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Lifelong Learning Policies in Flanders, Belgium

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 Lifelong Learning Policies in FLANDERS, Belgium
 LLL2010 SP1 Country Report

This Working Paper is published in the Working Paper Series of an international research project “Towards a Lifelong Learning Society in Europe: the Contribution of the Education System” (acronym LLL2010) to reflect state of the art results of the research still in progress.

The project involves researchers from thirteen countries and regions of Europe: Scotland, England, Ireland, Austria, Belgium, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Norway and Russia. Further information on the project is available online <http://LLL2010.tlu.ee>

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INTRODUCTION: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO LLL

Lifelong learning and the educational system

The Department of Education is a provider of higher education, adult education, basic education, distance learning, and art academies.

In Flanders 'higher education' refers to forms of education accessible to people who have obtained a diploma of secondary education (normally around the age of 18 as learning is compulsory until the age of 18) leading to a qualification recognised by the government, such as a diploma. Higher education is available in universities (6) and colleges (20). Professional and academic programmes have a duration of three, four, five or seven years, depending on the branch of studies. Basic programmes can be supplemented by advanced studies. Universities and colleges have formed associations; associating colleges or colleges and one university. The bachelor/master model is gradually being introduced. There is also the Open University for distance learning (in close collaboration with the Netherlands). Another form of higher education is Higher Education for Social Promotion (Hoger onderwijs voor sociale promotie, HOSP).

Centres for Adult Education (including 'General Education or Second Chance Education) (Centra voor Volwassenenonderwijs, CVO): all interested adults can follow courses (languages, business related courses, vocational courses, ...) related with professional, leisure-related or other learning needs.

Centres for Basic Education (Centra voor Basiseducatie, CBE): provide courses to adults for whom basic education is necessary to function in our society or to be admitted to other forms of education. The level is similar to the level in primary education or lower secondary education. In these courses the focus is on basic competencies (such as literacy, Dutch as a second language and ICT). The centres carry out activation activities and guidance as well.

Furthermore, distance learning is provided by the government (language courses, economy, psychology, natural sciences, ...). This is called Guided Individual Learning (Begeleid Individueel Studeren, BIS).

Art academies are widely spread all over Flanders and are accessible for all citizens, but in practice people below the age of 18 enrol.

Developments in lifelong learning policies

Political, cultural and economical factors

Policy on LLL seems to have been driven mainly by international developments. Social and political interest in lifelong learning arose in the sixties after the UNESCO-conference on adult education held in Montreal (1960). It was seen as a means for personal wellbeing and social participation. Educational institutions in Flanders were ambivalent to adult education policies. On the one hand the government was necessary to provide means to organise education and to help people to participate but interference regarding content was looked at with suspicion. But international events occurring in the sixties and seventies (war in Vietnam, economic recession, structural unemployment, ...) diminished political attention for and investments in education. The belief that education could change society disappeared.

Political interest in education was stimulated again in the nineties when it became clear that the welfare state had reached its limits. Globalisation, economical competition, individualisation together with the need for social cohesion, ecological problems, the development of a service economy, problems of employability, ... were seen as challenges to which continuous learning was the answer. The international year of lifelong learning (1996) and European policy statements brought lifelong learning policies back to life. Although Flanders already made big efforts with regard to lifelong learning (the provision of learning opportunities has always been very extensive and generally of high quality), it was only in 1997 that the initiative was taken by the government to draw up a global policy plan concerning lifelong learning.

Demography

Demographics are also an influence. Because of the greying population, the share of the labour force in the population is diminishing. In order to secure the social security system, the share of employed people within the total population should grow. LLL is seen as one of the means to reach this aim. Particular attention is paid to the learning opportunities for older workers.

Immigration/ Minority groups

Immigration policies influence lifelong learning in the sense that the obligation for certain groups of immigrants to follow courses, has forced institutions like the centres for basic education to provide courses for these migrants to help them integrate in society. A specific problem for migrants is that the educational experience they had in their home country is mostly not recognised, nor by educational institutions, nor by employers or other actors in the labour market. Minority groups are considered within more general policies concerning migration.

