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Adult Learning policy and provision in the Member States of the EU

A synthesis of reports by country experts

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1. INTRODUCTION

This synthesis report **considers the current situation of national adult learning policies and systems across the EU-28. The report brings together the findings from a set of country reports**¹ that were previously completed for each Member State by a set of country experts. The report reflects on the complex adult learning policy and financing frameworks, national targets and interventions, as well as their strengths and weaknesses and the reforms that are needed in the systems that are in place in Member States. In so doing, it contributes to increasing the evidence base on adult learning systems in the EU, which is an essential pre-requisite for assessing their effectiveness, impact and responsiveness to adult learning needs.

The scope of this report and its corresponding research is primarily interested in the role of the public sector in the adult learning systems. Whilst adult learning systems are a broad mixture of actions and investment by individuals, employers and the public sector, the scope of this report is mainly focussed on the issues that interact with public sector involvement rather than understanding, for example, how companies can increase the effectiveness of employee training or what motivates individuals to take up extra learning.

Educational attainment is a key driver of social and economic participation. In 2017, the employment rate of persons who attained no more than lower secondary qualifications was much lower than the employment rate of those educated at tertiary level (55% in comparison with 84%).² Existing forecasts mirror these trends, and indicate that only a little over 10% of job openings in the next decade in the EU will require low or no qualifications, while the overwhelming majority will require high or medium level qualifications.³ Individuals with higher education levels are thus more likely to be in employment, but this is not the only benefit. Improved health, higher quality of life, and increased civic engagement are also associated with higher qualification and skills levels.⁴ The advance of new technologies and automation highlight the need for adult learning at all achieved qualification levels, however. Having the capacity and opportunity to adapt occupational and personal skills sets and adjust to the changing world of work is equally important for higher educated individuals.

In recognition of the significance of skills development for individuals, the economy and the wider society, Member State efforts to improve adult participation in learning have increased over the past two decades. Measures to promote adult participation in learning are often included in education and training policies at the national and sub-national levels. A varied combination of public, private and EU funds is available to finance such measures, and employers are encouraged to contribute to re-skilling and up-skilling their employees. In most Member States, adult learning is driven by the private sector in a private market

¹ See all reports at:

https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?pager.offset=25&advSearchKey=Full+Country+Report&mode=advancedSubmit&catId=1307&doc_submit=&policyArea=0&policyAreaSub=0&country=0&year=0

² EU Labour Force Survey (2017). Employment by educational attainment level - annual data [lfsi_educ_a], percentage of total population. Available at <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/lfs/data/database>.

³ European Commission, (2016). *Analytical Underpinning for a New Skills Agenda for Europe*, Commission Staff Working Document, Brussels, 10.6.2016, SWD(2016) 195 final, http://europeanmemoranda.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/files/2016/06/10038-16_ADD_1_.pdf.

⁴ Cedefop, (2017). *Investing in skills pays off: The Economic and Social Cost of Low-Skilled Adults in the EU*, 26/7/2017, Luxembourg: Cedefop, <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/5560>.

(often without any encouragement) which is unlike other parts of the education system where public finance generally supports most of the provision available.

For many years, the EU has also been taking an increasingly active role in promoting and supporting adult learning initiatives. In more recent times (since 2011), the European Commission and 32 countries in the EU and beyond have been implementing the *European Agenda for Adult Learning*,⁵ which promotes increased participation in formal, non-formal and informal adult learning opportunities and the acquisition of a broad variety of skills (work-related, personal, social).

The *New Skills Agenda for Europe*⁶ and *Upskilling Pathways – New Opportunities for Adults*⁷ are two of the most recent examples of EU policy initiatives, which aim at raising adults' skills levels. Seeing as approximately 61 million of them have not achieved a secondary qualification level, the Upskilling Pathways initiative is focused on supporting the acquisition of a minimum level of literacy, numeracy and digital skills and encouraging further learning to acquire a qualification. In addition, the ET2020 Working Group on adult learning⁸ has undertaken peer learning between Member States on policies that support adult learning in the workplace.

Despite these EU level policy initiatives, and also Member State level interventions, challenges persist since a relatively low number of adults in the EU access high quality and relevant learning programmes.⁹ According to the latest Eurostat data, only 10.9% of adults in the EU took part in formal or non-formal learning activity in 2017, showing a slight increase from 10.8% in 2016.¹⁰ This EU average conceals considerable disparities between Member States, with adult learning participation rates in 2017 ranging from 30.4% in Sweden to 1.1% in Romania.¹¹ These figures show that while some countries have far exceeded the EU2020 target for participation in adult learning (15%), others lag very far behind. There is also considerable variation between individuals with higher and lower qualification levels, with 18.6% of those who have achieved tertiary level qualifications participating in a learning activity in 2017, compared with only 4.3% of those with basic skills.¹² As such, the EU is characterised not only by stark variations between the Member States, but also between the different sub-groups of adults, as defined by different socio-demographic features.

1.1. Research objectives

The report brings together the findings from a set of country reports that were previously completed for each Member State. Country experts in the field of adult learning

⁵ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32011G1220\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32011G1220(01)&from=EN).

⁶ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1223&langId=en>.

⁷ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1224>.

⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/expert-groups/adult-learning_en.

⁹ European Commission, (2017). *Skills for the Labour Market*, EU Semester Thematic Factsheet, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/european-semester_thematic-factsheet_skills-for-labour-market_en_0.pdf

¹⁰ The standard measure for adult learning participation is the proportion of adults (aged 25 to 64) taking part in an education or training activity in the past four weeks, as measured by the EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS). Data available at

http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/skills/data/database?p_p_id=NavTreeportletprod_WAR_NavTreeportletprod_I_NSTANCE_iA3rC4hKTZK8&p_p_lifecycle=0&p_p_state=normal&p_p_mode=view&p_p_col_id=column-2&p_p_col_count=1 accessed 6/6/18.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid

each produced a report on adult learning in their respective Member State as part of a wider project undertaken by Ecorys for DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion in 2017-2018. As with other similar synthesis reports, this document provides only the key findings and data drawn together in summative form, rather than providing detailed descriptions for all of the 28 Member States (which are provided in each country report).

