementation of a National Qualifications Framework is currently underway in all countries within this cluster<sup>48</sup>.

A number of the countries within the cluster have identified challenges or 'preconditions' which must be addressed before the EQF can successfully be implemented. It has been identified that in Denmark and Lithuania, for example, all interested partners and end users must be provided with sufficient information. In Estonia, Finland, Lithuania and Sweden, it is important to ensure sufficient involvement, ownership and consensus between all relevant parties<sup>49</sup>.

Member States have been invited to relate their national qualifications systems to the relevant levels of the EQF by 2010. From 2012, all new qualifications should carry a reference to the EQF, so that employers and institutions can identify a candidate's knowledge, skills or competences across regional and/or national boundaries. Denmark, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are using eight reference levels in their NQFs, in line with the EQF, although it is only once national analysis and consultation has been conducted that referencing to the EQF can start<sup>50</sup>.

The development of the EQF and the NQFs is driving a shift towards learning outcomes with consequences for the adult learning sector. This is particularly significant for a priority action area of the Action Plan, namely, the validation of non-formal and informal learning, since a learning outcomes approach focuses on the outcomes of a learning process rather than the particular features of the process itself. General developments in this regard and developments in the cluster countries are set out below under Priority Action 4.

In addition, reforms in relation to quality assurance in other sectors of the education system are spilling over into adult education and training. Again, general developments in this regard and developments in the cluster countries are set out below, this time under Priority Action 2.

In relation to reforms in education and training, it is worth noting that in the current financial and economic crisis budget cuts are most likely to occur in areas such as development and 'project' work or administrative costs, thus mainly influencing (or potentially delaying) planned reforms in the education and training sector overall, including in the adult education and training sector.

## 2.2 **PRIORITY ACTION 2 - Improve the quality of provision**

Although the **contribution of staff to the quality of adult learning provision** is widely recognised, the 2007 Action Plan identified that so far many countries have paid little attention to the training (initial and continuing), the status or the career development of adult learning staff.

The ALPINE (Adult Learning Professions in Europe) study launched by the European Commission identified a number of key characteristics of the adult education and training sector

<sup>46</sup> European Commission, DG Education and Culture (2008), The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning. Internet: [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/publ/pdf/eqf/broch\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/publ/pdf/eqf/broch_en.pdf)

<sup>47</sup> Cedefop (2009) Continuity, Consolidation and Change, Towards a European era of vocational education and training, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. The European Qualifications Framework is made up of eight levels, each one defined by a set of descriptors indicating the learning outcomes relevant to qualifications at that level in any system of qualifications.

and staff, across Europe<sup>51</sup>. The sector is diverse. Providers differ in size, the type of learning they provide, the way they are funded/governed, their target groups and the learning methods used. Staff within the sector has different employment conditions, ranging from permanent, full-time contracts to more precarious, freelance contracts. Staff has a variety of backgrounds, work on short-term contracts or in addition to another job and tend to join the profession later in life after gaining work experience elsewhere. This means that the provision of training to personnel within the sector needs to be particularly flexible and there is more emphasis on continuing professional development (CPD) through short courses, work-based learning and induction programmes than on initial training. Generally, the professions of teaching or training in adult learning are poorly regulated.

In recent years countries are beginning to respond in different ways to the need to ensure the quality of staff in the adult learning sector.

The **introduction of definitions, legislation and regulations** can help to improve the status and quality of adult learning. Competence profiles exist in Denmark and Sweden and in Finland the Act on Liberal Adult Education lays down specific requirements in relation to the skill sets of teachers in non-formal adult learning. In Lithuania, the draft Lifelong Learning Strategy (2008) aims to regulate the profession of an adult educator and to create the conditions for the development of relevant competencies in educational establishments.

Estonia is among the few European countries where adult educator is considered a specific profession; a new professional qualification standard has been created and it is based on the adult educator's competences. Its Adult Education Plan for 2005-2008 addressed a number of priorities, including the quality assurance system of adult learning and in-service training.

Outside of 'second-chance' general and vocational adult learning in mainstream schools and other public institutions where staff are frequently required to hold the same qualifications as school education staff, there are **many educational and professional routes** to becoming a teacher or a trainer in the adult education sector<sup>52</sup>. In many European countries there are no specific initial qualification requirements for adult education teaching staff. This **variety of qualifications** on offer means that the market for professionals is not transparent for employers.

However, undergraduate courses in adult education do exist in most of the countries in this particular cluster (more so than in the other clusters), including DK, EE, FI, LV, LT and NO. In Finland, there is a professorship of adult education in seven universities and a new course in social pedagogy concerned with non-formal and informal adult learning has emerged. In Sweden, there was no specialised teacher training for adult education teachers until 2007, when a supplementary course was set up at Linköping university, offering the opportunity to students who have already undertaken formal education to become a teacher, to qualify as an 'adult education teacher'. The Jönköping university college also offers a course in adult learning for teachers and students of teaching.

In a context of diverse, limited or, indeed, no specific pre-service professional training or qualifications, **in-service training** or **continuing professional development (CPD)** is important to ensure the quality of provision. Although many European countries do not have measures in place to support adult educators, in some countries, organisations have their own in-service programme. For example, in Denmark, there is a system for support and in-service education for staff in non-formal adult education, organised mainly through Adult Educational Resource Centres (VPC). In Sweden, a CPD initiative to boost the teaching of Swedish to immigrants was introduced in 2008.

**Quality assurance** approaches are important for the professionalisation of the adult education sector, including measures such as setting entry requirements for staff, supporting continuing professional development and external evaluations. In general, QA systems are at different

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<sup>51</sup> Research voor Beleid (2008) *ALPINE – Adult Learning Professions in Europe, A study of the current situation, trends and issues*.

<sup>52</sup> Keogh, H (2009) *The state and development of adult learning and education in Europe, North America and Israel. Regional Synthesis Report. UNESCO CONFINTEA vi*.



stages of development in Europe. The Nordic countries (together with AT, DE, IE, UK) have advanced quality assurance systems in place in comparison to many other European countries<sup>53</sup>.

The **accreditation of providers** according to explicit quality criteria is a key quality measure. Such measures through which public authorities seek to legitimise and quality-assure a range of different providers are in place in at least 15 European countries, including all three Baltic States. For example, in 2003, the Latvian Adult Education Association in co-operation with national, regional and local authorities developed recommendations on licensing non-formal adult learning programmes. In Estonia, the government issues a licence to providers of VET or non-formal adult learning.

Quality assessment by national education agencies or centres of adult learning expertise takes place in the Nordic countries (including FI, IS, SE). In Sweden, a Commission of Inquiry made a nationwide evaluation of liberal adult education in 2002-2004. In Norway, the KVAAS project (2004-5) produced a set of common standards of quality in adult learning.

Public perceptions of the role adult teachers and trainers can impact on the number of people who choose to work in the sector and in a number of countries, action has been taken to **improve the attractiveness of working in the sector**. In Estonia, the annual Adult Learners Week helps to promote lifelong learning and includes an award ceremony for 'Learner and Educator of the Year'. In Sweden, Rvux is an association which aims to support the development of formal education. It distributes a journal which contains articles and materials that can be used for in-service training.

### 2.3 **PRIORITY ACTION 3 - Increase the possibilities for adults to go 'one step up'**

The Action Plan states that it is not enough to simply attract people into education and training, there must also be a real opportunity for them to raise their qualification levels. This applies especially to low-skilled and low-qualified individuals, including early school leavers, many migrants and other individuals from marginalised backgrounds, all groups who participate least in formal and non-formal learning. To support the development of 'one-step up' policies and practices a Peer Learning Activity (PLA) was organised jointly by the European Commission, the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, UK and the National Research and Development Centre, UK in London in April 2009<sup>54</sup>. Three cluster countries (DK, NO, SE) participated in the PLA.

Overall, the eight cluster countries have implemented various measures to increase possibilities for low-skilled adults to achieve higher level qualifications. Measures to ensure **the development of key competences for all adults are stipulated in legislation** in the majority of European countries<sup>55</sup> (including IS, LT, NO and SE). Within the legislation of a number of cluster countries, (including DK, FI, IS, LV and LT) there is a clear intention to create coherence between the adult learning sector and the remaining sectors of education and training. Iceland, where the Bill on Adult Education will create a bridge between the formal system and learning acquired in other contexts, is a good example of this commitment to supporting lifelong learning<sup>56</sup>. Finland and Iceland are among a small number of European countries where a trend towards the amendment of legislation to respond to new priorities related to the implementation of Key Competences can be observed<sup>57</sup>. The authorities from Latvia report operating 34 evening schools that provide second-chance education, including basic skills training, for all age groups<sup>58</sup>. In Lithuania, legislative changes have taken place in order to improve opportunities for socially excluded groups to gain access to learning (e.g. the Law on the Social Integration of the Disabled and the Law on Social Enterprises have been adopted).

Countries (including DK, FI, NO, SE) have expanded **programmes to support the development of key competences for adults with low basic skills or who are unemployed**.

<sup>53</sup> Keogh, H (2009), *The state and development of adult learning and education in Europe, North America and Israel. Regional Synthesis Report. UNESCO CONFINTEA vi*.

<sup>54</sup> Reports from the Peer Learning Activity can be found at: <http://www.ksill.net/PeerLearningActivities/PlaDetails.cfm?id=89>

<sup>55</sup> Austria, Belgium, Germany, Greece, Croatia, Ireland, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, Romania and Sweden.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> The Draft cross-country analysis 2009 on countries' implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme, as well as the national country reports.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

These aim to provide the target group with the skills needed to be able to participate fully in the labour market, as well as support their personal and social development. For example, the Basic Competence in Working Life (BCWL) programme in Norway funds enterprise-based courses on basic skills. These courses give adults the opportunity to acquire the basic skills they need to keep up with the demands and changes of modern working life, and encourage them to set and achieve further educational goals<sup>59</sup>. Similar national programmes have benefited over 24,000 and 22,800 low-qualified adults in Finland (Noste) and Estonia (Adult Work-related Training and Development Activities), respectively.

**Flexible and/or individualised learning pathways** have recently been developed by at least 13 European countries (including DK, EE, FI, IS, NO and SE). In Denmark, the provision of Preparatory Adult Education has been made more flexible and it is intended that the possibilities of combining literacy and numeracy courses with adult vocational training will be better utilised<sup>60</sup>.

Measures to support the **development of key competences among migrant/bilingual adults** have been implemented in a number of the cluster countries. Some have established initiatives to improve migrant/bilingual adults' competence in the official/national language (DK, EE, NO, SE). The development of key competences can encourage migrants to learn new competences for the labour market or to improve their participation in society. For example, the programme for Language Training 2007-2010 was established in Estonia to improve the language skills of non-native Estonians. The programme also includes provisions to improve the skills and capabilities of teachers and trainers to teach non-natives. In Denmark, language learning for immigrants is integrated with learning of vocational skills or combining working and learning<sup>61</sup>.

**Guidance services** are important to increase adults' awareness of education and training opportunities. Guidance service measures have been implemented, for example, in Finland, where a comprehensive internet-based guidance for adults is provided through a joint initiative of the education and labour ministries<sup>62</sup>. The Latvian Ministry of Education and Science estimates that over 44,000 adults received career consultation support in 2008 alone.

A number of the cluster countries help socially and economically disadvantaged individuals to obtain qualifications through **funding** (EE, LV, SE) or **financial incentives** (FI, NO, SE). These incentives include vouchers (FI) and training grants/free tuition fees for courses of basic education (NO). Sweden provides a good example of increased funding.<sup>63</sup> Measures that **combine work and learning** are used by many European countries (including DK, EE, FI, NO and SE) to ensure adult learning meets the needs and expectations of the learner.

## 2.4 **PRIORITY ACTION 4 - Speed up the process of assessing and recognising non-formal and informal learning for disadvantaged groups**

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is central to the EU lifelong learning strategy. Validation is highlighted in the *Education and Training 2010 Work Programme* and was selected as a priority for 2009 and 2010 in the updated framework for European co-operation in education and training.

**Common principles for validation** were adopted in 2004 to encourage and guide the development of high-quality, comparable approaches and systems by Member States. These principles were used by at least two of the cluster countries (IS and NO) as a partial basis for their validation systems. In 2009 more detailed guidelines<sup>64</sup> have been developed for policy makers and practitioners.

To support the exchange of good practice on validation policies and practices a Peer Learning Activity (PLA) was organised jointly by the European Commission and the Ministry of Education,

<sup>59</sup> Background report to the Peer Learning Activity 'One Step Up'. <http://www.ksll.net/PeerLearningActivities/PlaDetails.cfm?id=89>

<sup>60</sup> Information provided by DG EAC, 2009

<sup>61</sup> The Draft cross-country analysis 2009 on countries' implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme, as well as the national country reports.

<sup>62</sup> Keogh, H (2009), *The state and development of adult learning and education in Europe, North America and Israel. Regional Synthesis Report. UNESCO CONFINTEA vi.*

<sup>63</sup> The Draft cross-country analysis 2009 on countries' implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme, as well as the national country reports.

<sup>64</sup> Cedefop (2009), European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning, Internet: [http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/Upload/Information\\_resources/Bookshop/553/4054\\_en.pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/Upload/Information_resources/Bookshop/553/4054_en.pdf)

Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic in Prague in June 2009<sup>65</sup>. Four cluster countries (DK, LV, NO, SE) participated in the PLA, which focused on validation for low-qualified and low-skilled groups.

The European Qualifications Framework supports the development of validation systems by virtue of its basis in learning outcomes. Mutual co-operation has been encouraged through a Cluster on Recognition of Learning Outcomes.