Theoretical Perspectives

Almost all academic/scientific research of post-compulsory education and LLL in Flanders is policy-oriented because the Flemish or federal government mainly commissions it. Research projects can be descriptive, explanatory or evaluative. Both micro and macro perspectives are present. Fundamental research on these topics is rather rare.

Of course, policy-oriented research is mainly performed by academic or scientific researchers, who approach the topic from their own discipline: educational science, sociology, economics, psychology, linguistics, technological sciences, ... All these scientists bring in theories from their own field (e.g. human capital and social capital theories, theory of reasoned action, learning theories, human resources, ...) Because lifelong learning has multiple facets, a lot of research is multidisciplinary. In institutes like ours several disciplines are represented, but it also happens very often that faculties from different disciplines collaborate to do research on lifelong learning (within one university or in collaboration with several universities). Multidisciplinary research is very common.

1. INFLUENCE OF CONCEPTUALISATIONS & DRIVERS ON LLL POLICY & PRACTICE

The most important driving force on LLL policy is the employability of people. The second most important is personal development/active citizenship. Both are related with social integration and social cohesion.

Employability is an important driving force because of the particular labour market problems Flanders is confronted with. Unemployment rates are very high, in particular long-term unemployment and many jobs disappeared (e.g. because of bankruptcy or reorganisations). On the other hand Flanders is confronted with a lot of hard-to-fill vacancies, according to the employers because a lot of people lack the required competencies. Many groups are at risk for unemployment: people between 55 and 64, allochthonous people, disabled people and low-skilled people. The Flemish coalition agreement (Vlaams Regeerakkoord) states clearly that entrepreneurship and employment are absolute priorities, which is reflected in many measures to raise employment rates. Lifelong learning is seen as one of these.

Flemish labour market policy is strongly influenced by many European rules and international conventions (WHO, Council of Europe, International Labour Organisation, ...). Many of these state that education and training is a key to employment.

Personal development and active citizenship are also seen as aims to strive for. They are seen as valuable benefits. These drivers are often mentioned in order to widen the scope of lifelong learning policy. However, in the long run most policy measures are made in the context of labour market policy. Sociocultural organisations make a huge effort in order to make the government pay enough attention to the aims of lifelong learning that are not directly related to the labour market.

Social integration and social cohesion is the ultimate driver. Employability as well as personal development and active citizenship help to stimulate this social integration and cohesion. The Flemish society, such as other countries or regions, is becoming a dual society, where people who are more educated have more chances than people who are less educated. Several groups are at risk of social exclusion: socially disadvantaged people, allochthonous people, disabled people, elderly. For all these groups education and training is seen as a means for integration.

2. UNDERSTANDINGS AND OPERATIONALISATIONS OF LLL

Lifelong learning has been operationalised in different ways. The general tendency is that the concept has been broadened during the last ten years. The Flemish understanding and operationalisation of LLL has always been based on international understandings and operationalisation. Lifelong learning in Flanders includes all possible learning activities, whether formal, non-formal or informal, whatever the aim (professional integration, personal development, social integration, active citizenship, to be independent, leisure, volunteer work, ...). 'Lifelong' refers to the fact that learning should start at the beginning of one's life and can never be seen as finished. Beside lifelong, 'lifewide' learning is an important concept in Flanders. 'Lifewide' is used to emphasise that learning serves more than only utilitarian aims, or aims set for economical reasons. In the light of the general definition, this term is superfluous, but in practice, lifelong learning is very often reduced to learning for the sake of employability and economical reasons and to learning in formal educational institutions. The use of the term 'lifewide' is a permanent reminder of the broad array of learning activities that constitute lifelong learning. Some authors (Baert & Van Wiele, 2001; Baert, 2002) argue that lifelong learning is more than education, more than learning activities and more than the acquisition of knowledge and skills. According to them the conceptualisation of lifelong learning should include that lifelong learning is essential to be able to manage a variety of tasks in a quickly changing society in a critical, meaningful and responsible way.