The term “adult learning” as used in this synthesis report is a ‘part of the lifelong learning pathway and is defined as any general or vocational education or training, either formal, non-formal or informal, which takes place after completing initial education and training’.¹³ Although this distinction is often not explicit, the underlying trend is to use ‘adult learning’ as a concept that refers to skills and competencies acquired as a result of learning opportunities outside of the formal class-based education (for example through work-related experience and training). ‘Adult education’ on the other hand tends to refer to the formalised structure through which education is delivered. This report tends to refer to adult learning as its primary focus.

Adult learning, is but one part of the lifelong learning pathway. ‘Lifelong learning’ refers to a broader ‘cradle to grave’ pathway which includes all learning activity undertaken throughout life which results in improving knowledge, know-how, skills, competences and/or qualifications for personal, social or professional reasons. The terminology and definitions adopted in the report tend to reflect the definitions in the European Adult Learning Glossary¹⁴.

This synthesis report reviews in particular the more formal elements of adult learning systems, namely the deliberate processes through which learning is expected to take place (work-place learning, working toward qualifications and certification, participating in on-line courses, be they thematically or skillset focused), and places less emphasis upon the - equally important - informal learning settings (such as learning informally through the internet).

1.2. Report Structure

The structure of the report takes the form of six sections, as below:

- The **Introduction** gives an overview of the context of adult learning in the EU and sets out the report’s objectives and structure (**Section 1**);
- The **Method and Approach to Analysis** (**Section 2**) explains the approach taken to analysis, outlines the main research questions, and briefly introduces the analytical approach and methodology;

¹³ Based on the renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning. (2011).

¹⁴ Brooks, G. and Burton, M. (2008). Study on European Terminology in Adult Learning for a common language and common understanding and monitoring of the sector, National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC) at the Institute of Education, DG Education and Culture. https://ec.europa.eu/epale/sites/epale/files/adultglossary1_en.pdf

- **Adult Learning in Europe: Participation levels and types of provision (Section 3)** compares participation in adult learning and employment rates in the EU, and discusses the main types of adult learning provision in the Member States;
- **Governance and Targets in Adult Learning (Section 4)** reviews governance arrangements and national targets for adult learning;
- **Policy Frameworks for Adult Learning (Section 5)** considers the national legislation, policy and strategies that are in place for adult learning;
- **Section 6** reviews **Investment in Adult Learning**, with a focus on the quantity and source of adult learning finance;
- An **Assessment of Adult Learning Systems in the EU** is presented in **Section 7** which reviews the core strengths and weaknesses of adult learning; and
- **Section 8** provides a **Conclusion** for the Synthesis report, which summarises the main findings and offers reflections on potential future reforms and policy orientation.

2. METHOD AND APPROACH TO ANALYSIS

This section outlines the data sources which this report draws on and explains the process through which information was collated, reviewed and analysed. The approach to this assignment, in part builds on the European Commission's 2015 research on adult learning policies and their effectiveness in Europe¹⁵, which identified key factors for successful adult learning policy, and articulated building blocks (i.e. approaches, conditions) for success in adult learning as part of a conceptual framework (see figure 7.1 in this report). This previous research is employed as a lens through which to understand what approaches and conditions are in place at the national level, hence one of the assignment research questions below considers the degree to which the building blocks of the conceptual framework are established across European member states.

2.1. Research questions

The overall aim of this report is to make a contribution to the evidence base around the state of play in adult learning policy and practice across the EU Member States. In summarising 'what exists' in terms of adult learning across Europe, it also reviews **how adult learning policies and systems compare across the EU28**. This overarching aim is explored and framed around the following questions:

1. What are the differences and similarities in adult learning policy frameworks across the EU28?
2. What national targets exist on adult learning?
3. What national frameworks exist to finance adult learning?
4. To what extent do national interventions include the building blocks of the conceptual framework and what does this tell us about their effectiveness?
5. What are the core strengths and weaknesses of the national adult learning 'systems' across the EU28?
6. What does the above tell us about the current state of adult learning policy and any reforms that might be needed in adult education?

In reporting against the above questions, we explore the different types of national systems, approaches, policy, financing and interventions with respect to adult learning, drawing on descriptive examples to highlight differences between Member States.

¹⁵European Commission, Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (2015). *An in-depth analysis of adult learning policies and their effectiveness in Europe*

2.2. The evidence base

The evidence base through which the above questions are addressed is provided by a set of country reports regarding adult learning policy and provision, and a questionnaire undertaken with country experts. These sources are outlined below, along with an explanation of methodological and design aspects.

When explaining methodological aspects, mention is made of the core research team (a team of researchers coordinating the assignment and analysis), a set of high level experts (a number of individuals drawn from academia and policy research with the role of contribution to the design of research tools, quality assurance, analysis and report writing), and a group of country experts for each of the EU Member States (responsible for country level reporting).

This synthesis report does not exhaustively describe every aspect of adult learning policy and provision in Member States, but rather focuses on bringing together an overarching summary and analysis of the main points provided by the country experts. Whilst the main focus of this report is to bring together the evidence provided through the country reports and the questionnaire, there is also reference to relevant statistical sources, academic research and literature in the field when relevant.