Many European countries have established a **legal framework** to formalise the system for validation and individuals' right to access validation. Others remain at the stage of implementing and/or learning from, pilot projects. Cluster countries are at varying stages of developing a validation system but, overall, this cluster comprises countries with well-developed systems (DK, EE, FI, NO) or countries where a system is in development (IS, LT, SE)<sup>66</sup>. In Latvia, the development of a legislative base for the recognition of informal learning is also in progress. A working group on validation has been set up under the Ministry of Education and Science and amendments to regulations are now being implemented in order to facilitate the introduction of validation for adults.

In Norway, a national system for documenting and validating the non-formal and informal learning of adults was established in 1999 through the 'Competence Reform'. As a result of this reform, validation is now an individual right in Norway. In Denmark too, the concept of validation was introduced in the 1990s and there is a law setting down principles for validation, although the actual implementation is decentralised. New rules were passed in 2007 relating to the development and recognition of prior learning in the adult and continuing education system. Adults now have the right to ask an educational institution to assess their prior learning in order to have their competences recognised.

It is well-acknowledged that validation can present an opportunity for people from disadvantaged groups, such as low-qualified, low-skilled<sup>67</sup> and/or unemployed individuals, early school leavers and migrants, to (re-)integrate into the labour market, to access formal education or to progress within their career pathway. Trade union representatives have been employed in Finland as 'learning agents' to recruit groups who are less likely to get involved in validation, education and training, such as people with low self-esteem and learning difficulties (Noste programme). Validation schemes can act as 'door openers' to education courses for early school leavers and other low-skilled individuals. For example, in Denmark and Norway, the validation system is one of the means that provide individuals with a 'second chance' to reach their full learning potential. It can also lead to shorter study periods for many individuals.

**Guidance** is critical to the validation process, in particular for low-qualified and low-skilled candidates. **Training of validation personnel** varies from country to country in Europe. In Norway, county authorities are responsible for the quality and training of staff, which is carried out regionally at assessment centres.

Sufficient **financial resources** are necessary to mainstream and consolidate validation. Public funding is essential for the promotion of validation, for funding low-qualified and low-skilled groups and for monitoring and evaluation. The level of funding allocated to validation, and the amount individuals must pay towards the process themselves, can affect the willingness of people to take up validation opportunities. In Denmark, validation (which costs around DKR 5000) is free to the low-skilled.

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<sup>65</sup> The report will soon be available online: <http://www.ksll.net/>

<sup>66</sup> The Draft cross-country analysis 2009 on countries' implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme, as well as the national country reports.

<sup>67</sup> While participants in the PLA in the Czech Republic, June 2009, preferred the term 'low-qualified' to 'low-skilled' they were of the opinion that individuals who were actually 'low-skilled' could, with the strong support of information and guidance, actually undertake a validation process which would most likely need to be supplemented with additional learning before a qualification would be achieved.

## 2.5 PRIORITY ACTION 5 – Improve monitoring of the adult learning sector<sup>68</sup>

At regional, national, European and global levels there is a lack of reliable, timely data on the adult learning sector to allow an informed assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the sector, as well as ensure policy is evidence-based and addresses the needs of learners, providers, employers and other key stakeholders. Relevant evidence can also help to promote equitable access to and participation in, adult education and training<sup>69</sup>.

It is essential that monitoring processes within the sector are considerably strengthened. Evidence is required on a wide range of indicators, not only on participation rates but also on, for example, the availability of learning opportunities, the profile of adult learners, the benefits and outcomes of adult learning and the barriers to participation.

There has been a number of actions at European level to improve the availability of data, including the pilot of the Adult Education Survey (AES) in the period 2005-2008. The survey gathered information on adult participation in non-formal and informal learning, obstacles to participation and the costs of learning, within a 12-month reference period. In addition, the Eurostat Labour Force Survey gathers information on adult participation in education and training and the Continuing Vocational Training Survey provides data on investment by enterprises and participation in continuing vocational training<sup>70</sup>.

To address monitoring-related issues the European Commission launched a study in late 2008 entitled 'Study on adult learning terminology and adult learning monitoring'. The purpose of the study is to develop a glossary of agreed terminology for adult learning and to propose a set of core data to facilitate a two- yearly monitoring of the sector.

To support the exchange of good practice on monitoring policies and practices a Peer Learning Activity (PLA) was organised jointly by the European Commission and the Academia Istropolitana in Bratislava in March 2009<sup>71</sup>. Two cluster countries (NO, SE) participated in the PLA.

Monitoring of the sector faces a number of challenges, not least **the diversity of the sector**. Providers are dispersed, of different natures and often operate outside the public sector. There are also complications associated with issues of ownership and privacy of data and rights and obligations at all levels. Furthermore, questions of definitions present a significant problem for the production of consistent, comparable data. For instance, the definition of both 'adult' and 'adult learning' varies across and even within European countries. In addition, many countries have different understandings of what monitoring itself should encompass and which types of learning it should cover (e.g. non-formal / informal learning, or learning recognised through validation).

In most European countries, including the cluster countries, **different sources of data exist** and the outputs do not necessarily harmonise across surveys because of different concepts and definitions, differing data collection protocols and differing reference periods.

In addition, education and **training personnel in most countries may need upskilling** in relation to all aspects of monitoring. Other challenges include: the cost of implementing monitoring systems, failure on the part of providers to return data, 'survey fatigue' and the fact that, traditionally, monitoring has not been strong within the adult learning sector.

Countries are at quite different stages in terms of the **development of national monitoring systems** for adult learning. Data are collected in all the cluster countries but in many countries **data tend to focus on basic information** such as overall numbers of participants, rather than detailed information by target group, by types of setting or programme and by outcomes etc. Twelve countries which participated in the PLA on adult learning monitoring in Bratislava, March

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<sup>68</sup> Data for this section of the report has been extracted from the background and summary reports from a Peer Learning Activity on Adult Learning Monitoring held in Bratislava in March 2009 (<http://www.kslll.net/PeerLearningActivities/PlaDetails.cfm?id=83>) and the Draft cross-country analysis 2009 on countries' implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme, as well as the national country reports.

<sup>69</sup> UNESCO Institute for Education (1997) Monitoring Adult Learning.

<sup>70</sup> The survey is used to describe the numbers of participants in employer-sponsored training and personnel training days received by gender, organiser of training and field of education, for example. Under examination are also the costs incurred from the training by cost factor, used forms of training, enterprises' personnel training principles, trends of change in training and obstacles to the organising of training.

<sup>71</sup> Reports from the Peer Learning Activity can be found at: <http://www.kslll.net/PeerLearningActivities/PlaDetails.cfm?id=83>

2009, confirmed that they do not have a unified national methodology for recording the participation of adults in education and training. Furthermore, in the majority of countries there is **no data chain** whereby data collected at different levels feed into the data needs of the next level of data collection.

Data for measuring participation of adults are usually collected by the National Statistics Offices (through the labour force survey and countries also contribute to the EU studies mentioned above). In Norway for example, the Ministry of Education monitors participation in non-formal adult learning through separate annual surveys carried out by the National Statistics Office and through programme evaluations. Furthermore, participation in work-based learning is measured annually with additional Labour Force Survey questions. At the aforementioned PLA, a number of countries suggested that the collection of basic data should be obligatory for all providers, public and private, and that the basic data collection format should be provided by National Statistics Offices.

**Monitoring is linked to quality assurance** in many of the cluster countries, including Norway and Denmark. In Denmark, the Ministry supervises provision and quality of the training activities but it is the providers which analyse the quality of the training activities - the satisfaction rate is measured systematically among all participants and a representative sample of companies ([www.viskvalitet.dk](http://www.viskvalitet.dk)).

Some countries have a **specific body** with responsibility for the collection and analysis of education and training data. Again in Norway, the Institute for Adult Learning (Vox) has set up a database to track the Working Life programme (BKA). Once data have been collected, it is important that they are put to good use. Data need to form part of **structured management information systems** for stakeholders at all levels and to be based on an analysis of the lifelong learning of the entire population, including young people and adults. Furthermore, after data have been collected, **research and analysis** are needed.

### 3 THE IMPACT OF THE FINANCIAL AND ECONOMIC CRISIS ON THE ADULT LEARNING SECTOR

Various Europe-wide reports prepared in the early part of 2009 were used to develop this section of the Background Paper but given the pace of recent developments, it is likely that some of the information is already out-of-date. Therefore, the primary purpose of the section is to provide a backdrop to the discussions that will provide updates during the regional meeting. A range of ways in which the financial and economic crisis may impact and is impacting on the adult education and training sector is set out below.

#### 3.1 The level of public spending on the adult education sector

The overall picture of how the financial and economic crisis will impact on education and training budgets is not yet clear. There is a high level of awareness in countries of the urgent need to increase or at least maintain public spending, but the extent to which this is happening depends on how hard government budgets are being hit by the crisis<sup>72</sup>. Indeed, in the face of budget deficits certain countries (including HU and IS) have already announced cuts that are affecting the adult learning sector.

In many other countries the crisis is likely to result in an important increase in participation rates because many countries are integrating training measures into their policy packages to respond to the crisis<sup>73</sup>. According to the information collected by DG EMPL on the impact of the economic crisis<sup>74</sup>, adult learning budgets are being increased in at least nine European countries, including Estonia and Latvia (no information was available for other cluster countries). For example, the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research has developed three adult education programmes, which provide free training for at least 73,000 adults between 2007 and 2013. Work-related courses in VET-institutions are planned for 33,000 adults while 40,000 will get the opportunity to

<sup>72</sup> Council of the European Union (2009): *Council Conclusions on Flexicurity in times of crisis*. Available from the internet: [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressdata/en/lsa/108369.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/lsa/108369.pdf)

<sup>73</sup> The European Employment Observatory, 2008/2009 – Background paper on measures to deal with the economic crisis. Information as of early April 2009.

<sup>74</sup> A Communication from the Commission (2009) *A Shared Commitment for Employment*. Brussels, 3.6.2009 COM(2009) 257 final.



improve their key competences in non-formal adult education institutions. Two other programmes will start with the help of European Social Fund in 2010.

One of the most recent European Employment Observatory reviews<sup>75</sup> suggests that adult learning budgets have also been increased in Finland and Sweden. For example, the recent budget proposal in Finland includes additional spending on flexicurity-related measures, including training. The Lithuanian government has announced plans to establish sector specific vocational training centres and modernise 49 adult education centres<sup>76</sup>.

In general terms, in the climate of budgetary constraints many ministries as well as education and training institutions are required to prioritise their spending. Budgets dedicated to developing and stimulating innovative actions in the field of adult learning may, therefore, suffer in order to enable greater investment in retraining unemployed persons.

### **3.2 Employers' investment in skills development**

Previous crises have shown that employers' investment in initial training, mainly through the provision of apprenticeship places, decreases at times of crises<sup>77</sup>. Evidence of the impact of financial crises on employers' investment in continuing training for adults is scarce. There are, however, indications that in some cases the level of investment increases, in order to retain experienced workers whose 'company-specific' competences are valuable in the post-crisis period<sup>78</sup>. Furthermore, a slowdown in economic activity can create 'quiet time' during which training can take place with less cost to the employer in terms of loss of productivity.

On the other hand, the budget cuts of companies experiencing serious cash flow problems are expected to hit activities which are not essential to the core business, such as training and staff away-days. There is also evidence to suggest that employers' investment in co-operation with education and training institutions (e.g. in the higher education sector) is likely to decrease.

Providers offering training to employers during an economic crisis need to maintain a focus on the employer as customer and offer tailored, value-for-money training which meets their needs and offers clear benefits to the employer as well as the employee. Adult learning providers which are 'employer responsive' in this way can help to address the economic crisis by assisting employers to increase their productivity and better manage their resources<sup>79</sup>. Social partners can also play a part in supporting adult education during financial crises. In Sweden, this is done through so-called 'job security councils' and foundations which have been established by social partners to support employees and companies affected by restructuring. They support redundant employees to find new careers by offering career adjustment support (e.g. training, career counselling etc.) and additional financial support. These measures are financed by employers who pay a contribution amounting to 0.15 to 0.3 % of their total salary costs.

### **3.3 Supporting the unemployed to re-train or update their skills**

The availability of re-training opportunities is particularly important for workers who lose their job now and may not be able to get back into their old job, occupation, or industry after the crisis<sup>80</sup>. For some others the crisis may be an opportunity to change career direction.

Re-training opportunities and incentives have expanded in many European countries (including FI, SE) to address the need for re-training opportunities for redundant workers<sup>81</sup>. The Swedish government has announced that it intends to increase the number of places in post-secondary vocational training and local authority upper secondary education for adults. It has also proposed to increase student aid for unemployed adults. In Finland, in 2008 the Ministry of Education decided to fund 1,000 extra student places in vocational schools<sup>82</sup>. Furthermore, the taskforce

<sup>75</sup> The European Employment Observatory, 2008/2009 – Background paper on measures to deal with the economic crisis. April 2009.

<sup>76</sup> GHK and IPISS (2009) European Employment Observatory. Quarterly reports. February 2009. Executive summary

<sup>77</sup> Brunello, Giorgio for OECD (2009): *Learning for jobs: The Effect of Economic Downturns on Apprenticeships and Initial Workplace Training: A Review of the Evidence*. Available from the internet: <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/51/41/43141035.pdf>

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Learning and Skills Improvement Service (2009), Help during the economic downturn.