Accreditation/certification of learning

Almost all learning in formal education is accredited, with a diploma, a certificate, a proof of attendance, ... But every organisation providing learning opportunities (commercial providers, libraries, clubs, associations) can give the learner some kind of certificate. Of course, this has not the same value. To give more value to competencies acquired outside the formal education system (whether non-formally or informally), procedures for the recognition of acquired competencies are being developed, but all this is still in an experimental stage. Driven by European developments, Flanders takes steps to develop a national qualifications framework in order to make accreditation and certification of learning more feasible.

In September 2005, the Flemish government made an order implementing the decree of April 30th 2004 concerning the acquisition of a degree of professional competence. The decree aims to validate professional competencies wherever they are acquired. With a degree of professional competence, people can prove they have the necessary competencies to practise a certain profession, even when the competencies are not acquired through the formal education system. In 2006 bodies for assessment will be established. The administration of employment will be the authority for the recognition and granting of the degree. Standards are being developed for several professions, such as baker/pastrycook, hairdresser, industrial painter and crane operator. The procedure will cost 100 Euro for employed people, and 50 Euro for self-employed. If one belongs to a group at risk, the cost decreases by fifty percent. For job seekers and youngster at school

age in part-time education, the service is free of charge. The main problem that might arise is that the cost can be too high for low-skilled people, unemployed people and that the procedure is too complex.

Significance of Key Concepts in LLL Policy

This section explains and accounts for the importance of the following concepts in LLL policy and practice in the country:

- Learning citizens
- Knowledge society
- Learning cities/regions
- Learning organisations
- Others (if any)

All these concepts (apart from learning cities) are used in Flanders (all feature in policy documents and in research reports), but it is difficult to call them key concepts. By the government these concepts are used rhetorically (except from the concept 'learning organisation'); they are not really worked out very well. In the academic or scientific world, these concepts are also used, but they are not really theorised upon or further developed.

Strictly speaking, in Flanders the term 'learning citizen' is not used, but the concept 'learning society' (which is widely used) has more or less the same connotations. But the concept is not really worked out well. By the government it is used to refer to a society where a certain number of people (target set by the government conform European targets) regularly undertake learning activities in order to reach the aims set by the government.

'Knowledge society' is a term that is mostly used 1) to support the importance of lifelong learning policy measures or 2) in the field of economical policy. When the government introduces lifelong learning policy measures it refers to the development of a knowledge-based society, due to scientific and technological developments, as stated in the Declaration of Lisbon (2000). A knowledge-based society requires qualified citizens. The Flemish economy is export-oriented and is strongly affected by international events. Globalisation causes for instance a loss of labour in labour-intensive industries, which affects low-skilled people. More jobs are created in knowledge-based sectors.

In the policy brief 2004-2009 'Education and Training', drawn up by the Minister of Labour, Education and Training, the concept 'learning region' is used to give an overview of the participation of people in lifelong learning activities in Flanders. Apart from that, this term does not really have an important significance. It is mainly used rhetorically.

The concept of 'learning organisations' is not really a key concept in lifelong learning policy, although different measures are taken or are planned to be taken to improve

education and training in enterprises and organisations and to enhance participation in training within the work context. The emphasis is put on learning opportunities for individuals.

3. LEGISLATION & POLICY

EU policy / policy of international organisations

Since the 70's, international and EU policy documents have been the main driver for Flemish lifelong learning policies. Especially the goals set in the Lisbon Strategy are influencing and guiding Flemish policy, which is reflected in a steady monitoring of the effects on the participation in lifelong learning. With regard to the development of political standpoints and guidelines and to the introduction of instruments, methods, ... documents from organisations as OECD are regularly referred to.