2.2.1. Country reports

The **28 country reports** were first prepared in 2016 and then updated and extended in 2017 by country experts. Reports were produced for each EU Member State and outlined the situation regarding adult learning policy and provision for each country. The reports were prepared by country correspondents, each acting in the capacity of expert in the field of adult learning for a particular Member State. The experts are part of a network providing DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL) with information, data and knowledge on adult learning across the EU-28. These experts were selected and contracted on the basis of their in-depth experience and expertise of adult learning policy and practice within their own particular Member State (within which they are based, and native to).

In preparing their reports, experts analysed evidence (including policy and strategic documentation, research and analysis) to provide a comprehensive description of relevant aspects of the adult learning system; they also drew on their experience and understanding to assess its strengths and weaknesses and suggest avenues for further reform.

The country reports are available for review. This report brings together the evidence as a whole to present a picture of adult learning across the EU, including how systems and approaches might be compared.

The following steps were taken to ensure a consistent process of reporting amongst the country experts:

Standard reporting templates

To ensure consistency of reporting and to aid the analysis and comparability of evidence, a standard template was devised by the research team with input from high-level experts in the field of adult learning and representatives from DG EMPL. This process looked to define the areas of interest to be analysed, then developed a template with a set of standard questions and guidance for experts. The template was 'soft tested' then piloted amongst five country experts to check for clarity and interpretation. The guidance offered a glossary for experts to draw on to ensure consistency in the way that terminology was understood and applied. On the basis of the pilot reports, a number of changes were made to the template, prior to being finalised and agreed as a research tool.

The use of comparable statistical data where available

An effort was made to draw on comparable data sources, including those EU data sets (such as the Labour Force Survey). To enhance consistency and comparability in reporting, relevant EU data sources were added to the country report templates by the core research team. This data as reported was then checked with the data source as part of quality assurance processes.

Quality assurance

Each report was reviewed by a high-level expert to check clarity, quality and consistency. The country experts then worked to respond to any queries or questions raised as part of the process. A group of reports were also subject to a more intensive review by a peer reviewer, that is another in-country expert acting in the capacity of 'critical friend'. The core research team also checked reports for consistency, quality and clarity of expression.

2.2.2. Questionnaire to country experts

The report also draws on the results of a **questionnaire to country experts** as supporting evidence; it was designed to collate information on the views of experts across the same themes explored in the country reports (therefore acting to validate, summarise and reinforce the country reports), but also in a number of areas in which more detail was sought.

The questionnaire accompanied the expert report evidence base by providing information and input from experts in a somewhat synthesised and summarised manner. Through offering a series of closed questions, gradations and options for expert responses, the questionnaire supported the interpretation of the country reports whose narrative reporting style had varied in detail and level of content.

The core research team and high-level experts firstly scoped out the fields and sub-areas across which the questionnaire might usefully extend the evidence base. The questionnaire draft was developed with input from DG EMPL, then piloted amongst a set of country experts. The draft was developed on the basis of feedback, with attention paid to the clarity and interpretation of questions.

Responses to the overall questionnaire were provided by 27 of the 28 country experts, and data tables with response breakdowns were provided to aid data review and comparison.

Approach to evidence review and analysis

The core research team and the high-level experts together framed the approach to the analysis of the research data, and to review and assimilate the evidence gathered through the country reports and the questionnaire.

Effort was made to define particular cross-cutting dimensions, or a set of hypotheses through which the national data might be analysed. The evidence however, pointed to an extremely variable picture across Member States in terms of national contexts, performance and trends in adult learning participation, governance of various aspects of adult learning, funding for adult learning, policy and strategy and types of adult learning provision. Imposing particular themes, hypotheses or 'lenses' in the analysis of the data became ultimately counter-productive as national landscapes exhibited so much variation and inherent complexity. The core team and high-level experts were keen to avoid a system of analysis which inadvertently validated a certain national approach in adult learning over another. The high-level experts and core research team thus elected to use a more inductive approach to the analysis of the data. The priority here was to review the data in an 'open-source' manner and to let relevant themes emerge from the evidence base, rather than pre-determining or imposing particular themes for analysis and review. This approach was deemed appropriate since much of the evidence constituted a 'new' and novel evidence base, especially with respect to the various policies and legal frameworks that exist across the EU.

The set of evidence for each aspect/ theme reported against was assessed systematically in the context of the research questions, with the content for each Member State compiled in an analysis grid for each aspect. A number of workshops were held between the core team and high-level experts within which the evidence was explored and assessed in the context of the overarching research questions. This process allowed for the identification of consistent themes and patterns emerging from the report data, in relation to similarities and differences in adult learning policy frameworks, strengths and weaknesses of national adult learning systems, financing frameworks and national targets. The evidence was reviewed iteratively as part of ongoing discussion and debate between the research team, and the implications of the findings explored through reference to additional research and evidence. As part of the process, the high-level experts developed briefings to summarise the evidence in relation to a particular aspect, which informed discussion at expert workshops.

The questionnaire was developed by the core research team and high-level experts following the initial review of country report data. This allowed for the questionnaire to be designed in such a way as to collate data in relation to particular gaps in evidence that were apparent from the country reports. The questionnaire responses for particular aspects/ questions were then compiled, compared between Member States and assessed in relation to how they acted to validate the findings from the country reports (or otherwise).

2.3. Limitations

This section presents the main limitations and caveats which apply to the evidence base, which need to be taken into account when reading this report.