<sup>80</sup> Communication from the Commission (2009) *A Shared Commitment for Employment. Volume 2 - Annexes*. Brussels, 3.6.2009

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> GHK and IPISS (2009) European Employment Observatory. Quarterly reports. February 2009. Executive summary

formed in December 2008 by the Ministry of Education regarding adult education programmes in universities proposed the creation of apprenticeship-based supplementary education, starting in 2009<sup>83</sup>. The trainees are in a normal employment relationship during the training, and the employer is responsible for on-the-job training in accordance with an agreement between the employer and the university. Upon completion of their studies, the students are able to demonstrate the wide ranging skills they have obtained via on-the-job training, which is worth 30-60 study credits.

Furthermore, 19 EU countries have introduced measures to improve their active labour market policies (ALMPs). In Denmark and Finland this has meant investments in improving and tailoring services provided by their public agencies to ease labour market transition. In Sweden, the government has instructed the Public Employment Service (PES) to expand its matching services and provide early and individual support to people who have lost their job<sup>84</sup>. The government has also increased PES funding by EUR 26 million in 2009 and increased the number of places in work placement schemes as well as introducing new practical skill development schemes.

Previous research indicates that the quality and effectiveness of re-training measures varies greatly and that they are more effective when based on indicators of labour market demand and elaborated in cooperation with employers<sup>85</sup>. In this current crisis, however, information on future labour market demand (in terms of specific skills) is scarce or not directly usable (i.e. the sectors, such as health care and social services, where demand for workers continues even during the crisis often require very specific skills).

### **3.4 Household spending on education and training**

Although private investment in education and training is not the main source of funding across Europe, the influence of the economic crisis on households' spending on adult learning cannot be ignored. Some individuals may be discouraged from investing in training due to employment and, thus, financial uncertainty. Furthermore, they may consider that new qualifications are no longer a guarantee of a new job.

There are concerns about the impact of the crisis on equity in terms of access to adult learning. While families tend to protect the budgets dedicated to education and training, these can also represent important sums, especially for poorer families<sup>86</sup>. Training vouchers that target specific groups such as the long-term unemployed can be successful in encouraging people from lower socio-economic households to participate in training. For example, the Finnish Ministry of Education introduced a study voucher scheme in 2007 and today the scheme amounts to around five percent of public funding allocated to liberal adult education<sup>87</sup>.

### **3.5 Learners' choice of subject or course type**

Based on research on previous trends, it is likely that the economic downturn will have an impact on adult learners' choice of subject, course type and/or learning method. Learning for pleasure, which may be considered as lacking a direct impact on employability, may experience a decline in demand as a result of the decrease in disposable household income. Individuals may be more likely to opt for courses which offer a direct route to employment or have a vocational element. In some cases it can be expected that more people will turn towards particular professions as a result of the crisis. (For example, in times of uncertainty, becoming a teacher is viewed as a secure occupational choice<sup>88</sup>). Part-time courses, which can be taken alongside employment, are also more likely to be more popular than full-time training. Flexible learning opportunities such as e-learning, distance learning or blended learning may also show an increase in popularity. Adult learning providers need, therefore, to consider how their supply meets the needs of learners in the current economic climate.

<sup>83</sup> GHK and IPISS (2009) European Employment Observatory. Quarterly reports. February 2009. Executive summary

<sup>84</sup> The European Employment Observatory, 2008/2009 – Background paper on measures to deal with the economic crisis. April 2009.

<sup>85</sup> Walsh, K and Parsons, David J. (2004): Active policies and measures: impact on integration and reintegration in the labour market and social life in Cedefop (2004): *Impact of education and training*.

<sup>86</sup> The Economist 2 July 2009: Staying on Board / Ablett and Slengesol (2001): *Education in Crisis: The Impact and Lessons of the East Asian Financial Shock 1997–1999*. Available from the internet: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001233/123331e.pdf>

<sup>87</sup> The Draft cross-country analysis 2009 on countries' implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme, as well as the national country reports.

<sup>88</sup> GHK (2006): Mobility of Teachers and Trainers. Available from the internet: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/pdf/doc258\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/pdf/doc258_en.pdf)

### 3.6 Demand for advice and guidance

The demand for information, advice and guidance on areas such as course choice and level, learning methods, financial support and progression options is likely to increase during a period of economic downturn. Individuals who may be returning to structured learning after a break from participation will need advice on how best to address their skills gaps and increase their employability.

## 4 CONCLUSION

This brief background paper has used broad brush strokes to identify general and country-specific trends and progress in relation to the priority actions defined by the Action Plan on adult learning *It is always a good time to learn*. The paper also sought to kick-start a discussion on the implications of the current financial and economic crisis for the adult learning sector. In doing so, the intention is to enable participants to prepare for the regional meeting in Norway, 14 - 16 October 2009, to contribute to their work during the meeting and to support the achievement of the aims of the meetings. In particular it is intended to contribute to the goals of the meeting in relation to:

- facilitating an exchange of information on the implementation of the Action Plan at regional level;
- arriving at conclusions about the current situation of adult learning in the region;
- advancing co-operation between adult learning stakeholders on an intra-country and inter-country basis; and
- developing recommendations for future actions in relation to adult learning.

It is anticipated that participants in the meeting will add to the detail of the paper with specific updates from individual countries on progress on the priority action areas and on the on-going impact of the financial and economic crisis on the adult learning sector.





EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
Directorate-General for Education and Culture



# Action plan on adult learning: *from policy to practice*

## Regional Meeting Background Paper

Spain, 26 – 28 October, 2009



# 1 BACKGROUND

## 1.1 Regional meetings

The European Commission is organising four regional meetings on the Action Plan on Adult Learning *It is always a good time to learn* between October and November 2009. The meetings which will bring together adult learning stakeholders will take place as follows:

- Germany, 7 – 9 October – a cluster of eight Western European countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom).
- Norway, 14 – 16 October – a cluster of eight Nordic and Baltic countries (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden).
- Spain, 26 – 28 October - a cluster of seven Southern European countries (Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain and Turkey)
- Slovenia, 4 – 6 November – a cluster of nine Central and Eastern European countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia).

The aim of the meetings is to enable adult education and training stakeholders to engage in in-depth discussions and exchanges about topics and developments of importance to participating countries in the context of the Action Plan. Specifically, the meetings aim to:

- Strengthen intra-country and inter-country co-operation on adult learning at regional level
- Review developments to date on the implementation of the Action Plan at regional level
- Arrive at conclusions about the current situation of adult learning in participating European countries
- Identify possible means of co-operation between adult learning actors in different countries
- Develop recommendations for future actions.

## 1.2 Background paper

This paper is one of four Background Papers prepared for participants in the regional meetings, one for each meeting. The aim of the paper is to set the scene for and stimulate discussion in, the regional meeting in Spain, 26 - 28 October 2009, which brings together key stakeholders to review progress on the implementation of the Action Plan on adult learning in Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain and Turkey. The paper gives a brief overview of progress made in these countries on the priority actions set out in the Action Plan and discusses some of the trends and challenges emerging in this context. The paper also begins a discussion on the implications of the current economic crisis for adult learning. These issues will be debated further at the meeting and the conclusions arrived at will be included in the overall final report on the four meetings.

## 1.3 EU policy background on adult learning

The 2006 Communication on adult learning *It is never too late to learn* highlighted the essential contribution of adult learning to employability, labour market mobility and social inclusion. The Communication underlined the importance of removing barriers to participation. It also emphasised the need to invest in the quality of adult learning provision and the development of systems that recognise learning gained outside the formal education sphere. The Communication identified migrants and older people as priority groups and emphasised the urgent need to develop better monitoring systems for adult learning.

The 2007 Action Plan on Adult Learning *It is always a good time to learn* builds on the 2006 Communication and defines five concrete actions which Member States should seek to implement in order to increase participation in adult learning and develop efficient systems that reach all adults and involve all relevant stakeholders. The actions are as follows:

- Analyse the effects of reforms in all sectors of education and training on adult learning

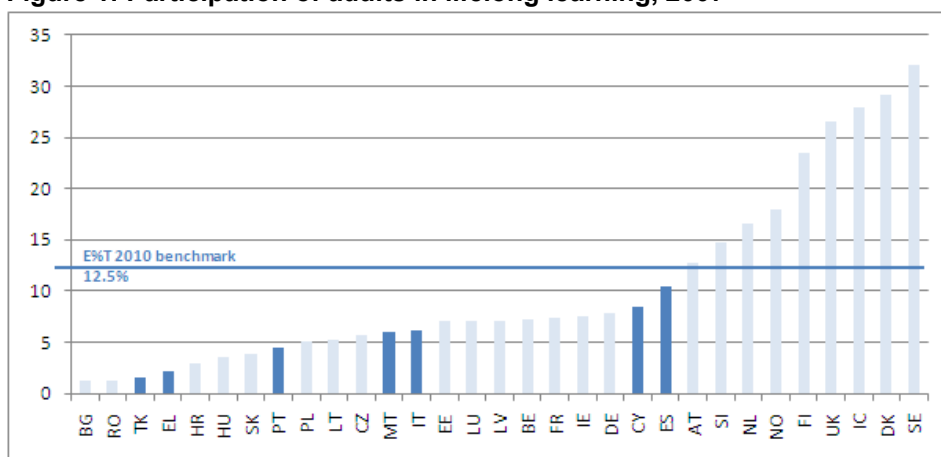
- Improve the quality of provision in the adult learning sector
- Increase the possibilities for adults to achieve a qualification at least one level higher than before ('go one-step-up')
- Speed up the process of assessment of skills and social competences and have them validated and recognised in terms of learning outcomes
- Improve the monitoring of the adult learning sector.

To date a range of actions has taken place at EU level to support development in these areas, including Europe-wide surveys and studies, working group and focus group meetings and peer learning activities which provide an opportunity for participating countries to discuss challenges and successes, compare progress and exchange good practice on a range of topics.

#### 1.4 Participation in adult learning

In 2007, 9.7% of the EU adult population participated in learning on a four-week reference period. None of the countries participating in the meeting has reached the European target that 12.5% of the population aged 25-64 should participate in lifelong learning by 2010. However, all have made good progress on their 2000 participation rates, especially Cyprus and Spain.

**Figure 1: Participation of adults in lifelong learning, 2007**



Source: Adapted from European Commission staff working document: Progress towards the Lisbon Objectives in Education and Training; Indicators and benchmarks 2008. The statistics cover EU countries and Iceland, Norway and Turkey. The seven countries participating in the regional meeting in Spain have been highlighted in dark blue. 2006 data for SE and UK.

The recent Adult Education Survey indicates that more than one-third (35.7%) of the EU's population aged 25-64 participated in formal or non-formal learning in the 12 months preceding the survey<sup>89</sup>. Job-related non-formal learning is where the majority of adults participate and participation rates decrease with age. There are significant country differences in participation, with participation being highest in the Nordic countries and the UK, closely followed by Germany.

The survey also found that persons with low education levels tend to have low participation rates in all surveyed countries. For example, persons with high-skilled white collar jobs have the highest participations rates, while low and high-skilled blue-collar workers tend to have equally poor chances part of participating in learning in every country surveyed.

## 2 TRENDS AND PROGRESS RELATED TO THE PRIORITY ACTIONS OF THE ACTION PLAN

This section gives a brief overview of developments in relation to the priority actions of the Action Plan, with particular emphasis on developments in the countries participating in the regional meeting in Spain.

<sup>89</sup> Boateng, S. K. (2009) Significant country differences in adult learning. Eurostat Statistics in Focus. 44/2009.

## 2.1 PRIORITY ACTION 1 – Analyse the effects of education and training reforms on adult learning

In early 2009 the European Commission launched a study to develop a methodology for the analysis of the effect on adult learning of reforms in the wider education and training system.

A specific reform referred to in the Action Plan is the development of **national qualification frameworks (NQFs)** and the **overarching European Qualifications Framework (EQF)**. The EQF provides an opportunity to improve the transparency of qualifications across Member States and it is also expected to increase access to and participation in, lifelong learning<sup>90</sup>. The impact of the EQF on adult learning is expected to be far-reaching. By establishing a common European reference point, it will be easier to combine what has been learned in diverse settings, such as different countries, sectoral education systems or informal learning environments.

The NQFs are expected to facilitate progression routes in the education and training system, thus opening up qualification systems to adults, facilitating valuing of a broader range of learning outcomes and addressing the transparency of systems and qualifications. Across the cluster, the countries are at various stages of developing their NQFs. Malta introduced its NQF in 2007 and formally aligned it to the EQF in October 2009. In Italy, Portugal, Spain and Turkey the development of a NQF is in progress. In Cyprus there has been limited progress<sup>91</sup>. In Greece, the NQF is in progress and it will be launched in February 2010 for public consultation. However, validation of non-formal learning and quality assurance mechanisms are in a very early stage of development.

A number of the countries within the cluster have identified challenges or 'preconditions' which must be addressed before the EQF can successfully be implemented. In Cyprus, for example, it is important to create acceptance for the introduction of mechanisms for the validation of non-formal learning and quality assurance. In Turkey, there is a need to train teachers and trainers within the scope of lifelong learning<sup>92</sup>.

Member States have been invited to relate their national qualifications systems to the relevant levels of the EQF by 2010. From 2012, all new qualifications should carry a reference to the EQF, so that employers and institutions can identify a candidate's knowledge, skills or competences across regional and/or national boundaries. Malta has an eight-level qualifications framework, in line with the EQF. Spain and Turkey also intend to use eight reference levels<sup>93</sup>.

The development of the EQF and the NQFs is driving a shift towards learning outcomes with consequences for the adult learning sector. This is particularly significant for a priority action area of the Action Plan, namely, the validation of non-formal and informal learning, since a learning outcomes approach focuses on the outcomes of a learning process rather than the particular features of the process itself. General developments in this regard and developments in the cluster countries are set out below under Priority Action 4.