Key legislative/policy items

Most important documents related to lifelong learning were action plans and white papers. In 2000, the Flemish government drew up the action plan 'Learning all one's life, on the right road' to stimulate personal development (literacy, numeracy, basic skills, social and communicative competencies, etc.), to increase social cohesion, to promote active citizenship, to contribute to economic growth and increasing labour market participation. This is a key document because it translated European policy and gave it a Flemish touch. It put more emphasis on personal development. Other documents elaborated on this action plan. The second most important document is the Vilvoorde Treaty (2001), which states that Flanders should be a learning society by 2010: at least 10% (last year adjusted up to 12.5%) of the people between 25 and 65 should participate in lifelong learning. Documents like the Flemish Action Plan 'European Guidelines for Member States Employment Policies' (emphasizing the development of human capital and promotion of lifelong learning) and the Flemish Agreement on Employment 2005-2006 (a.o. stimulating people to acquire a degree of 'professional competency' that validates non- and informally acquired competencies and non-recognised qualifications) have integrated the same principles and targets. The most recent guiding document is the Flemish Strategic Plan for Literacy (2005) incorporating several strategies. The feature making this document important is that all relevant actors are involved to reach the aims.

Other areas of policy

Recently, policy regarding lifelong learning has to take into account policy on migration. As several categories of immigrants are obliged to follow courses (e.g. Dutch) in order to be integrated in the Flemish society, this influences the participation in lifelong learning and the provision of courses and learning activities. Other policy domains didn't really affect lifelong learning policies, but were influenced by lifelong learning policy. Many policy

documents, in the strict sense dealing with other topics than lifelong learning, have incorporated items related with the participation in lifelong learning. E.g.: in order to stimulate scientific and technological innovation and entrepreneurship, policy measures taken by the Economy Ministry are aiming at the increasing use of personal computers, broad band technology and other ICT-devices, the development of competencies related to entrepreneurship and at the exchange of expertise between trainers/teachers and enterprises.

Policy co-ordination

- The Minister of Work, Education and Training and the Minister of Culture want to develop and implement an integrated policy to stimulate lifelong and lifewide learning, including all forms of learning. Therefore, a threefold structure was established in February 2005 for policy development, preparatory work and implementation, comprising (1) the Ministerial Committee 'Education, Training and Work', (2) the interdepartmental steering committee and (3) the Service for information, education and harmonisation (DIVA). (As these entities are only recently established, they have not been evaluated yet.)
- the Ministerial Committee Education, Training and Work: This committee is responsible for the co-ordination of decisions concerning topics inside the power of both ministers.
- the interdepartmental steering committee: This committee is made up by the department of education, the employment/labour administration and the culture administration and acts as an interface between the department and administrations. Matters regarding education, training and work at the same time are considered by the committee. The objectives and activities of this committee are determined by the Ministerial Committee. One of the current objectives is to develop a uniform and smooth certification and qualification system and to monitor the market of education and training, to develop a policy to promote lifelong learning, to follow-up the strategic actions to raise literacy levels. The committee co-ordinates the activities of the Service for information, education and harmonisation.
- the Service for information, education and harmonisation (DIVA): This implementing entity is responsible for the co-ordination and harmonisation of the execution of policies. One of its main activities is to promote lifelong learning through projects, for instance by making the availability of learning possibilities transparent (by means of databases) and by sensitising adults for lifelong learning.

Other important stakeholders

Very important for the development of lifelong learning policies are consultative and advisory bodies, e.g. Flemish Educational Council, Social-Economic Council of Flanders.

They have a big influence in the policy-making process and represent all important stakeholders (employees, employers, providers of education and training, ...). Other important institutions are sectoral training funds established by the employers and trade unions collectively (in agreement with the government), and are mainly influencing the supply of work-related training.