2.3.1. Evidence from expert reporting does not represent an official national policy position

All of the country experts have extensive experience and expertise in relation to adult learning policy and practice in their own Member State. However, it should be acknowledged that they each draw on different backgrounds in terms of education and training, the sub-specialisms and disciplines within adult learning that they have experience within, and employing institution/s. As a result of this, the country experts will each have a slightly different view of the various aspects on which the work has focussed. This adds a richness to the information collected, but it is **important to stress that the experts have reported on the basis of their own experience, expertise and opinions, which cannot be taken as representing an official policy position for a particular country**. Therefore, when this synthesis refers to evidence from the expert reports, an important caveat to note is that the experts offer informed, but subjective insights. This presents a limitation on the degree to which the positions of different Member States can be compared on the basis of the country reports or questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to gather assertions from country experts about various aspects of policy and practice, with question responses framed by way of a scaled or graded set of response options. The evidence drawn from the questionnaire needs, then, to be appropriately qualified with the proviso that as the responses offered by experts do not offer an official report of actual circumstances in Member States, but represent the informed, albeit personal opinions of experts in the field.

Nevertheless, when appropriately qualified, the information as reported by the experts does make an extensive and comprehensive addition to the evidence base on adult learning, by drawing on the knowledge, insight and experience of practitioners and experts working within particular Member States.

While comprehensive, the information as reported by country experts may be occasionally subject to potential bias, which we have attempted to mitigate by involving high-level experts in the analysis and interpretation of the core material from the country reports.

2.3.2. Nature of reporting, data availability and data-collection tools

Extensive efforts were invested in the development of the reporting tools, namely a reporting template which provided a framework for experts to report against in providing country reports. The template outlined the specific areas which should be reported against and provided guidance on content length, structure, reporting style, and a glossary of terms. The use of a consistent reporting tool has gone some way to establish the basis for a broadly comparable set of deliverables. However, it should be acknowledged that the country reports are ultimately narrative in style, and that of course in some countries there is a lot of practice, information and evidence in relation to a particular aspect that was to be reported on, whilst in another country less so. The amount and nature of evidence

reported in relation to various aspects of the report template therefore reflected these variables.

It should be noted that the examples outlined by experts as part of their reporting were illustrative and drawn on to highlight the types of approaches and provision in a particular Member State. Whilst comprehensive, the country reports in this sense do not represent a comprehensive and exhaustive inventory of all measures and programmes in relation to adult learning in a particular Member State, reflecting data availability. As such, where this synthesis report refers to national examples, it is for illustrative purposes and does not suggest that similar approaches cannot be found elsewhere.

The adult learning sector is also complex, as we will go on to explore later in this report, primarily as the policy area cuts across a number of overarching topics, systems and governance institutions. This means that the evidence that experts had to draw on was not uniformly available in one place, and sometimes was more straightforward to source, and readily available in some Member States than others. The breadth of reporting has at times been affected by data availability. In some cases, this represents a finding in itself (e.g. at times, information is not transparent at the national level or data is either not collected or readily available). The specific gaps in terms of data availability and the associated implications are highlighted in each section of the report.

The most significant limitations are posed by the comparative analysis of financial frameworks. To an important degree, data gaps on financial instruments and mechanisms have caused the variation in the information that was included in the country reports. This has impeded the development of a comparative framework for analysis. We have attempted to partially mitigate this situation by including questions that address financial frameworks in the expert questionnaire. It should nevertheless be noted that the results of the questionnaire are also subject to potential bias, having only been administered on the 28 Member State experts.

Overall, it should be held in mind that whilst the data collection tool was designed to be a consistent and rigorous basis for reporting, in the 'real' world, the comparability of the mainly qualitative data offered by the reports is limited by the amount and type of data available nationally, as well as the style and quantity of narrative employed.

The expert reports and questionnaire overall provide important and fresh contributions to the evidence base on adult learning. In fact, the insights and reporting from country experts provides valuable and comprehensive updates on how adult learning is being provided across EU Member States, in a format that has not been otherwise available until now. However, the evidence has to be taken at face value, and considered in the light of what it actually represents – the views of individuals involved in the sector, rather than an absolute and objective assessment of what is happening in Member States. Just as is the case with most qualitative evidence collection, there is the risk of inherent bias in the information reported, which needs to be held in mind when the findings of this report are reviewed.

The next section of the report presents some context for adult learning provision through drawing on quantitative data, as a means of setting the scene for analysis of the evidence as provided by the experts in the reports, and the questionnaire.

3. ADULT LEARNING IN EUROPE: PARTICIPATION LEVELS AND TYPES OF PROVISION

This chapter draws on the 28 country reports to provide an overview of levels of participation in adult learning and employment across the EU, as well as take stock of the main types of adult learning provision found in the EU28. By way of context for the rest of the report, this chapter seeks to advance the understanding of the complex adult learning landscape. In so doing, it discusses selected examples of measures implemented in the Member States. It is beyond the scope of this study to map adult learning measures in the EU systematically, and as such, the selected measures only aim at contextualising adult learning provision in national contexts.

3.1. Employment and participation in adult learning in the EU

Increasing the employment rate of those aged 20-64 as a minimum to 75% in the Member States is one of the key objectives included in the Europe 2020 Strategy.¹⁶ In addition, 15% of adults aged 25-64 should be participating in adult learning by 2020, in line with the EU target.¹⁷ Against this backdrop, participation in adult learning in 2016 and employment levels are discussed in this sub-section.

Participation in education and training for adults (25 and 64 years of age) and employment rates vary considerably between the Member States. Figure 3.1 (below) displays employment levels and participation in education and training rates for adults in 2016 across the EU. The intersecting lines in red indicate the EU targets for the employment rate and the participation rate in education and training whilst the intersecting 'broken' lines indicate the EU average level of performance for these two areas. The position for each Member State is plotted on the basis of Labour Force Data, and some interesting patterns can be observed. It shows that the **highest performing countries** (those exceeding the headline targets for both employment levels and participation in adult learning) were **Sweden, Denmark, Netherlands and Estonia**. A number of **countries reached one of the two targets** (either employment levels or participation in adult learning): the **Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Lithuania, Luxembourg, United Kingdom**. Most EU Member States, however, **reached neither target: Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain**. Among the final cluster, those which were **above the EU average on at least one indicator** were **Austria, Hungary, Latvia and Slovenia**. The rest of the Member States were below the EU average on both indicators.