In addition, reforms in relation to quality assurance in other sectors of the education system are spilling over into adult education and training. Again, general developments in this regard and developments in the cluster countries are set out below, this time under Priority Action 2.

In relation to reforms in education and training, it is worth noting that in the current financial and economic crisis budget cuts are most likely to occur in areas such as development and 'project' work or administrative costs, thus mainly influencing (or potentially delaying) planned reforms in the education and training sector overall, including in the adult education and training sector. In Greece, however, the government agreed a rise in the budget because of the urgency of the ongoing Reforms in education and training systems and the relatively low investment in education and lifelong learning.

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<sup>90</sup> European Commission, DG Education and Culture (2008), The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning. Internet: [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/publ/pdf/eqf/broch\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/publ/pdf/eqf/broch_en.pdf)

<sup>91</sup> Cedefop (2009) Continuity, Consolidation and Change, Towards a European era of vocational education and training, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

## 2.2 PRIORITY ACTION 2 - Improve the quality of provision<sup>94</sup>

Although the **contribution of staff to the quality of adult learning provision** is widely recognised, the 2007 Action Plan identified that so far many European countries have paid little attention to the training (initial and continuing), the status or the career development of adult learning staff.

The ALPINE (Adult Learning Professions in Europe) study launched by the European Commission identified a number of key characteristics of the adult education and training sector and staff, across Europe<sup>95</sup>. The sector is diverse. Providers differ in size, the type of learning they provide, the way they are funded/governed, their target groups and the learning methods used. Staff within the sector has different employment conditions, ranging from permanent, full-time contracts to more precarious, freelance contracts. Staff has a variety of backgrounds, work on short-term contracts or in addition to another job and tend to join the profession later in life after gaining work experience elsewhere. This means that the provision of training to personnel within the sector needs to be particularly flexible and there is more emphasis on continuing professional development (CPD) through short courses, work-based learning and induction programmes than on initial training. Generally, the professions of teaching or training in adult learning are poorly regulated.

In recent years countries are beginning to respond in different ways to the need to ensure the quality of staff in the adult learning sector.

The **introduction of definitions, legislation and regulations** can help to improve the status and quality of adult learning. A number of the cluster countries (e.g. CY and IT) have recently introduced regulations defining adult learning and what adult learning practitioners should do for their professional development. In Italy for example, legislation requires teachers in the field of adult learning to attend training sessions run by the Regional Institutes for Educational Research. In Greece, new legislation is under preparation to improve quality of provision and processes professionalise adult learning staff.

Outside of 'second-chance' general and vocational adult learning in mainstream schools and other public institutions where staff are frequently required to hold the same qualifications as school education staff, there are **many educational and professional routes** to becoming a teacher or a trainer in the adult education sector. In fact, in many European countries there are no specific initial qualification requirements for adult education teaching staff. Generally speaking, the variety of qualifications on offer means that the market for professionals is not transparent for employers.

However, undergraduate courses in adult education exist in a number of EU countries, including EL and PT. For example, in Portugal, trainers who are teaching adults in the field of key competences in RVCC centres need to be qualified teachers as well as certified adult trainers<sup>96</sup>.

In a context of diverse, limited or, indeed, no specific pre-service professional training or qualifications, **in-service training** or **continuing professional development (CPD)** is important to ensure the quality of provision. European funding, such as the European Social Fund, can also be used to fund training activities. For example, in Malta a project entitled 'Training of Trainers Programme in Basic Literacy' was implemented over the period 2005-2006, with funding from the government and ESF. In Portugal, a specialised training programme addressing the pedagogical teams of the New Opportunities Centres is implemented on an annual basis. This training was developed by a group of public universities in 2008.

In the majority of European countries, the **status, conditions of employment** and **remuneration** of adult learning staff generally fall below those of staff in other education and training sectors. To increase equality within the adult learning sector in Portugal, the staffing requirements,

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<sup>94</sup> Information for this section has been collected from **Research voor Beleid** (2008) *ALPINE – Adult Learning Professions in Europe, A study of the current situation, trends and issues*. And **Keogh, H** (2009), *The state and development of adult learning and education in Europe, North America and Israel. Regional Synthesis Report. UNESCO CONFINTEA vi*.

<sup>95</sup> **Research voor Beleid** (2008) *ALPINE – Adult Learning Professions in Europe, A study of the current situation, trends and issues*.

<sup>96</sup> UNESCO ConfinteA (2008) *The development and state of the art of adult learning and Education. National report of Portugal*.

qualifications, recruitment procedures and remuneration of the RVCC providers are clearly set out, along with the CPD arrangements for staff. In Turkey, public institutions providing adult learning programmes recruit staff according to the results of the selection examination for professional posts in public organisations and salaries are set by the government.

**Quality assurance** approaches are important for the professionalisation of the adult education sector, including measures such as setting entry requirements for staff, supporting continuing professional development and external evaluations. In general, QA systems are at different stages of development in Europe with some of the most advanced being in the Nordic countries, AT, DE, IE and UK. In PT quality assessment is carried out by national education agencies or centres of adult learning expertise.

The **accreditation of providers** according to explicit quality criteria is a key quality measure. Such quality control measures are in place in at least 15 EU countries, including Greece in this cluster.

### 2.3 **PRIORITY ACTION 3 - Increase the possibilities for adults to go 'one step up'**

The Action Plan states that it is not enough to simply attract people into education and training, there must also be a real opportunity for them to raise their qualification levels. This applies especially to low-skilled and low-qualified individuals, including early school leavers, many migrants and other individuals from marginalised backgrounds, all groups who participate least in formal and non-formal learning. To support the development of 'one-step up' policies and practices a Peer Learning Activity (PLA) was organised jointly by the European Commission, the UK Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills and the National Research and Development Centre, UK in London in April 2009<sup>97</sup>. One cluster country (EL) participated in the PLA.

Overall, the seven cluster countries have implemented various measures to increase possibilities for low-skilled adults to achieve higher level qualifications. Measures to ensure **the development of key competences for all adults are stipulated in legislation** in the majority of European countries<sup>98</sup> (including EL, IT and PT). In a number of European countries, including Spain, it is clear from the legislation that there is a willingness to create coherence between the adult learning sector and the remaining sectors of education and training in a vision of lifelong learning<sup>99</sup>. In Greece, the Lifelong Learning Strategy identifies broader systemic and pedagogic improvements such as developing learner-centred approaches, programmes and assessment<sup>100</sup>.

Countries (including EL, ES, IT and PT) have **programmes in place to support the development of key competences for adults with low basic skills or who are unemployed**. These aim to provide the target group with the skills needed to be able to participate fully in the labour market, as well as support their personal and social development. In Italy, a pact signed in 2002 confirmed commitment to increasing the education and training levels of young people and adults, to improving basic knowledge and literacy skills and to enabling the acquisition of specific skills useful for both working and social life. In Spain, the key competence-related training offer for adults is channelled through a number of different programmes, including Elementary Education for Adults, VET programmes, *Programa Mentor* (open, free and distance online training) and other second-chance measures. The New Opportunities Initiative has already raised basic qualification levels of tens of thousands of early school leavers and low-qualified adults in Portugal. The number of Centres for Adult Education (KEE) has been increased in Greece together with Schools for Parents. In Turkey, the *Mother and Daughter in school* national campaign enables low-skilled individuals, over 5m of whom are illiterate women, to return to school/complete their basic education. Since 2001, 1,896,562 have completed basic education under the campaign.

**Flexible and/or individualised learning pathways** have recently been developed by at least 13 European countries (including EL and PT). For example, the curricula of Second-Chance Schools ( $\Sigma\Delta E/SDE$ ) in Greece are designed to be flexible in order to respond to the individual needs of learners.

<sup>97</sup> Reports from the Peer Learning Activity can be found at: <http://www.ksll.net/PeerLearningActivities/PlaDetails.cfm?id=89>

<sup>98</sup> Austria, Belgium, Germany, Greece, Croatia, Ireland, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, Romania and Sweden.

<sup>99</sup> The Draft cross-country analysis 2009 on countries' implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme, as well as the national country reports.

<sup>100</sup> Background report to the Peer Learning Activity One Step Up: <http://www.ksll.net/PeerLearningActivities/PlaDetails.cfm?id=89>

Measures to support the **development of key competences among migrant/bilingual adults** have been implemented by a number of the cluster countries. Some have established initiatives to improve migrant/bilingual adults' competence in the official language national language (EL, MT) or to help them to gain skills to integrate in the new society (EL, ES). For example, in Greece, language learning is integrated with the learning of other competences, such as literacy, mathematical skills and digital competence. An increase in the number of recently arrived immigrants in Spain has meant significant increases in the number of people studying Spanish or other basic or professional courses in adult education centres.

## 2.4 **PRIORITY ACTION 4 - Speed up the process of assessing and recognising non-formal and informal learning for disadvantaged groups**

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is central to the EU lifelong learning strategy. Validation is highlighted in the *Education and Training 2010 Work Programme* and was selected as a priority for 2009 and 2010 in the updated framework for European co-operation in education and training.

**Common principles for validation** were adopted in 2004 to encourage and guide the development of high-quality, comparable approaches and systems by Member States. In 2009 more detailed guidelines<sup>101</sup> have been developed for policy makers and practitioners.

To support the exchange of good practice on validation policies and practices a Peer Learning Activity (PLA) was organised jointly by the European Commission and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic in Prague in June 2009<sup>102</sup>. Three cluster countries (EL, IT, PT) participated in the PLA which focused on validation for low-qualified and low-skilled groups.

The European Qualifications Framework supports the development of validation systems by virtue of its basis in learning outcomes. Mutual co-operation has been encouraged through a Cluster on Recognition of Learning Outcomes.

Many countries have established **a legal framework** to formalise the system for validation and individuals' right to access validation. Others remain at the stage of implementing and/or learning from pilot projects. Cluster countries are at varying stages of developing a validation system. In Portugal, for example, the national system for the Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences (RVCC) supports early school leavers. RVCC is aimed at adults who have no basic or secondary school certificates and recognises, validates and certifies the know-how and competences they have gained through their various life experiences. The approach focuses on basic and secondary levels of education<sup>103</sup>. Spain is in the final stages of approving new legislation to establish a procedure and requirements for the evaluation and accreditation of professional competences acquired through work experience or non-formal training<sup>104</sup>.

In Italy, there is no national system in place but a number of regions have developed policies and strategies in relation to validation<sup>105</sup>. Malta is at the pilot project stage. In Cyprus, Greece and Turkey no legal framework for validation is yet in place<sup>106</sup>.

It is well-recognised that validation can present an opportunity for people from disadvantaged groups, such as low-qualified, low-skilled and/or unemployed individuals, early school leavers and migrants, to (re-)integrate into the labour market, to access formal education or to progress within their career pathway. As previously mentioned, validation has been used in Portugal to enable early school leavers to acquire qualifications. In Spain, it is anticipated that 80,000 people – mainly with low qualification levels – will benefit from the validation system in its first three years<sup>107</sup>.

**Guidance** is critical to the validation process, in particular for low-qualified and low-skilled candidates. In Spain, the legislation on validation which is currently being developed outlines a

<sup>101</sup> [http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/Upload/Information\\_resources/Bookshop/553/4054\\_en.pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/Upload/Information_resources/Bookshop/553/4054_en.pdf)

<sup>102</sup> Summary Report on Peer Learning Activity on Validation of non-formal and informal learning. The report will soon be available online: <http://www.kslll.net/>

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> The Draft cross-country analysis 2009 on countries' implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme, as well as the national country reports.

<sup>105</sup> Summary Report on Peer Learning Activity on Validation of non-formal and informal learning: <http://www.kslll.net/>

<sup>106</sup> The Draft cross-country analysis 2009 on countries' implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme, as well as the national country reports.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.



substantial role for guidance during the validation process and underlines the importance of the training of assessors as well as counsellors.

**Training of validation personnel** varies from country to country. The New Opportunities Centres which deliver validation in Portugal are supported by qualified and specialist staff who are trained to work in a number of different areas, including guidance<sup>108</sup>.

Sufficient **financial resources** are necessary to mainstream and consolidate validation. Public funding is essential for the promotion of validation, for funding low-qualified and low-skilled groups and for monitoring and evaluation. In Spain, for example, over EUR 30 million has been allocated to the evaluation and accreditation of non-formal learning associated with professional competences in the budgetary framework for the national Roadmap for a New Vocational Training<sup>109</sup>.

## 2.5 PRIORITY ACTION 5 – Improve monitoring of the adult learning sector<sup>110</sup>

At regional, national, European and global levels there is a lack of reliable, timely data on the adult learning sector to allow an informed assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the sector, as well as ensure policy is evidence-based and addresses the needs of learners, providers, employers and other key stakeholders. Relevant evidence can also help to promote equitable access to and participation in, adult education and training<sup>111</sup>.

It is essential that monitoring processes within the sector are considerably strengthened. Evidence is required on a wide range of indicators, not only on participation rates but also on, for example, the availability of learning opportunities, the profile of adult learners, the benefits and outcomes of adult learning and the barriers to participation.

There have been a number of actions at European level to improve the availability of data, including the pilot of the Adult Education Survey (AES) in the period 2005-2008. The survey gathered information on adult participation in non-formal and informal learning, obstacles to participation and the costs of learning, within a 12-month reference period. In addition, the Eurostat Labour Force Survey gathers information on adult participation in education and training and the Continuing Vocational Training Survey provides data on investment by enterprises and participation in continuing vocational training<sup>112</sup>.

To address monitoring-related issues the European Commission launched a study in late 2008 entitled 'Study on adult learning terminology and adult learning monitoring'. The purpose of the study is to develop a glossary of agreed terminology for adult learning and to propose a set of core data to facilitate a two- yearly monitoring of the sector.