4. MAIN PATTERNS OF PROVISION & PARTICIPATION

General patterns of participation

Analysis of the European Labour Force Survey makes clear that:

- Participation in lifelong learning decreases as people become older;
- Women participate less than men (because women participate less in the labour market and employment status and participation in learning are strongly related);
- The more educated participate more in learning activities;
- The employed participate more than the unemployed.

Patterns of participation by provider

Higher education is provided both by colleges and universities. Participation in higher education has been increasing for a long time. Since many years, women outnumber men in colleges and in universities. Allochthonous people are severely underrepresented. Most people go to college or university right after having completed secondary education. Centres for adult education provide general education, on the level of secondary education (including 'second chance' education) or on the level of higher education. On the level of secondary education, language courses are very important, just as business-related courses. Both low- and high-qualified people participate. On the level of higher education, economic, educational and social work studies are the most popular. The enrolments for courses are steadily increasing and women outnumber men. Centres for basic education provide courses for adults for whom basic education (literacy courses, basic ICT, ...) is necessary to function in our society or to be admitted to other forms of education. The number of enrolments is still increasing. Almost three out of four participants are younger than 45. Allochthonous people are overrepresented (almost 50% of the participants). They mainly can be found in courses as 'Dutch as a second language'. Distance learning attracts a small public (around 1% of people between 15 and 64). After an increase in participation, the introduction of a subscription fee had a negative effect on participation. Both low- and high-qualified people participate. Women outnumber men. Art academies attract among 1% of the people between 15 and 64. Only one out of five students is older than 18. Women are overrepresented.

Adult Sociocultural Education Centres and other organisations for social-cultural work (both don't belong to the educational system) are important organisations contributing to the participation in lifelong learning. This is reflected by the huge supply of education and training opportunities and by the importance attached to it in policy documents. Data on provision and participation are unfortunately hardly available.

Flemish Employment and Occupational Training Office (including competence centre), the Flemish Agency for Enterprise Training / Syntra, and what we call 'third parties', private, mainly non-profit organisations who link training with work experience (Vitamine W, VOKANS), are important providers of training as well, especially for the unemployed. These organisations do not belong to the educational system.

Beside, there are a large number of private providers in Flanders, but detailed data on the participation are not available.

Extent and reliability of the data

An extensive amount of data on the participation in lifelong learning is available, but:

- data are fragmented, coming from providers, administrative databases, research databases, European databases etc.;
- participation is not regularly and not systematically monitored;
- there is not one common definition for lifelong learning;
- measurement is not standardised (e.g. difference reference periods are used).

Funding

Around 14% of the budget of the department of education is set aside for adult education. No significant increase or decrease has been noted during the last 10 years. Beside that, the government invests in learning through measures aiming at taking away the financial barriers for individuals or businesses.

5. BROADER SOCIAL POLICY & LLL

All official bodies are expected to show awareness related with gender, age, ethnicity, disability and socially disadvantaged people. The aim is to remove inequalities and to promote the equal distribution of chances. For example, policy concerning the employment problems of older workers will deal with learning opportunities for these people. When measures are taken, it is taken care of (or at least monitored) that the advantages go to the most needed. E.g. centres for career guidance are obliged by the government to target low-skilled and elderly employees. Another example: when it was clear that vouchers for training and education were mostly used by people who would all the same participate in lifelong learning, this was seen as a problem.

In many domains of policy, learning is seen as a possible remedy for social problems: immigrants are obliged to follow courses to be able to integrate in our society; in the system of initial education a policy for equal chances is developed in order to diminish the social risks run by socially disadvantaged pupils; the newly developed degree of competence is meant for unqualified people to give them more chances on the labour market where diplomas are very important, etc.

6. EFFECTIVENESS OF LLL POLICIES

Available data

The achievement of objectives by stated policies is not systematically monitored, but several research projects have been commissioned by the government to evaluate policy measures related with lifelong learning. In 2003, a state of the art was made by the Higher Institute of Labour Studies summarising and describing data on participation and policy measures. It was meant to do this annually, but there never has been any follow-up. Concurrently, an instrument for the monitoring of lifelong learning was developed, but this hasn't been used as it was meant to be.