It should be noted that this report (like the ET2020 benchmark of adult participation in learning) uses the EU Labour Force Survey data¹⁸ to derive participation in education and training, and employment rates. The EU LFS measures participation over the 4 weeks preceding the interview, while other EU-wide surveys look at a longer period. For example, the EU Adult Education Survey measures participation in education and training over the last 12 months preceding the interview.¹⁹ These differences in coverage periods influence

¹⁶ Europe 2020 Strategy, available at http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Europe_2020_headline_indicators.

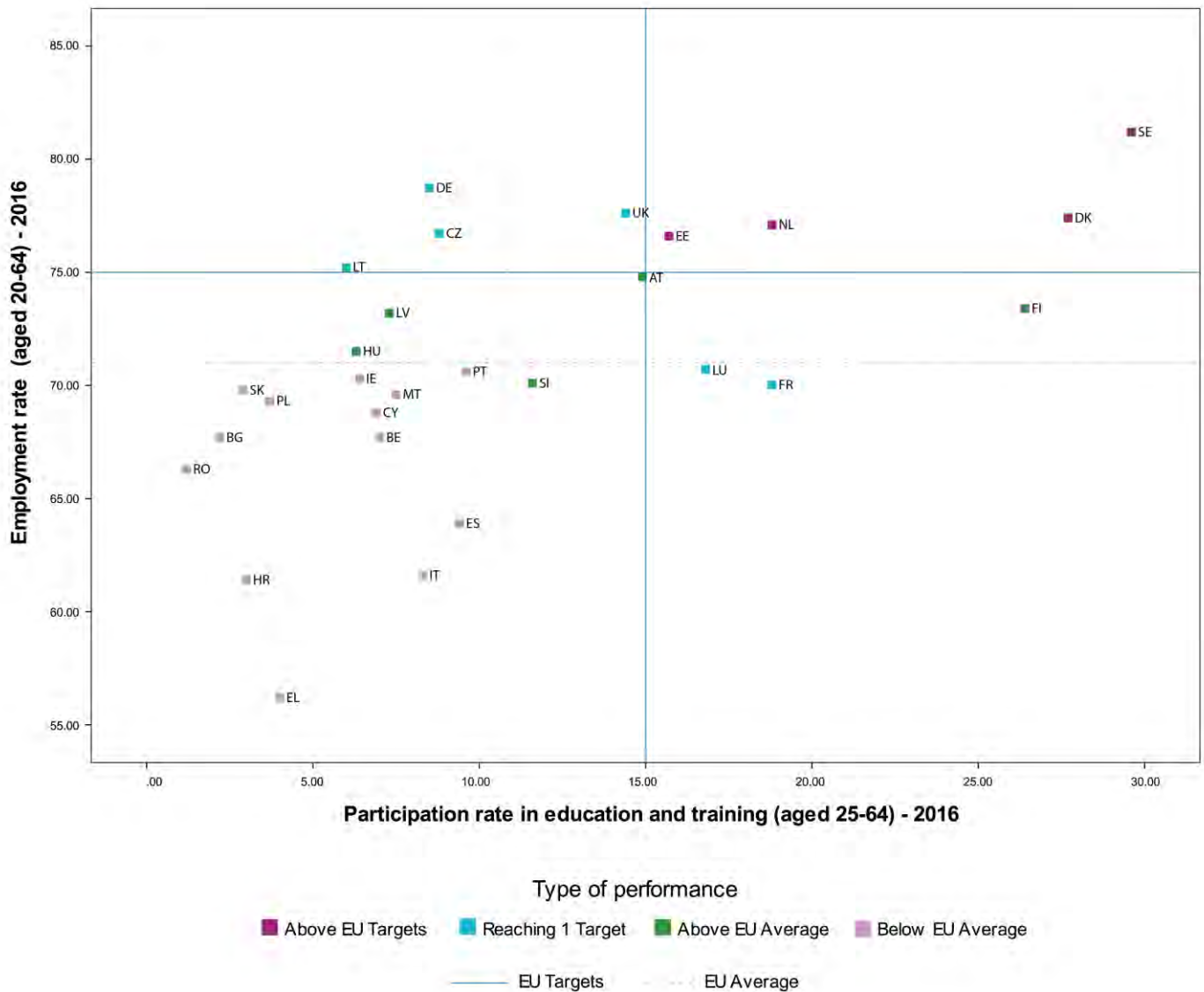
¹⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/adult-learning/adult_en.

¹⁸ Information available at <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/microdata/european-union-labour-force-survey>.

¹⁹ Information available at <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/microdata/adult-education-survey>.

estimations about participation rates and affect comparability across these key surveys to a certain degree.²⁰

Figure 3.1: Employment and participation in adult learning – total population (2016)



Source: Authors’ calculations based on the 2016 EU Labour Force Survey data: Employment rates by sex, age and educational attainment level (%) aged 20-64 [lfsa_ergaed] and Participation rate in education and training by sex and age aged 25-64 [trng_lfse_01]

3.2. Main types of adult learning provision

Adult education and training programmes vary significantly across the Member States. In order to review the various types of provision that exist, the country experts reported

²⁰ Valentina Goglio, Elena Claudia Meron - Joint Research Centre (JRC) (2014). *Adult Participation in Lifelong Learning. The impact of using a 12-months or 4-weeks reference period. Technical Briefing*, available at <http://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC92330/lbna26918enn.pdf>.