To support the exchange of good practice on monitoring policies and practices a Peer Learning Activity (PLA) was organised jointly by the European Commission and the Academia Istropolitana in Bratislava in March 2009<sup>113</sup>. Two cluster countries (CY and PT) participated in the PLA.

Monitoring of the sector faces a number of challenges, not least **the diversity of the sector**. Providers are dispersed, of different natures and often operate outside the public sector. There are also complications associated with issues of ownership and privacy of data and rights and obligations at all levels. Furthermore, questions of definitions present a significant problem for the production of consistent, comparable data. For instance, the definition of both 'adult' and 'adult learning' varies across and even within countries. In addition, many countries have different

<sup>108</sup> Summary Report on Peer Learning Activity on Validation of non-formal and informal learning: <http://www.kslll.net/>

<sup>109</sup> Mutual Learning Programme, Host Country Discussion Paper: Making up People's Minds – How can VET be made more attractive and relevant to people's needs? Internet: <http://www.mutual-learning-employment.net/>

<sup>110</sup> Data for this section of the report has been extracted from the background and summary reports from a Peer Learning Activity on Adult Learning Monitoring held in Bratislava in March 2009 (<http://www.kslll.net/PeerLearningActivities/PlaDetails.cfm?id=83>) and the Draft cross-country analysis 2009 on countries' implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme, as well as the national country reports.

<sup>111</sup> UNESCO Institute for Education (1997) Monitoring Adult Learning.

<sup>112</sup> The survey is used to describe the numbers of participants in employer-sponsored training and personnel training days received by gender, organiser of training and field of education, for example. Under examination are also the costs incurred from the training by cost factor, used forms of training, enterprises' personnel training principles, trends of change in training and obstacles to the organising of training.

<sup>113</sup> Reports from the Peer Learning Activity can be found at: <http://www.kslll.net/PeerLearningActivities/PlaDetails.cfm?id=83>



understandings of what monitoring itself should encompass and which types of learning it should cover (e.g. non-formal / informal learning, or learning recognised through validation).

In most European countries, including the cluster countries, **different sources of data exist** and the outputs do not necessarily harmonise across surveys because of different concepts and definitions, differing data collection protocols and differing reference periods. In addition, education and **training personnel in most countries may need upskilling** in relation to all aspects of monitoring. Other challenges include: the cost of implementing monitoring systems, failure on the part of providers to return data, 'survey fatigue' and the fact that, traditionally, monitoring has not been strong within the adult learning sector.

Countries are at quite different stages in terms of the **development of national monitoring systems** for adult learning. Data are collected in most countries but in many countries **data tend to focus on basic information** such as overall numbers of participants, rather than detailed information by target group, by types of setting or programme and by outcomes etc. Wherever more detailed indicators exist (as reported for example in ES and IT), data however fail to be comparable. Twelve countries which participated in the PLA on adult learning monitoring in Bratislava, March 2009, confirmed that they do not have a unified national methodology for recording the participation of adults in education and training. Furthermore, in the majority of countries there is **no data chain** whereby data collected at different levels feed into the data needs of the next level of data collection.

Data for measuring the participation of adults are usually collected by the National Statistics Offices (through the labour force survey and countries also contribute to the EU studies mentioned above). At the aforementioned PLA, a number of countries suggested that the collection of basic data should be obligatory for all providers, public and private, and that the basic data collection format should be provided by National Statistics Offices.

Some countries have a **specific body** with responsibility for the collection and analysis of education and training data. In Cyprus, a National Lifelong Learning Committee and a Technical Lifelong Learning Committee have been appointed to monitor the implementation of the new Lifelong Learning Strategy management information systems for providers. It has also now been agreed that the management information system of the adult learning sector should be further developed through the active participation and involvement of all stakeholders. Within this framework, they have decided on frequent collection of data on the progress made on adult learning through research and reporting initiatives.

**Monitoring is linked to quality assurance** in many EU countries, including Portugal. Here, regional structures of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity and the National Agency for Qualification can access information regarding the New Opportunities Centres (NOCs) under their direct responsibility.

Once data have been collected, it is important that they are put to good use. Data need to form part of **structured management information systems** for stakeholders at all levels and to be based on an analysis of the lifelong learning of the entire population, including young people and adults. Furthermore, after data have been collected, **research and analysis** are needed.

Again in Portugal, monitoring contributes to the development of a management information system (MIS) which gathers information on adults enrolled in the validation of non-formal and informal learning processes as well as on adults attending education and training courses. The MIS is being developed so that in the short-term it includes data on all the qualification pathways being followed by individuals (adults and young people). The system also supports the adjustment of training provision to identified needs.

### **3 THE IMPACT OF THE FINANCIAL AND ECONOMIC CRISIS ON THE ADULT LEARNING SECTOR**

Various Europe-wide reports prepared in the early part of 2009 were used to develop this section of the Background Paper but given the pace of recent developments, it is likely that some of the information is already out-of-date. Therefore, the primary purpose of the section is to provide a backdrop to the discussions that will provide updates during the regional meeting. A range of ways

in which the financial and economic crisis may impact and is impacting on the adult education and training sector is set out below.

### 3.1 The level of public spending on the adult education sector

The overall picture of how the financial and economic crisis will impact on education and training budgets is not yet clear. There is a high level of awareness in countries of the urgent need to increase or at least maintain public spending, but the extent to which this is happening depends on how hard government budgets are being hit by the crisis<sup>114</sup>. Indeed, in the face of budget deficits certain countries (including HU and IS) have already announced cuts that are affecting the adult learning sector.

In many other countries the crisis is likely to result in an important increase in participation rates because many countries are integrating training measures into their policy packages to respond to the crisis<sup>115</sup>. According to the information collected by DG EMPL on the impact of the economic crisis<sup>116</sup>, adult learning budgets are being increased in nine European countries, including Italy, where a new Fund for Employment and Training has been established in response to the financial crisis<sup>117</sup>. Information for the other cluster countries was not available.

In general terms, in the climate of budgetary constraints many ministries as well as education and training institutions are required to prioritise their spending. Budgets dedicated to developing and stimulating innovative actions in the field of adult learning may, therefore, suffer in order to enable greater investment in retraining unemployed persons.

### 3.2 Employers' investment in skills development

Previous crises have shown that employers' investment in initial training, mainly through the provision of apprenticeship places, decreases at times of crises<sup>118</sup>. Evidence of the impact of financial crises on employers' investment in continuing training for adults is scarce. There are, however, indications that in some cases the level of investment increases, in order to retain experienced workers whose 'company-specific' competences are valuable in the post-crisis period<sup>119</sup>. Furthermore, a slowdown in economic activity can create 'quiet time' during which training can take place with less cost to the employer in terms of loss of productivity.

On the other hand, the budget cuts of companies experiencing serious cash flow problems are expected to hit activities which are not essential to the core business, such as training and staff away-days. There is also evidence to suggest that employers' investment in co-operation with education and training institutions (e.g. in the higher education sector) is likely to decrease.

Providers offering training to employers during an economic crisis need to maintain a focus on the employer as customer and offer tailored, value-for-money training which meets their needs and offers clear benefits to the employer as well as the employee. Adult learning providers which are 'employer responsive' in this way can help to address the economic crisis by assisting employers to increase their productivity and better manage their resources<sup>120</sup>.

Social partners can also play a part in supporting adult education during financial crises. For example, fifteen inter-professional funds have been funded in Italy. They aim to finance training plans (at sectoral, territorial or firm level) presented by member companies, as well as individual plans for workers employed in those companies.

### 3.3 Supporting the unemployed to re-train or update their skills

The availability of re-training opportunities is particularly important for workers who lose their job now and may not be able to get back into their old job, occupation, or industry after the crisis<sup>121</sup>.

<sup>114</sup> Council of the European Union (2009): *Council Conclusions on Flexicurity in times of crisis*. Available from the internet:

[http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressdata/en/lsa/108369.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/lsa/108369.pdf)

<sup>115</sup> The European Employment Observatory, 2008/2009 – Background paper on measures to deal with the economic crisis.

<sup>116</sup> A Communication from the Commission (2009) *A Shared Commitment for Employment*. Brussels, 3.6.2009 COM(2009) 257 final.

<sup>117</sup> The European Employment Observatory, 2008/2009 – Background paper on measures to deal with the economic crisis.

<sup>118</sup> Brunello, Giorgio for OECD (2009): *Learning for jobs: The Effect of Economic Downturns on Apprenticeships and Initial Workplace Training: A Review of the Evidence*. Available from the internet: <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/51/41/43141035.pdf>

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Learning and Skills Improvement Service (2009), *Help during the economic downturn*.

<sup>121</sup> Communication from the Commission (2009) *A Shared Commitment for Employment. Volume 2 - Annexes*. Brussels, 3.6.2009

For others the crisis may be an opportunity to change career direction. Overall, fewer examples of adult training measures implemented in response to the financial crisis were found in Southern European countries than in many of the Western and Northern European countries. The regional meeting will provide an opportunity for further discussion of the availability of such measures.

Re-training opportunities and incentives have, however, been expanded in some cluster countries (including EL, PT) to address the need for re-training opportunities for redundant workers<sup>122</sup>. For example, Portugal has expanded the provision of job training to beneficiaries of minimum income. Furthermore, 19 EU countries have introduced measures to improve their active labour market policies (ALMPs). Countries such as Greece have invested heavily in improving and tailoring services provided by their public agencies to ease labour market transition<sup>123</sup>.

Measures explicitly designed to support and ease the re-integration into the labour market of recently laid-off workers have been adopted in at least ten Member States<sup>124</sup>. In Spain, one of the measures announced in the anti-crisis plan is to help the car industry relate to support for training programmes. Similar initiative has been introduced in Portugal, where the Support Plan to the Automobile Sector has been adopted, including EUR 200 million dedicated to training and re-training. Furthermore, the Initiative for Investment and Employment (IIE) was presented in Portugal in the last quarter of 2008. Nearly EUR 580 million was allocated to temporary measures to support employment, including support measures to enhance transition from education to work and the introduction and expansion of training programmes and on-the-job learning opportunities. The government in Cyprus has announced an intention to support lifelong learning programmes.

Previous research indicates that the quality and effectiveness of re-training measures varies greatly and that they are more effective when based on indicators of labour market demand and elaborated in co-operation with employers<sup>125</sup>. In this current crisis, however, information on future labour market demand (in terms of specific skills) is scarce or not directly usable (i.e. the sectors, such as health care and social services, where demand for workers continues even during the crisis often require very specific skills).

### **3.4 Household spending on education and training**

Although private investment in education and training is not the main source of funding across Europe, the influence of the economic crisis on households' spending on adult learning cannot be ignored. Some individuals may be discouraged from investing in training due to employment and, thus, financial uncertainty. Furthermore, they may consider that new qualifications are no longer a guarantee of a new job.

There are concerns about the impact of the crisis on equity in terms of access to adult learning. While families tend to protect the budgets dedicated to education and training, these can also represent important sums, especially for poorer families<sup>126</sup>. Training vouchers that target specific groups such as the long-term unemployed can be successful in encouraging people from lower socio-economic households to participate in training. Financial support for access to education has recently been enhanced in, for example, Portugal.

### **3.5 Learners' choice of subject or course type**

Based on research on previous trends, it is likely that the economic downturn will have an impact on adult learners' choice of subject, course type and/or learning method. Learning for pleasure, which may be considered as lacking a direct impact on employability, may experience a decline in demand as a result of the decrease in disposable household income. Individuals may be more likely to opt for courses which offer a direct route to employment or have a vocational element. In some cases it can be expected that more people will turn towards particular professions as a result of the crisis. (For example, in times of uncertainty, becoming a teacher is viewed as a secure

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Walsh, K and Parsons, David J. (2004): Active policies and measures: impact on integration and reintegration in the labour market and social life in Cedefop (2004): *Impact of education and training*.

<sup>126</sup> The Economist 2 July 2009: Staying on Board / Ablett and Slengesol (2001): *Education in Crisis: The Impact and Lessons of the East Asian Financial Shock 1997–1999*. Available from the internet: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001233/123331e.pdf>

occupational choice<sup>127</sup>). Part-time courses, which can be taken alongside employment, are also more likely to be more popular than full-time training. Flexible learning opportunities such as e-learning, distance learning or blended learning may also show an increase in popularity. Adult learning providers need, therefore, to consider how their supply meets the needs of learners in the current economic climate.

### 3.6 Demand for advice and guidance

The demand for information, advice and guidance on areas such as course choice and level, learning methods, financial support and progression options is likely to increase during a period of economic downturn. Individuals who may be returning to structured learning after a break from participation will need advice on how best to address their skills gaps and increase their employability.

## 4 CONCLUSION

This brief background paper has used broad brush strokes to identify general and country-specific trends and progress in relation to the priority actions defined by the Action Plan on adult learning *It is always a good time to learn*. The paper also sought to kick-start a discussion on the implications of the current financial and economic crisis for the adult learning sector. In doing so, the intention is to enable participants to prepare for the regional meeting in Spain, 26 – 28 October 2009, to contribute to their work during the meeting and to support the achievement of the aims of the meetings. In particular it is intended to contribute to the goals of the meeting in relation to:

- facilitating an exchange of information on the implementation of the Action Plan at regional level;
- arriving at conclusions about the current situation of adult learning in the region;
- advancing co-operation between adult learning stakeholders on an intra-country and inter-country basis; and
- developing recommendations for future actions in relation to adult learning.