During the last 10 years, the following topics have been investigated by government order:

- the re-entry in higher education of adults (results not yet available);
- career guidance in enterprises;
- career guidance: evaluation of demand and supply;
- supply of education and training in Flanders;
- participation in labour-market related education and training: costs and benefits for the participant;
- skills-upgrading for the low-qualified;
- good practices to develop a positive learning climate, especially for the low-qualified;
- open and distance learning in enterprises;
- international comparative research into the systems and practices for the recognition and validation of prior learning;
- the influence of the government on training policies in enterprises
- training policies in enterprises
- evaluation of the sectoral training funds' policies;
- feasibility and effectiveness of guaranteed training for the long-term unemployed;
- needs for qualifications in the textile industry;

- employees' needs for training.

The most important indicators are the extent of the participation in lifelong learning, the number of unqualified school-leavers, indicators concerning literacy and numeracy. These indicators are closely monitored because they are linked with the objectives put forward in the Lisbon Strategy and adopted in the Vilvoorde Treaty. The monitoring relies up-to-now mainly on data gathered in European and international surveys, like the Labour Force Survey, the European Survey on Working Conditions, International Adult Literacy Survey, the Continuing Vocational Training Survey, OECD-indicators, Eurobarometer Survey on Europeans' attitudes to education and training, surveys by CEDEFOP (DG EAC-CEDEFOP lifelong learning questionnaire and information on structural indicators provide by Eurostat. Normally, Flanders will participate in the forthcoming Adult Education Survey.

Other data are gathered by the government (Administration Planning and Statistics) and by universities (by government order). The knowledge centre 'Employment, Labour and Training' monitors evolutions and trends in the labour market. Each year indicators on the Flemish labour market, including data on lifelong learning, are published. The knowledge centre 'Transitions from school to work' has gathered data on 4 cohorts of young people, each surveyed at the age of 23, 26 and 29. The questionnaire included several questions on the participation in lifelong learning.

Achievements

Not all aspects of lifelong learning policy are regularly monitored. Most attention is paid to aim formulated in the Treaty of Vilvoorde in 2001 (Verdrag van Vilvoorde):

In 2010, at least 10% (in 2005 adapted to 12.5%) of the Flemish inhabitants between the age of 25 and 65 should participate in lifelong learning activities. During the last years the participation has steadily been increasing. According to the Labour Force Survey, the participation rate was in 2004 9.8% (Van Woensel, 2006). The problem of social inequality remains.

Tensions

Tensions in lifelong learning policies have been listed extensively by Baert (2002,2003):

- Learning can be done in formal, non-formal or informal contexts. Formal contexts can be managed and controlled more easily by the government than the others. Promotion and valorisation of learning in non-formal or informal contexts may not be neglected.
- Should people be activated or be forced to learn through the life course or should they be invited and motivated to learn? When does motivating people for lifelong learning become propaganda?

- How to find a good balance between individuals' rights and duties, i.c. the right to personal development and the duty to contribute to the development of our society? (In line with discussions on welfare and workfare, 'learnfare' could be introduced.)
- How to find a balance between extrinsic motivation (learning for employment) and intrinsic motivation (for the joy of learning, because learning is meaningful in itself)? Both motivators can be present at the same time, but can a society allow saying that learning always has to serve external aims? This is the difference between rewarding learning with better chances for labour market participation and reducing learning to its economic value.
- Is learning something that makes life meaningful and helps people to influence their own lives? Or do lifelong learning policies make people passive, by making them do what is politically determined?
- Is learning meant to make people adapt to our economies (by focusing on employability) or to make people participate in our society (including a critical and active attitude towards the economical system)? Is the learner somebody who absorbs knowledge or somebody who participates in the public debate?
- Learning balances between competitiveness and solidarity, between individual and collective actions. Social and ethical questions concerning all these questions have to be treated in depth.

7. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To raise the participation in lifelong learning, several actors are involved and several aspects related to learning should be taken into consideration (De Rick, Van Valckenborgh & Baert, 2004): the individual learner, all providers of learning opportunities in the broadest sense (the classic formal educational system, sociocultural suppliers, enterprises and organisations, libraries, community work, ...) and all governmental domains that have to do with lifelong learning (directly such as employment and education or more or less indirectly such as poverty and migration) and probably many others.

Some years ago a large consultation process was set up by academic researchers (by order of the Flemish government) to get to know the most important features of a good policy for lifelong learning. About 100 experts from different domains (economical, social, cultural, ...) were involved and practices in several countries were studied. This resulted in the following recommendations for lifelong learning policy:

To facilitate learning

- lay the foundation for lifelong learning in initial education by imparting knowledge, competencies and attitudes to children and youth that help them to learn and to enjoy learning
- diminish unqualified school-leaving
- create a positive learning that makes clear that learning is important, enriching and pleasant
- stimulate people to analyse and express their learning needs, detect these needs and provide the necessary learning opportunities
- support non-formal and informal learning
- stimulate workplace learning and turn organisations into learning organisations
- provide flexible learning trajectories, for instance by making courses modular
- provide guidance for learning

To valorise learning

- generalise the certification of learning

- build systems to guarantee the quality of education and training
- recognise knowledge and competencies acquired by experience
- reward people for their learning efforts

To develop a coherent lifelong learning policy

- found lifelong learning policy and policy measures on a global coherent vision and strategy
- involve all relevant stakeholders by interactive policymaking
- define governmental responsibilities and core tasks
- find a good balance between public and private responsibilities
- lay down standards in laws
- install a formal collaboration between different policy domains involved in lifelong learning policy

To make policy and practice possible

- establish networks, partnerships, collaboration and co-ordination if possible based on existing initiatives
- work on local and regional level
- bring different branches together
- monitor the results of lifelong learning policy and lifelong learning measures
- enhance the educators' expertise necessary for teaching adults
- make traditional educational systems more flexible in order to make these systems more accessible and to give people the opportunity to draw up an educational programme that suits them best
- establish a coherent research programme on lifelong learning, including fundamental research, research preceding the formulation of policy measures, evaluative research, monitoring etc.

The main challenges are

- equal participation for groups at risk (related with gender, age, social class, origin, level of skills, qualifications, etc.);
- make sure that the people who are the most in need of help (financial help, guidance, ...) are preferentially treated and enjoy the benefits of measures the most;
- to valorise acquired competencies
- to make learning have real benefits (whether in or outside the labour market);
- to find an answer to the tensions mentioned in §8.

GENERAL CONTEXT OF THE LLL 2010 RESEARCH PROJECT

In March 2000, the then 15 European leaders committed the European Union to become by 2010 “the most dynamic and competitive knowledge based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, and respect for the environment”. The Lisbon strategy, as it has come to be known, was a comprehensive but interdependent series of reforms, which has significant implications for a whole range of social policies, including policies for learning.

As part of the Lisbon strategy, the European Union has set the goal of raising the number of adults participating in lifelong learning to 12.5% by 2010. However, the proportion of learning adults in Europe differs widely across countries. The project "**Towards a Lifelong Learning Society in Europe: the contribution of the education system**", which forms part of the European Commission’s 6th Framework Research Program, is dedicated to identifying the reasons behind these differences and to studying the policies and practices related to adults’ participation in and access to lifelong learning in a number of European countries (see project's web-page <http://LLL2010.tlu.ee>).

The project involves researchers from thirteen countries and regions of Europe: Scotland, England, Ireland, Austria, Belgium, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Norway and Russia.