against six main types of adult learning provision (as below). Whilst not a formal typology, the country reports included these main types of adult learning, in order to provide a framework for consistent country reporting, as agreed with DG EMPL. The six main types against which experts reported were:

- 1) Measures aimed at helping adults improve their basic skills
- 2) Measures aimed at helping adults to achieve a recognised qualification
- 3) Measures aimed at helping adults develop other knowledge and skills, not for vocational purposes
- 4) Measures aimed at facilitating transition to the labour market for unemployed people or those at risk of unemployment (ALMPs)
- 5) Measures aimed at opening up Higher Education to adults
- 6) Measures aimed at enabling adult employees to develop their work-related skills

The country report template also offered provision for experts to refer to types of provision which did not fit into the six main types identified above. Feedback from the country experts suggests that not all provision corresponds neatly with the six main types, which reflects the diverse and over-lapping nature of adult learning interventions. Nevertheless, the above framework acted to provide some basis for identifying what type of measures are commonly being delivered in member states.

This section provides an overview of the types of measures and programmes implemented in the Member States across these six types of provision. The measures described in the 28 country reports were often reported against one of the six types of provision, for illustrative purposes and to aid comparison through the use of a standardised reporting structure. In reality, many measures can be included into two or more types of provision, reflecting the complexity of adult learning provision in the Member States.

Overall, the measures included in the six different types of provision cover all levels (from basic qualifications to higher education), as well as different forms of education (vocational, general) and purposes (work-related and non-vocational). The 28 country reports select a range of flagship initiatives to illustrate the characteristics of adult learning provision in each Member State. Some of them are brought forth below to highlight the variety of the adult learning provision landscape in the EU, rather than comprehensively mapping them at the Member State level.

3.2.1. Measures aimed at helping adults improve their basic skills

Basic skills provision in the Member States includes measures and programmes aimed at improving general literacy, numeracy and digital competences. In the context of EU policy on adult learning, and as noted in the Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways these core skills of literacy, numeracy and digital competences are the building blocks upon which the acquisition of other knowledge and competences can build.²¹

²¹ Council Recommendation of 19 December 2016 on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:JOC_2016_484_R_0001

These programmes are delivered in the form of formal education (general adult education), as well as through work-related training programmes aimed at increasing employability (e.g. vocational adult education). In many cases, there are opportunities for participants to acquire basic qualifications.

In the formal education system, basic skills for adults are delivered by secondary schools, adult education centres that may or may not be integral to public services, associations and NGOs that are active in this field (e.g. in **France** – *National Federation of Welcome and Social Inclusion Associations*; in **Hungary** – *Hungarian Folk-High School Society* and the *Association for Lifelong Learning*), as well as a host of private providers (e.g. in **Germany**). These programmes are aimed at facilitating the acquisition not only of skills, but also of basic qualifications.

The examples below illustrate the diversity of measures available in the Member States, provided mostly in the formal education system, but also by private providers and other organisations. The measures focus on the acquisition of basic qualifications for adults, as well as basic skills such as language skills for foreigners or digital skills. As the examples below illustrate, there are different approaches to what constitutes basic education.

In **Greece**, Second Chance Schools (SCS) are the key state-funded institution that enables adults aged 18 and over who have not completed their nine-year compulsory education to continue their studies and obtain a qualification equivalent to the high school certificate.

In **Italy**, Provincial Centres for Adult Education (*Centri provinciali per l'istruzione degli adulti – CPIAs*) and upper secondary schools are the main providers of adult education. Programmes delivered in these institutions lead to the development of basic skills (including the acquisition of basic Italian language competences for foreigners).

In **Lithuania**, the provision of basic skills for adults exists at the primary education level (ISCED 1), at the lower-secondary level (ISCED 2), and at upper-secondary level (ISCED 3). Basic skills provision is currently funded by the ESF and public budget allocations.

The situation is similar in **Denmark**, where basic skills are provided for adults at two levels. First, **General Vocational Adult Education (AVU)** is offered mainly in the general school subjects and leads to qualifications equivalent with those obtained by young people. AVU education is provided by the Adult Education Centres (VUC). Costs are partially covered by state grants and students have to pay tuition fees of varying amounts. Second, there are also **Higher Preparatory Education (HF)** programmes at the upper secondary level. These include subjects for general upper secondary education and lead to qualifications that offer access to higher education. HF is provided by the Adult Education Centres (VUC). As with AVU, costs are mainly covered by state grants, but students also pay tuition fees.

In **Spain**, basic and compulsory education or professional training (at the initial and secondary education levels) are offered to adults to support the acquisition of basic skills. Secondary education for adults is organised around three areas: communication – including a foreign language; social sciences, geography and history, citizenship education; and the scientific-technological area (e.g. mathematics, technology, health and environmental issues). There are also Vocational Secondary Education

Programmes for adults, and language education to acquire the Basic User Level (A1 and A2) according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

Source: Country reports

As emphasised in several country reports, **EU structural funds** have supported the implementation of measures aimed at increasing adults' basic skills levels, especially those relevant for improving employability. Such programmes tend to emphasise the formation of skills and competences rather than the acquisition of qualifications, in contrast to the examples highlighted above.

For example in **Estonia**, the Adult Education Programme 2017-2020 prioritises digital skills, learning skills, social skills and entrepreneurship, and national and foreign language skills. ESF funds have been allocated to support the delivery of nine projects offering training for key competences to at least 20,000 adults across the country throughout 2017-2020.

In the **Czech Republic**, basic training to improve adults' literacy and numeracy is mostly funded by ESF projects and interventions and delivered by elementary schools. There is a focus on vocational or professional education rather than on literacy and numeracy courses. ESF interventions support the development of basic and soft skills, ICT skills and socio-economic skills, particularly for vulnerable people.