It is anticipated that participants in the meeting will add to the detail of the paper with specific updates from individual countries on progress on the priority action areas and on the on-going impact of the financial and economic crisis on the adult learning sector.

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<sup>127</sup> GHK (2006): Mobility of Teachers and Trainers. Available from the internet: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/pdf/doc258\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/pdf/doc258_en.pdf)



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
Directorate-General for Education and Culture



# Action plan on adult learning: *from policy to practice*

## Regional Meeting Background Paper

Slovenia, 4 – 6 November, 2009



# 1 BACKGROUND

## 1.1 Regional meetings

The European Commission is organising four regional meetings on the Action Plan on Adult Learning *It is always a good time to learn* between October and November 2009. The meetings which will bring together adult learning stakeholders will take place as follows:

- Germany, 7 – 9 October – a cluster of eight Western European countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom).
- Norway, 14 – 16 October – a cluster of eight Nordic and Baltic countries (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden).
- Spain 26 – 28 October - a cluster of seven Southern European countries (Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain and Turkey)
- Slovenia, 4 – 6 November – a cluster of nine Central and Eastern European countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia).

The aim of the meetings is to enable adult education and training stakeholders to engage in in-depth discussions and exchanges about topics and developments of importance to participating countries in the context of the Action Plan. Specifically, the meetings aim to:

- Strengthen intra-country and inter-country co-operation on adult learning at regional level
- Review developments to date on the implementation of the Action Plan at regional level
- Arrive at conclusions about the current situation of adult learning in participating European countries
- Identify possible means of co-operation between adult learning actors in different countries
- Develop recommendations for future actions.

## 1.2 Background paper

This paper is one of four Background Papers prepared for participants in the regional meetings, one for each meeting. The aim of the paper is to set the scene for and stimulate discussion in, the regional meeting in Slovenia, 4 – 6 November 2009, which brings together key stakeholders to review progress on the implementation of the Action Plan on adult learning in Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovak Republic and Slovenia. The paper gives a brief overview of progress made in these countries on the priority actions set out in the Action Plan and discusses some of the trends and challenges emerging in this context. The paper also begins a discussion on the implications of the current economic crisis for adult learning. These issues will be debated further at the meeting and the conclusions arrived at will be included in the overall final report on the four meetings.

## 1.3 EU policy background on adult learning

The 2006 Communication on adult learning *It is never too late to learn* highlighted the essential contribution of adult learning to employability, labour market mobility and social inclusion. The Communication underlined the importance of removing barriers to participation. It also emphasised the need to invest in the quality of adult learning provision and the development of systems that recognise learning gained outside the formal education sphere. The Communication identified migrants and older people as priority groups and emphasised the urgent need to develop better monitoring systems for adult learning.

The 2007 Action Plan on Adult Learning *It is always a good time to learn* builds on the 2006 Communication and defines five concrete actions which Member States should seek to implement in order to increase participation in adult learning and develop efficient systems that reach all adults and involve all relevant stakeholders. The actions are as follows:

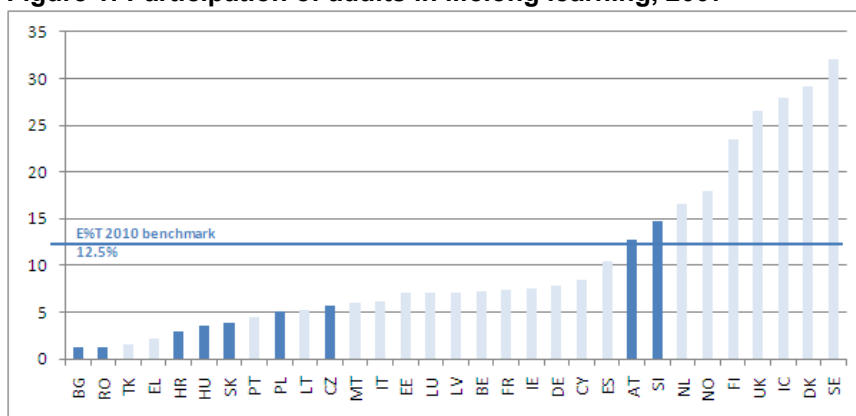
- Analyse the effects of reforms in all sectors of education and training on adult learning
- Improve the quality of provision in the adult learning sector
- Increase the possibilities for adults to achieve a qualification at least one level higher than before ('go one-step-up')
- Speed up the process of assessment of skills and social competences and have them validated and recognised in terms of learning outcomes
- Improve the monitoring of the adult learning sector.

To date a range of actions has taken place at EU level to support development in these areas, including Europe-wide surveys and studies, working group and focus group meetings and peer learning activities which provide an opportunity for participating countries to discuss challenges and successes, compare progress and exchange good practice on a range of topics.

#### 1.4 Participation in adult learning

In 2007, 9.7% of the EU adult population participated in learning on a four-week reference period. Only two of the countries participating in the regional meeting in Slovenia (AT and SI) have exceeded the European target that 12.5% of the population aged 25-64 should participate in lifelong learning by 2010. The rest remain below the target and the European average.

**Figure 1: Participation of adults in lifelong learning, 2007**



Source: Adapted from European Commission staff working document: Progress towards the Lisbon Objectives in Education and Training; Indicators and benchmarks 2008. The Statistics cover EU countries and Iceland, Norway and Turkey. The nine countries participating in the regional meeting in Slovenia have been highlighted in dark blue. 2006 data for SE and UK.

The recent Adult Education Survey indicates that more than one-third (35.7%) of the EU's population aged 25-64 participated in formal or non-formal learning in the 12 months preceding the survey<sup>128</sup>. Job-related non-formal learning is where the majority of adults participate and participation rates decrease with age. There are significant country differences in participation, with participation being highest in the Nordic countries and the UK, closely followed by Germany and Slovenia.

The survey also found that persons with low education levels tend to have low participation rates in all surveyed countries. For example, persons with high-skilled white collar jobs have the highest participations rates, while low and high-skilled blue-collar workers tend to have equally poor chances of participating in learning in every country surveyed.

## 2 TRENDS AND PROGRESS RELATED TO THE PRIORITY ACTIONS OF THE ACTION PLAN

This section gives a brief overview of developments in relation to the priority actions of the Action Plan, with particular emphasis on developments in the countries participating in the regional meeting in Slovenia.

<sup>128</sup> Boateng, S. K. (2009) Significant country differences in adult learning. Eurostat Statistics in Focus. 44/2009.



## 2.1 PRIORITY ACTION 1 – Analyse the effects of education and training reforms on adult learning

In early 2009 the European Commission launched a study to develop a methodology for the analysis of the effect on adult learning of reforms in the wider education and training system.

A specific reform referred to in the Action Plan is the development of **national qualification frameworks (NQFs)** and the **overarching European Qualifications Framework (EQF)**. The EQF provides an opportunity to improve the transparency of qualifications across Member States and it is also expected to increase access to and participation in, lifelong learning<sup>129</sup>. The impact of the EQF on adult learning is expected to be far-reaching. By establishing a common European reference point, it will be easier to combine what has been learned in diverse settings, such as different countries, sectoral education systems or informal learning environments.

The NQFs are expected to facilitate progression routes in the education and training system, thus opening up qualification systems to adults, facilitating valuing of a broader range of learning outcomes and addressing the transparency of systems and qualifications<sup>130</sup>. In the Czech Republic, a Framework was introduced in 2008 and is currently in the process of implementation. In the other cluster countries (AT, BG, HR, HU, RO, SL and SK) the development of NQFs is currently in progress<sup>131</sup>.

Member States have been invited to relate their national qualifications systems to the relevant levels of the EQF by 2010. From 2012, all new qualifications should carry a reference to the EQF, so that employers and institutions can identify a candidate's knowledge, skills or competences across regional and/or national boundaries. Across the cluster, many countries are taking actions to align their frameworks with the EQF (AT, BG, CZ, HR, HU and RO<sup>132</sup>) and in the Czech Republic the NQF uses an eight-level structure<sup>133</sup>, in line with the EQF<sup>134</sup>.

The development of the EQF and the NQFs is driving a shift towards learning outcomes with consequences for the adult learning sector. This is particularly significant for a priority action area of the Action Plan, namely, the validation of non-formal and informal learning, since a learning outcomes approach focuses on the outcomes of a learning process rather than the particular features of the process itself. General developments in this regard and developments in the cluster countries are set out below under Priority Action 4.

In addition, reforms in relation to quality assurance in other sectors of the education system are spilling over into adult education and training. Again, general developments in this regard and developments in the cluster countries are set out below, this time under Priority Action 2.

In relation to reforms in education and training, it is worth noting that in the current financial and economic crisis budget cuts are most likely to occur in areas such as development and 'project' work or administrative costs, thus mainly influencing (or potentially delaying) planned reforms in the education and training sector overall, including in the adult education and training sector.

## 2.2 PRIORITY ACTION 2 - Improve the quality of provision<sup>135</sup>

Although the **contribution of staff to the quality of adult learning provision** is widely recognised, the 2007 Action Plan identified that so far many countries have paid little attention to the training (initial and continuing), the status or the career development of adult learning staff.

<sup>129</sup> European Commission, DG Education and Culture (2008), The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning. Internet: [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/publ/pdf/eqf/broch\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/publ/pdf/eqf/broch_en.pdf)

<sup>130</sup> Cedefop (2009) Continuity, Consolidation and Change, Towards a European era of vocational education and training, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> The Draft cross-country analysis 2009 on countries' implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme, as well as the national country reports.

<sup>133</sup> Cedefop (2009) Continuity, Consolidation and Change, Towards a European era of vocational education and training, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities

<sup>134</sup> The European Qualifications Framework is made up of eight levels, each one defined by a set of descriptors indicating the learning outcomes relevant to qualifications at that level in any system of qualifications.

<sup>135</sup> Information for this section has been collected from **Research voor Beleid** (2008) *ALPINE – Adult Learning Professions in Europe, A study of the current situation, trends and issues*. And **Keogh, H** (2009), *The state and development of adult learning and education in Europe, North America and Israel. Regional Synthesis Report. UNESCO CONFINTEA VI*.



The ALPINE (Adult Learning Professions in Europe) study launched by the European Commission identified a number of key characteristics of the adult education and training sector and staff, across Europe<sup>136</sup>. The sector is diverse. Providers differ in size, the type of learning they provide, the way they are funded/governed, their target groups and the learning methods used. Staff within the sector has different employment conditions, ranging from permanent, full-time contracts to more precarious, freelance contracts. Staff has a variety of backgrounds, works on short-term contracts or in addition to another job and tends to join the profession later in life after gaining work experience elsewhere. This means that the provision of training to personnel within the sector needs to be particularly flexible and there is more emphasis on continuing professional development (CPD) through short courses, work-based learning and induction programmes than on initial training. Generally, the professions of teaching or training in adult learning are poorly regulated.

In recent years countries are beginning to respond in different ways to the need to ensure the quality of staff in the adult learning sector.

The **introduction of definitions, legislation and regulations** can help to improve the status and quality of adult learning. A number of countries have recently introduced regulations defining adult learning and what adult learning practitioners should do for their professional development (including AT, HR, PL and RO). In Austria, occupational profiles developed for educational counsellors have enabled the profession to be officially recognised and approved. In Romania, the Sectoral Committee for Education and Training validated and updated an occupational standard for 'trainers' in 2006.

In many countries there are no specific initial qualification requirements for adult education teaching staff. In fact, outside of 'second-chance' general and vocational adult learning in mainstream schools and other public institutions where staff is frequently required to hold the same qualifications as school education staff, there are **many educational and professional routes** to becoming a teacher or a trainer in the adult education sector. For example, adult learning teachers in Austria have many different educational backgrounds, mainly depending on the provider. In public school and HE-based adult learning, the general access conditions for the teaching profession apply. In the private and third sectors, experts from companies and freelancers are also recruited as teachers. Providers may also deliver their own training as is the case in AT and PL. For example, the Austrian Catholic Adult Education Forum provides a two-year training course leading to the qualification of 'certified adult educator'. Generally speaking, the variety of qualifications on offer means that the market for professionals is not transparent for employers. Consensus has been reached in Austria on an innovative system for the qualification and recognition of practicing adult educators, the *Academy of Continuing Education*. Practical experience is a prerequisite and previously acquired qualifications are acknowledged. Skill deficiencies can be filled by means of accredited further education programmes. It offers a two-step qualification: level 1 "certified adult educator" and of level 2 "graduate adult educator" (bachelor level).

Undergraduate courses in adult education exist in a number of European countries (including AT, CZ, HU and RO) and in most European countries there are general pedagogical programmes offering different specialisations, including adult learning.

In a context of diverse, limited or, indeed, no specific pre-service professional training or qualifications, **in-service training or continuing professional development (CPD)** is important to ensure the quality of provision. Such training and development may be delivered by providers or state agencies. In Slovenia, for example, the Institute for Adult Education (SIAE) is the main provider of in-service teacher training programmes for adult education. The right and obligation in respect of in-service training is determined by law. In Croatia, the Agency for Adult Education provides professional support to adult education institutions in form of training of teachers and trainers, seminars for staff, manuals on andragogical teaching methods, etc. The Croatian Andragogy Society (CAS), a professional association, also supports the CPD of adult learning staff. CAS focuses on: improving the theory and practice of both formal and non-formal adult education; providing training opportunities for its members; encouraging research in the field of

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<sup>136</sup> Research voor Beleid (2008) *ALPINE – Adult Learning Professions in Europe, A study of the current situation, trends and issues*.

adult learning and encouraging co-operation among key stakeholders. In Hungary, "adult education teacher" as a higher vocational qualification is being introduced. This new qualification will provide a CPD opportunity for teachers and trainers with HE qualifications, who intend to work in the field of adult education. Learning networks can also help to encourage learning among staff within the sector. In Poland, for example, professional associations actively promote continuing professional development.