Project objectives

The objectives of this project are to:

- Show to what extent the countries differ in terms of patterns of lifelong learning.
- Reveal how these differences depend upon specific institutions and policies of each country.
- Assess the contribution of each country’s education system to the development of lifelong learning.
- Trace the ways institutional and policy prerequisites for lifelong learning have been developed in European countries.
- Identify the barriers to participation in lifelong learning in terms of policies, educational institutions, enterprises’ practices and potential learners’ motivation.
- Identify the best solutions and most successful practices in terms of participation in lifelong learning and to decide to what extent these would be applicable in other countries.
- Propose changes, which would enhance adult participation in lifelong learning and decrease social exclusion.

The LLL2010 research project extends over five years (commencing in September 2005), and these questions will be addressed in various ways through five sub-projects.

Potential impact

Project is expected to contribute both to competitiveness and cohesion of the EU by (a) developing and carrying out a joint agenda for a better understanding of the tensions between the knowledge-based society, lifelong learning and social inclusion in the context of enlargement of the EU and globalisation, (b) identification of best practices and

suggestion of ways for implementation in order to reach the objectives for lifelong learning. The LLL2010 research project extends over five years (commencing in September 2005), and these questions will be addressed in various ways through five sub-projects.

The plan for disseminating the knowledge

The project aims to examine and report on national differences in approaching formal lifelong learning, but also to assist policymakers and practitioners in learning appropriate lessons from contrasting practice in other countries. Therefore, disseminating knowledge to relevant audiences – individuals, institutional actors and policymakers – is of the core issues within this project, and so dissemination activity will take place throughout the life of the project.

The preliminary results will be discussed in the workshops and conferences and introduced to national as well as international audiences. The results of the different research projects within LLL2010 will be presented in five comparative reports – one per subproject – and a final report, and two books will be published as a result of the project. A Conference “The Contribution of the Education System to Lifelong Learning”, scheduled in the end of the project, is aimed at discussing findings, conclusions and expert opinions on a European level.

To contribute to scientific discussion and enhance comparative studies in the field, further analysis of the results of the research will take place in articles published in specialized and interdisciplinary journals. As LLL2010 will undertake a number of original studies, the data, questionnaires and codebooks, and all the other relevant materials generated in the project will be made available to the scientific community at large.

Results achieved

The present summary covers the findings of the team during the first Sub-project, ‘Review of Literature and Policy Documents’; the full comparative report of the results of this Subproject will be made available on the project website by the end of 2007. The Sub-project undertook comparative research on lifelong learning policies and practices. The aim was to review how lifelong learning is being conceptualised and put into operation across a range of countries in Northern, Central and Eastern Europe.

Purpose & Methodology of Sub-project 1

The purpose of the first Sub-project was to review how lifelong learning is being conceptualised and put into operation across a range of countries in Northern, Central and Eastern Europe. The nature of the educational and lifelong learning regimes in each country, and how they are changing, were investigated. The report considers how far lifelong learning has entered the policy rhetoric in each country, and in what forms it has done so – in particular, how far it has been shaped by the European Union’s thinking, or by national or other influences. It considers how far rhetoric and practice diverge in each country. It also considers how far actions of different areas of policy and government support lifelong learning, or hinder its development.

The Sub-project applied a comparative documentary analysis of approaches to lifelong learning, through analysing national policy documents and addressing lifelong learning in participating countries.

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4. Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh, Scotland, United Kingdom
5. Educational Disadvantage Centre, Centre for Human Development at St. Patrick's College, Dublin City University, Ireland
6. Fafo Institute for Labour and Social Research, Oslo, Norway
7. Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, Ljubljana, Slovenia
8. TÁRKI Social Research Centre, Budapest, Hungary
9. Centre for International Relations and Studies, Mykolo Romerio University, Vilnius, Lithuania
10. Institute of Sociology, Bukarest, Bulgaria
11. St. Petersburg State University: Department of Sociology, Department of Retraining and Improvement of Professional Skills for Sociology and Social Work, Russia
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