Source: Country reports

Some country reports highlighted that there is an emphasis on the provision of basic skills programmes aimed at **adults from disadvantaged groups**, especially individuals belonging to the Roma communities and migrants, but also ethnic minority groups and the long-term unemployed. In Bulgaria, a focus on these groups has been a feature of active labour market policies in Bulgaria and provision to support basic skill development amongst adults has been the focus of the "New Chance for Success" project delivered across 2017/2018.

In **Slovenia**, there are programmes designed to support the development of basic skills, such as increasing literacy, strengthening social skills and promoting active citizenship. They are aimed at vulnerable adults in general, but also at supporting the early integration of migrants (including language courses). The programmes are funded from the national public budget and the ESF, and are free of charge for participants.

In **Slovakia**, there are 10-month courses provided by primary or secondary schools to help adults complete lower secondary education. These initiatives are not implemented nationally, however, but are rather aimed at specific geographical areas. The number of early school leavers is especially high in the eastern regions of Slovakia, and in the regions with a large Roma population, for example, which explains the focus on measures looking to improve basic skills and/or qualifications in those areas. EU funds support adult learning and include measures enabling the completion of primary school and the transition to secondary school.

In **Hungary** too, low achievement among Roma settlements is a considerable challenge, which is addressed under Priority 1 of the Human Resource Development Operative Programme (HDOP, 2017-2020) and includes basic skills provisions.

Source: Country reports

As highlighted in the country reports on adult learning, the provision of basic skills for adults often focuses on the relevance to labour market demand, increasing employability and facilitating sustainable employment. The examples below illustrate examples of measures in **France and Germany**, but similar examples exist in other Member States as well. This is consistent with the increased focus at European and Member State level on the link between the education and training systems and the labour market demand.

In **France**, low qualified target groups are supported to improve their basic skills by associations such as the National Federation of Welcome and Social inclusion Associations (*Fédération nationale des associations d'accueil et de réinsertion sociale - FNARS*) or public bodies such as the 12 regional public *Illiteracy Resource Centres*. At a more informal level, second chance schools also provide basic skills training to young adults from 16 to 25 that did not complete their education. Training programmes are individualised and include on-the-job training in companies. Moreover, second chance education measures target early school leavers.

In **Germany**, there are several approaches to providing basic skills, particularly for those who do not make the transition to upper secondary education (i.e. general and vocational tracks – dual apprenticeships and school-based VET). Basic skills are delivered by a variety of providers. The focus on skills rather than the acquisition of formal qualifications is evidenced by recent statistics, which indicate that approximately 3.4% of adults who were engaged in formal adult education in 2013/2014 were focused on achieving qualifications²².

Source: Country reports

The selected examples above reflect the variety of opportunities for adults to acquire basic skills in the Member States. Some programmes target early school leavers, who have not finished compulsory education, and for whom second chance education measures exist. They are aimed at facilitating the acquisition of basic qualifications. Formal education institutions at different levels play an important role in this sense. There are, on the other hand, other types of programmes, which are more narrowly focused on specific types of basic skills (e.g. language skills for foreigners, ICT skills, etc.).

3.2.2. Measures aimed at helping adults achieve a recognised qualification

As evidenced in the country reports, achieving a recognised qualification is generally possible following completion of programmes delivered by public formal education institutions (such as lower and upper secondary schools) and by vocational education and training providers (including public institutions and non-public providers as well, such as Chambers of Commerce, non-for-profit associations etc.). All levels of education are included, from basic to higher education. Both general and vocational types of programmes are included. Training programmes subsidised by Public Employment Services can also result in partial or full qualifications.

²² Frauke Bilger, Alexandra Strauß (2017). Weiterbildungsverhalten in Deutschland 2016. Ergebnisse des Adult Education Survey – AES Trendbericht, hrsg. vom Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, Berlin.

Although not all country reports chose to highlight this aspect, some of those that did indicate that adults can achieve recognised qualifications by completing programmes funded and/or offered by public and private providers. The broad range of providers is illustrated below with some concrete examples. They also highlight two main types of measures, which can co-exist: the acquisition of formal qualifications in the formal education system; and the recognition of learning outcomes obtained outside the formal education system.

A particular example is a **French** initiative, which is aimed at recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes (*Validation of Experiential Learning outcomes/ Validation des acquis de l'expérience, VAE*). Applicants who can document their learning outcomes are awarded full qualifications without further formal learning requirements, but interviews, portfolios of competences and sometimes practical tests are required. Qualifications standards are the same as those used in formal qualifications systems, i.e. for apprenticeships, initial education and training.

In the **UK**, adult education funding and planning systems differ across the four nations (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland). So do definitions of recognised qualifications. The four national qualifications frameworks incorporate non-formal qualifications or credits to varying degrees. Recently, the role of employers in informing labour-market relevant qualifications frameworks has increased.

In **Romania**, the National and County Employment Agencies (*ANOFM/ AJOFM*) implement training programmes for the unemployed that result in recognised qualifications.

In **Slovakia**, the most common way to obtain qualifications is to complete a course or study provided by public institutions at the lower and upper secondary level, and further education and vocational education establishments (which can also be non-public).

Source: Country reports

3.2.3. Measures aimed at helping adults develop other knowledge and skills, not for vocational purposes

While often not as frequent as general or work-related education or training programmes, measures aimed at supporting adults develop knowledge and skills outside of the vocational area do exist in some Member States. Selected examples are included below. They are, however, not representative of all measures that are implemented in the Member States. Instead, they are selected from the examples that were provided in the country reports.