**Quality assurance** approaches are important for the professionalisation of the adult education sector, including measures such as setting entry requirements for staff, supporting continuing professional development and external evaluations. In general, QA systems are at different stages of development in Europe with some of the most advanced being in the Nordic countries, AT, DE, IE and UK. A number of countries within the cluster are only just beginning to implement QA systems, indicators and quality management tools for VET institutions (CZ, RO, SI). In contrast, Austria established a quality assurance system and independent evaluation body a few years ago. Quality assurance frameworks are also in use in, for example, HU.

The **accreditation of providers** according to explicit quality criteria is a key quality measure. Such quality control measures are in place in at least 15 EU countries, including AT, BG, HU, PL, RO, SI and SK. In Poland, all trainers in NGOs must gain accreditation from the Polish association of trainers (STOP). In Hungary, accreditation is not mandatory, but state-supported training can be organised only by accredited institutions. In Austria, **quality labels** (INSI-QUEB, EQFM and ISO) are in place.

In the majority of European countries, the **status, conditions of employment and remuneration** of adult learning staff generally fall below those of staff in other education and training sectors. Whereas some appreciate the flexibility of working within the sector and enjoy working with adults, others may be put off by the salary or conditions. In Austria, for example, it has been reported that the flexibility of the work appeals to those looking for a diverse and varied role. At the same time reports suggest that in Poland, for example, salaries are above average which makes the sector appealing, whereas in Bulgaria, adult learning professions are generally viewed unfavourably.

### 2.3 **PRIORITY ACTION 3 - Increase the possibilities for adults to go 'one step up'**

The Action Plan states that it is not enough to simply attract people into education and training, there must also be a real opportunity for them to raise their qualification levels. This applies especially to low-skilled and low-qualified individuals, including early school leavers, many migrants and other individuals from marginalised backgrounds, all groups who participate least in formal and non-formal learning. To support the development of 'one-step up' policies and practices a Peer Learning Activity (PLA) was organised jointly by the European Commission, the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, UK and the National Research and Development Centre, UK in London in April 2009<sup>137</sup>. Three cluster countries (AT, CZ, HU) participated in the PLA.

Overall the nine cluster countries have implemented various measures to increase possibilities for low-skilled adults to achieve higher level qualifications.

Measures to ensure **the development of key competences for all adults are stipulated in legislation** in the majority of European countries<sup>138</sup> (including AT, HR and RO). In a few European countries, including the Czech Republic and Hungary, a trend towards the amendment of legislation to take account of new priorities related to the implementation of Key Competences, can be observed<sup>139</sup>.

A number of the cluster countries (including AT, HR, HU, SI and SK) have expanded **programmes to support the development of key competences for adults with low basic skills or who are unemployed**. In particular, literacy is at the core of actions to support these groups. In Croatia, the project "For a Literate Croatia: the Way to a Desirable Future" provides elementary education for adults aged between 15 and 50 years old and enables them to

<sup>137</sup> Reports from the Peer Learning Activity can be found at: <http://www.ksll.net/PeerLearningActivities/PlaDetails.cfm?id=89>

<sup>138</sup> Austria, Belgium, Germany, Greece, Croatia, Ireland, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, Romania and Sweden.

<sup>139</sup> The Draft cross-country analysis 2009 on countries' implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme, as well as the national country reports.

complete an occupational training programme. In Slovenia, the Strategy for Development of Slovenia 2007-2013 and the National Master Plan on Adult Education to 2010 provide the basis for the use of state funds for the development of new adult literacy programmes. Literacy courses are seen as an integral part of support programmes for the low-skilled in Austria. In Hungary adults with poor basic skills can attend public re-integration programmes that enable them to improve their reading, writing and numeracy skills before they join vocational training programmes<sup>140</sup>. In Bulgaria, specific support for the Roma minority group has been implemented through the National Programme for the Literacy Education and Professional Qualification of Roma. This programme aims to support unemployed people from disadvantaged groups in the labour market, and adults with lower literacy levels. In Romania, literacy courses are offered to parents (particularly those from disadvantaged communities such as the Roma community) to enable them to support their children to do homework.

**Flexible and/or individualised learning pathways** have recently been developed by at least 13 European countries (including AT, CZ and HU). For example, adults in Hungary can acquire partial qualifications thanks to the new flexible and modular National Qualification Register (NQR). In Austria, the focus is on the individualisation of study plans. In the Czech Republic, legislation introduced in 2006 established “partial qualifications” for professions which can be used as stand-alone qualifications in the labour market.

Measures to support the **development of key competences among migrant/bilingual adults** have been implemented by a number of EU countries, including Austria where integration courses support migrants to obtain language skills at the same time as other key competences (including literacy, digital competence, maths, social and civic competence). These programmes also incorporate measures to assess and validate migrants’ prior learning.

Many of the cluster countries (including AT and HU) provide **financial incentives** to support socially and economically disadvantaged individuals to obtain qualifications. In Hungary, there are many different training subsidies available to marginalised adults. For example, the ‘Make one step forward’ programme provides participants with subsidies which are awarded in instalments after every 150 lessons<sup>141</sup>. In Austria, it is recognised that educational measures alone are not sufficient to help significantly disadvantaged individuals. Additional measures such as coaching, financial incentives and transition modules to further education have proven to be effective supports for the achievement of sustainable progress<sup>142</sup>.

## **2.4 PRIORITY ACTION 4 - Speed up the process of assessing and recognising non-formal and informal learning for disadvantaged groups**

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is central to the EU lifelong learning strategy. Validation is highlighted in the *Education and Training 2010* Work Programme and was selected as a priority for 2009 and 2010 in the updated framework for European co-operation in education and training.

**Common principles for validation** were adopted in 2004 to encourage and guide the development of high-quality, comparable approaches and systems by Member States. In 2009 more detailed guidelines<sup>143</sup> have been developed for policy makers and practitioners.

To support the exchange of good practice on validation policies and practices a Peer Learning Activity (PLA) was organised jointly by the European Commission and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic in Prague in June 2009<sup>144</sup>. Two cluster countries (AT and HU) participated in the PLA which focused on validation for low-qualified and low-skilled groups.

The European Qualifications Framework supports the development of validation systems by virtue of its basis in learning outcomes. Mutual co-operation has been encouraged through a Cluster on Recognition of Learning Outcomes.

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<sup>140</sup> Background report to the Peer Learning Activity ‘One Step Up’ <http://www.kslll.net/PeerLearningActivities/PlaDetails.cfm?id=89>

<sup>141</sup> Background report to the Peer Learning Activity ‘One Step Up’ <http://www.kslll.net/PeerLearningActivities/PlaDetails.cfm?id=89>

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Cedefop (2009), European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning, Internet: [http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/Upload/Information\\_resources/Bookshop/553/4054\\_en.pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/Upload/Information_resources/Bookshop/553/4054_en.pdf)

<sup>144</sup> The report will soon be available online: <http://www.kslll.net/>

Many European countries have established a **legal framework** to formalise the system for validation and individuals' right to access validation. Others remain at the stage of implementing and/or learning from pilot projects. Cluster countries are at varying stages of developing a validation system. For example, in the Czech Republic, legislation on validation has been in place since 2007. The legislation introduced a uniform, transparent and objective method of validation and recognition of skills and knowledge<sup>145</sup>. In Slovenia, the National Vocational Qualification Act introduced a certification system which enables the assessment and verification of vocational knowledge, skills and experiences acquired outside of school in relation to vocation-related knowledge<sup>146</sup>.

In Austria, there is no national system of validation but prior learning is recognised in certain fields of education and there is also a number of individual validation initiatives across the country<sup>147</sup>. Although there is no formal system of validation in Hungary, specific competence validation measures are in place in the fields of ICT and foreign languages<sup>148</sup>. Likewise in Poland, systemic and legal arrangements for validation are being introduced only on a gradual basis but *de facto* validation subsystems already exist in certain crafts and other sectors. There is an abundance of examples of innovative initiatives in the third sector too, as well as interesting analytical and development projects in academic institutions. Although there is no national system for validation in place in Bulgaria, Croatia or Slovakia, a range of developments is taking place.<sup>149</sup>

It is well-recognised that validation can present an opportunity for people from disadvantaged groups, such as low-qualified, low-skilled<sup>150</sup> and/or unemployed individuals, early school leavers and migrants, to (re-)integrate into the labour market, to access formal education or to progress within their career pathway. Therefore, low-skilled individuals are often an important target group for validation. This is the case, for example, in the Czech Republic and Hungary. In Hungary, validation is targeted at adults who wish to enrol in a higher level of formal education or training but do not have the necessary formal qualifications. Through validation they are able to 'bypass' the normal progression routes within the formal system and use competences obtained through non-formal and informal learning to access further training for which they would otherwise be ineligible. In Austria, specific target groups such as migrants and disadvantaged women can use portfolios to document their learning and achieve recognition through different instruments, such as the 'Austria Language Diploma' in the case of migrants<sup>151</sup>.

**Guidance** is critical to the validation process, in particular for low-qualified and low-skilled candidates.

**Training of validation personnel** varies from country to country across the EU. For example, in the Czech Republic, there are no special requirements for education or training of the staff that carry out validation of non-formal and informal learning<sup>152</sup>. Training is provided for counsellors in the process of assessment and recognition of NVQs in Slovenia<sup>153</sup>.

Sufficient **financial resources** are necessary to mainstream and consolidate validation. Public funding is essential for the promotion of validation, for funding low-qualified and low-skilled groups and for monitoring and evaluation.

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<sup>145</sup> Background report to the Peer Learning Activity 'One Step Up' <http://www.kslll.net/PeerLearningActivities/PlaDetails.cfm?id=89>

<sup>146</sup> ECOTEC: Hawley, J (2007), *European Inventory on Validation of non-formal and informal learning: Slovenia*.

<sup>147</sup> Summary Report on PLA on Validation of non-formal and informal learning. Soon be available online: <http://www.kslll.net/>

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> The Draft cross-country analysis 2009 on countries' implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme, as well as the national country reports.

<sup>150</sup> While participants in the PLA in the Czech Republic, June 2009, preferred the term 'low-qualified' to 'low-skilled' they were of the opinion that individuals who were actually 'low-skilled' could, with the strong support of information and guidance, actually undertake a validation process which would most likely need to be supplemented with additional learning before a qualification would be achieved.

<sup>151</sup> Background report to the Peer Learning Activity 'One Step Up'. <http://www.kslll.net/PeerLearningActivities/PlaDetails.cfm?id=89>

<sup>152</sup> Summary Report on PLA on Validation of non-formal and informal learning. Soon be available online: <http://www.kslll.net/>

<sup>153</sup> ECOTEC: Hawley, J (2007), *European Inventory on Validation of non-formal and informal learning: Slovenia*.

## 2.5 PRIORITY ACTION 5 – Improve monitoring of the adult learning sector<sup>154</sup>

At regional, national, European and global levels there is a lack of reliable, timely data on the adult learning sector to allow an informed assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the sector, as well as ensure policy is evidence-based and addresses the needs of learners, providers, employers and other key stakeholders. Relevant evidence can also help to promote equitable access to and participation in, adult education and training<sup>155</sup>.

It is essential that monitoring processes within the sector are considerably strengthened. Evidence is required on a wide range of indicators, not only on participation rates but also on, for example, the availability of learning opportunities, the profile of adult learners, the benefits and outcomes of adult learning and the barriers to participation.

There has been a number of actions at European level to improve the availability of data, including the pilot of the Adult Education Survey (AES) in the period 2005-2008. The survey gathered information on adult participation in non-formal and informal learning, obstacles to participation and the costs of learning, within a 12-month reference period. In addition, the Eurostat Labour Force Survey gathers information on adult participation in education and training and the Continuing Vocational Training Survey provides data on investment by enterprises and participation in continuing vocational training<sup>156</sup>.

To address monitoring-related issues the European Commission launched a study in late 2008 entitled 'Study on adult learning terminology and adult learning monitoring'. The purpose of the study is to develop a glossary of agreed terminology for adult learning and to propose a set of core data to facilitate a two-yearly monitoring of the sector.

To support the exchange of good practice on monitoring policies and practices a Peer Learning Activity (PLA) was organised jointly by the European Commission and the Academia Istropolitana in Bratislava in March 2009<sup>157</sup>. Three cluster countries (AT, BG and CZ) participated in the PLA.

Monitoring of the sector faces a number of challenges, not least **the diversity of the sector**. Providers are dispersed, of different natures and often operate outside the public sector. There are also complications associated with issues of ownership and privacy of data and rights and obligations at all levels. Furthermore, questions of definitions present a significant problem for the production of consistent, comparable data. For instance, the definition of both 'adult' and 'adult learning' varies across and even within countries. In addition, many countries have different understandings of what monitoring itself should encompass and which types of learning it should cover (e.g. non-formal / informal learning, or learning recognised through validation).

In most European countries, including the cluster countries, **different sources of data exist** and the outputs do not necessarily harmonise across surveys because of different concepts and definitions, differing data collection protocols and differing reference periods. In Hungary, the current National Programme for Statistical Data Collection (OSAP) does not give a complete picture of adult training programmes and their participants (according to the estimates of the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs, one third of continuing vocational training activities do not appear on the system). Incomplete data present problems in planning development programmes and also make it difficult to evaluate the results, since it is difficult to define the starting position of such programmes.

In addition, **education and training personnel in most countries may need upskilling** in relation to all aspects of monitoring. Other challenges include: the cost of implementing monitoring systems, failure on the part of providers to return data, 'survey fatigue' and the fact that, traditionally, monitoring has not been strong within the adult learning sector. In Slovakia, for

<sup>154</sup> Data for this section of the report has mainly been extracted from the background and summary reports from a Peer Learning Activity on Adult Learning Monitoring held in Bratislava in March 2009 (<http://www.kslll.net/PeerLearningActivities/PlaDetails.cfm?id=83>) and the Draft cross-country analysis 2009 on countries' implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme, as well as the national country reports. Other sources are referenced individually.

<sup>155</sup> UNESCO Institute for Education (1997) Monitoring Adult Learning.

<sup>156</sup> The survey is used to describe the numbers of participants in employer-sponsored training and personnel training days received by gender, organiser of training and field of education, for example. Under examination are also the costs incurred from the training by cost factor, used forms of training, enterprises' personnel training principles, trends of change in training and obstacles to the organising of training.

<sup>157</sup> Reports from the Peer Learning Activity can be found at: <http://www.kslll.net/PeerLearningActivities/PlaDetails.cfm?id=83>



example, education institutions are obliged to provide statistical information on the implementation of educational activities to national authorities but this obligation is usually fulfilled by only 40% of all education institutions.

Countries are at quite different stages in terms of the **development of national monitoring systems** for adult learning. Data are collected in all the cluster countries but in many countries **data tend to focus on basic information** such as overall numbers of participants, rather than detailed information by target group, by types of setting or programme and by outcomes etc. Twelve countries which participated in the PLA on adult learning monitoring in Bratislava, March 2009, confirmed that they do not have a unified national methodology for recording the participation of adults in education and training. Furthermore, in the majority of countries there is **no data chain** whereby data collected at different levels feed into the data needs of the next level of data collection.

Data for measuring participation of adults are usually collected by the National Statistics Offices (through the labour force survey and countries also contribute to the EU studies mentioned above). For example, the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (SORS) gathers data connected with the monitoring of the acquisition of formal education. The SORS also collects data on participation in non-formal education by age and gender and by education area.

At the aforementioned PLA, a number of countries suggested that the collection of basic data should be obligatory for all providers, public and private, and that the basic data collection format should be provided by National Statistics Offices. In Hungary, adult training institutes are legally obliged to supply statistical data on the progression of learners. Failure to meet this requirement means that they are not allowed to apply for national or EU grants. A governmental decree which aims to regulate a 'national career follow-up system', is under construction. The system offers the opportunity for the evaluation of the training providers' activity and substantiates the decision made in connection with institutes and their funding<sup>158</sup>.

**Monitoring is linked to quality assurance** in many of the cluster countries. According to the national reports for the latest *Education and Training 2010* Progress Report, Croatia, together with France and Norway, are among the few countries which are currently implementing measures for a more systematic and reliable data collection. The Croatian an Adult Learning database was developed under the CARDS 2004. Today, the Agency for Adult Education gathers data on the adult education institutions and their formal and non-formal programmes as a continuation of the CARDS activity. Providers that are not registered as an "adult education institution" at the Commercial Court of the Republic of Croatia can also feed their information into the database but it cannot be used by the Agency which has no jurisdiction over them according to the Adult Education Act. Cooperation between the Central Bureau of Statistics and the Agency has been established and it is possible that CBS will use the collected data for regular adult education analysis.

Developments are also taking place in other countries. For example, the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture (BMUKK) has set up a working group to examine methods of monitoring progression of adult learners in a more systematic manner. Furthermore, Austria was a member of the preparation group for the PIAAC survey<sup>159</sup>. In Bulgaria, education and labour market authorities have jointly introduced a pilot model for collecting, storing, processing and providing data for all stakeholders and institutions on the demand and supply of vocational education and guidance at local, regional and national levels.

Once data have been collected, it is important that they are put to good use. Data need to form part of **structured management information systems** for stakeholders at all levels and to be based on an analysis of the lifelong learning of the entire population, including young people and adults. Furthermore, after data have been collected, **research and analysis** are needed.

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<sup>158</sup> Background report to the Peer Learning Activity 'One Step Up'. <http://www.kslll.net/PeerLearningActivities/PlaDetails.cfm?id=89>

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

### 3 THE IMPACT OF THE FINANCIAL AND ECONOMIC CRISIS ON THE ADULT LEARNING SECTOR

Various Europe-wide reports prepared in the early part of 2009<sup>160</sup> were used to develop this section of the Background Paper but given the pace of recent developments, it is likely that some of the information is already out-of-date. Therefore, the primary purpose of the section is to provide a backdrop to the discussions that will provide updates during the regional meeting. A range of ways in which the financial and economic crisis may impact and is impacting on the adult education and training sector is set out below.

#### 3.1 The level of public spending on the adult education sector

The overall picture of how the financial and economic crisis will impact on education and training budgets is not yet clear. There is a high level of awareness in countries of the urgent need to increase or at least maintain public spending, but the extent to which this is happening depends on how hard government budgets are being hit by the crisis<sup>161</sup>. Indeed, in the face of budget deficits certain countries (including HU and IS) have already announced cuts that are affecting the adult learning sector.

In many other countries the crisis is likely to result in an important increase in participation rates because many countries are integrating training measures into their policy packages to respond to the crisis<sup>162</sup>. According to the information collected by DG EMPL on the impact of the economic crisis on adult learning<sup>163</sup>, adult learning budgets are being increased in some of the cluster countries (including AT, CZ). For example, a major part of the Austrian strategy to counteract the impact of the economic downturn is to promote (re-)training opportunities among employees, unemployed persons and young people. Policy-makers decided to continue the Regional Skilled Worker training project with the aim of providing vocational training for a further 6,400 persons. In addition, to make existing 'Further training leave' policy more attractive, regulations have been modified for a new model of 'Further training leave plus'. Employees can take a training leave of between 3 and 12 months and receive an allowance equal to the amount of the unemployment benefit to cover the cost of living. To comply with the regulations, companies have to organise training according to their particular skill needs and it has to be provided by external training institutions. Half of the training costs are funded by the provincial government (available in six regions). This model is intended to encourage companies to invest in the training of employees and give them an incentive to keep on their employees during the economic crisis.

In general, in the climate of budgetary constraints many ministries as well as education and training institutions are required to prioritise their spending. Budgets dedicated to developing and stimulating innovative actions in the field of adult learning may, therefore, suffer in order to enable greater investment in retraining unemployed persons.

#### 3.2 Employers' investment in skills development

Previous crises have shown that employers' investment in initial training, mainly through the provision of apprenticeship places, decreases at times of crises<sup>164</sup>. Evidence of the impact of financial crises on employers' investment in continuing training for adults is scarce. There are, however, indications that in some cases the level of investment increases, in order to retain experienced workers whose 'company-specific' competences are valuable in the post-crisis period<sup>165</sup>. Furthermore, a slowdown in economic activity can create 'quiet time' during which training can take place with less cost to the employer in terms of loss of productivity.

<sup>160</sup> Communication from the Commission (2009) *A Shared Commitment for Employment. Volume 2 - Annexes*. Brussels, 3.6.2009  
The European Employment Observatory, 2008/2009 – Background paper on measures to deal with the economic crisis. April 2009.  
GHK and IPISS (2009) European Employment Observatory. Quarterly reports. February 2009. Executive summary

<sup>161</sup> Council of the European Union (2009): *Council Conclusions on Flexicurity in times of crisis*. Available from the internet: [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressdata/en/lsa/108369.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/lsa/108369.pdf)

<sup>162</sup> The European Employment Observatory, 2008/2009 – Background paper on measures to deal with the economic crisis. April 2009.

<sup>163</sup> On the basis of responses to the 2009 Communication "A shared commitment for employment" – A Communication from the Commission (2009) *A Shared Commitment for Employment*. Brussels, 3.6.2009 COM(2009) 257 final.

<sup>164</sup> Brunello, Giorgio for OECD (2009): *Learning for jobs: The Effect of Economic Downturns on Apprenticeships and Initial Workplace Training: A Review of the Evidence*. Available from the internet: <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/5/14/43141035.pdf>

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.



On the other hand, the budget cuts of companies experiencing serious cash flow problems are expected to hit activities which are not essential to the core business, such as training and staff away-days. There is also evidence to suggest that employers' investment in co-operation with education and training institutions (e.g. in the higher education sector) is likely to decrease.

Providers offering training to employers during an economic crisis need to maintain a focus on the employer as customer and offer tailored, value-for-money training which meets their needs and offers clear benefits to the employer as well as the employee. Adult learning providers which are 'employer responsive' in this way can help to address the economic crisis by assisting employers to increase their productivity and better manage their resources<sup>166</sup>. Social partners can also play a part in supporting adult education during financial crises.

### **3.3 Supporting the unemployed to re-train or update their skills**

The availability of re-training opportunities is particularly important for workers who lose their job now and may not be able to get back into their old job, occupation, or industry after the crisis<sup>167</sup>. For some others the crisis may be an opportunity to change career direction.

Re-training opportunities and incentives have expanded in many EU countries (including AT, BG, CZ, HU and RO) to address the need for re-training opportunities for redundant workers<sup>168</sup>. Furthermore, 19 EU countries have introduced measures to improve their active labour market policies (ALMPs). For example, in Hungary, HUF 20 billion (approximately EUR 66 million) is being made available to offices of the Public Employment Service (PES), to support active labour market programmes. Funds have also been made available for companies to fund one training day a week. In a similar manner, the Czech Ministry of Labour recently announced a new policy initiative, 'Education is an Opportunity', to provide employer with subsidies for training and retraining of their employees. The subsidy can cover up to 100 % of costs but no more than CZK 24 000 (Euro 950) per employee (three times the minimum wage) and a maximum of CZK 5.4 million (Euro 200 000) per firm. Another programme, 'Educate Yourself', is available to co-finance training in firms which have had to reduce employees' working time.

Previous research indicates that the quality and effectiveness of re-training measures varies greatly and that they are more effective when based on indicators of labour market demand and elaborated in cooperation with employers<sup>169</sup>. In this current crisis, however, information on future labour market demand (in terms of specific skills) is scarce or not directly usable (i.e. the sectors, such as health care and social services, where demand for workers continues even during the crisis often require very specific skills).

### **3.4 Household spending on education and training**

Although private investment in education and training is not the main source of funding across Europe, the influence of the economic crisis on households' spending on adult learning cannot be ignored. Some individuals may be discouraged from investing in training due to employment and, thus, financial uncertainty. Furthermore, they may consider that new qualifications are no longer a guarantee of a new job.

There are concerns about the impact of the crisis on equity in terms of access to adult learning. While families tend to protect the budgets dedicated to education and training, these can also represent important sums, especially for poorer families<sup>170</sup>. Training vouchers that target specific groups such as the long-term unemployed can be successful in encouraging people from lower socio-economic households to participate in training.

### **3.5 Learners' choice of subject or course type**

Based on research on previous trends, it is likely that the economic downturn will have an impact on adult learners' choice of subject, course type and/or learning method. Learning for pleasure,

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<sup>166</sup> Learning and Skills Improvement Service (2009), Help during the economic downturn.

<sup>167</sup> Communication from the Commission (2009) *A Shared Commitment for Employment. Volume 2 - Annexes*. Brussels, 3.6.2009

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Walsh, K and Parsons, David J. (2004): Active policies and measures: impact on integration and reintegration in the labour market and social life in Cedefop (2004): *Impact of education and training*.

<sup>170</sup> The Economist 2 July 2009: Staying on Board / Ablett and Slengesol (2001): *Education in Crisis: The Impact and Lessons of the East Asian Financial Shock 1997–1999*. Available from the internet: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001233/123331e.pdf>

which may be considered as lacking a direct impact on employability, may experience a decline in demand as a result of the decrease in disposable household income. Individuals may be more likely to opt for courses which offer a direct route to employment or have a vocational element. In some cases it can be expected that more people will turn towards particular professions as a result of the crisis. (For example, in times of uncertainty, becoming a teacher is viewed as a secure occupational choice<sup>171</sup>). Part-time courses, which can be taken alongside employment, are also more likely to be more popular than full-time training. Flexible learning opportunities such as e-learning, distance learning or blended learning may also show an increase in popularity. Adult learning providers need, therefore, to consider how their supply meets the needs of learners in the current economic climate.

### **3.6 Demand for advice and guidance**

The demand for information, advice and guidance on areas such as course choice and level, learning methods, financial support and progression options is likely to increase during a period of economic downturn. Individuals who may be returning to structured learning after a break from participation will need advice on how best to address their skills gaps and increase their employability.

## **4 CONCLUSION**

This brief background paper has used broad brush strokes to identify general and country-specific trends and progress in relation to the priority actions defined by the Action Plan on adult learning *It is always a good time to learn*. The paper also sought to kick-start a discussion on the implications of the current financial and economic crisis for the adult learning sector. In doing so, the intention is to enable participants to prepare for the regional meeting in Slovenia, 4 – 6 November 2009, to contribute to their work during the meeting and to support the achievement of the aims of the meetings. In particular it is intended to contribute to the goals of the meeting in relation to:

- facilitating an exchange of information on the implementation of the Action Plan at regional level;
- arriving at conclusions about the current situation of adult learning in the region;
- advancing co-operation between adult learning stakeholders on an intra-country and inter-country basis; and
- developing recommendations for future actions in relation to adult learning.

It is anticipated that participants in the meeting will add to the detail of the paper with specific updates from individual countries on progress on the priority action areas and on the on-going impact of the financial and economic crisis on the adult learning sector.

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<sup>171</sup> GHK (2006): Mobility of Teachers and Trainers. Available from the internet: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/pdf/doc258\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/pdf/doc258_en.pdf)

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