- Programmes aimed at promoting positive attitudes towards learning, promoting equal opportunities in accessing education, encouraging the productive use of free time and increasing access to the labour market (**Greece**);
- Society, policy and science; languages; personality and communication; life orientation; health, wellness and sports and art and creativity (**Austria**);
- Community education, which is grounded on principles of justice, equality, social inclusion and citizenship leading to positive personal, social and economic outcomes and focuses on supporting adults who wish to return to or continue their education, with a focus on people who are distant from education (**Ireland**);

- Popular adult education including a broad range of different learning non-formal or informal learning activities, such as group activities and courses with different topics (**Sweden**);
- Co-funded provision of 'community learning', i.e. non-formal learning that takes place in the community (**UK**).

3.2.4. Measures aimed at facilitating transition to the labour market for unemployed people or those at risk of unemployment (ALMPs)

Particularly after the economic crisis, the key objective of employment policies in the Member States has been to reduce unemployment. Active labour market policies have played a major role in this strategic approach. A broad variety of measures and programmes with different features, target groups and duration have been implemented across the Member States as part of this framework, aiming at increasing individuals' employability. Training programmes aimed at skilling, re-skilling and up-skilling are part of the latter set of interventions, which are generally targeted at those groups that are defined as disadvantaged. The definition of 'disadvantage' may vary to some degree between the Member States. In principle, however, it generally denotes those who are perceived to be at risk of becoming long-term unemployed (notably characterised by low skill/ qualification levels, with work-impairing disabilities, aged below 25 or over 50).

ALMPs are generally implemented by Public Employment Services (PES) and in some cases also by local authorities. The measures include training schemes, job-search assistance, matching services and wage subsidies, among many others. Training measures are connected to labour market demand trends, and thus publicly subsidised training for unemployed people is more likely to occur in occupations that are in demand (at a national or local level). Training measures which are included in ALMPs are generally implemented at the low and medium skill level rather than supporting higher education programmes.

In **Belgium (Flanders)**, the VDAB (*Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling*), the Flemish Employment Service and Vocational Training Agency is the key provider of ALMPs, with more than 2000 programmes. Specific types of vocational training targeted towards occupations in demand on the labour market are on offer. Several programmes also include specific inductions and work experiences within the work environment.

In **Spain**, the main ALMP provider is the Ministry of Employment and Social Security, but other educational institutions and providers are also involved. An annual programme takes into account proposals made by the Autonomous Communities. This programme includes measures such as subsidising training actions with a recruitment commitment for least 60% of the trainees; training plans to support the unemployed access existing employment opportunities; training programmes for specific groups, especially young people. There are also programmes specifically targeted at people who cannot access unemployment benefits (e.g. Plan PREPARA). The programme focuses on subsidising training opportunities, including those aimed at the acquisition of new qualifications. In addition, financial support is provided, throughout the duration of the training.

Some of the country reports also highlight examples of measures aimed at people who are employed, but at risk of unemployment, as illustrated below.

In the **Czech Republic**, training courses are available for unemployed job-seekers registered at Public Employment Services, but also for employees working for a company that is undergoing process restructuring (e.g. changing their manufacturing process).

In **Finland**, those aged over 20 who either are unemployed or run the risk of becoming unemployed are the key target group of labour market initiatives in adult education.

In the **Netherlands** too, training courses are offered for unemployed people or those at risk of unemployment (organised through PES). Employers can also organise, in cooperation with the PES, courses for those at risk of losing their job, to enable smooth job-to-job transitions. In addition, when cancelling labour contracts, employers have to provide a 'transition fee' (*transitievergoeding*) to the employee, which can be used to enrol in courses that facilitate the transition into new jobs.

Source: Country reports

3.2.5. Measures aimed at opening up Higher Education to adults

There are generally no specific restrictions for adults enrolling in general higher education programmes in the Member States. There are, however, admission rules for the different types of programmes. Eligibility depends in many cases on the completion of upper secondary education. In some countries there are also particular higher education entrance requirements, such as being in possession of relevant professional qualifications (e.g. in **Austria**, the Austrian Law for the Universities of Applied Sciences prescribes such a requirement).

As underlined in many country reports, higher education institutions (public and private alike) in the Member States have developed a broad range of opportunities to widen access for adult participation. A common approach to promoting access for adults with employment commitments for example, is to offer flexible programmes that are tailored to various life stages and situations. Below are some examples of different types of measures used to support adults into education programmes.

Distance learning, evening classes and part-time course – country examples

In **Finland**, adults can study at Universities and Polytechnics. The study programme is tailored to accommodate adults who have a fulltime job, such as fewer lectures.

In **Denmark**, higher education includes programmes at three levels: business academy level (2 years); bachelor level (3-4 years); and master level (5 years). There is a part-time system for adults with programmes corresponding to these three levels. Job experience contributes to knowledge and skills and thus fewer courses are included relative to other programmes. In some cases, part of the teaching is done online.

In **France**, the CNAM (*Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers*) – a tertiary education and training institution for adults – provides second chance programmes aimed at the acquisition of qualifications. The CNAM targets adults who aim to resume formal studies. Distance learning is included in the programme, as well as classroom-based teaching during evenings and weekends.

In **Latvia**, part-time and distance learning or e-learning facilities are offered to students in most universities, which provide a large variety of non-formal and formal education programmes for adult learners, as well as language learning activities.

In the **Netherlands**, the Associate Degree programme (a two-year higher education programme referenced to NQF/EQF level 5), facilitates access to higher education for working adults. In addition, there are initiatives to make part-time higher education more attractive (*Experiment flexibilization part-time education: experiment flexibilisering deeltijdonderwijs*).

Source: Country reports

Further education and VET programmes at the higher education level – country examples

In **Austria**, adult study courses are designed to complement participants' jobs and take account of adult-oriented learning by means of a specific didactic concept.

In **Finland**, Universities of Applied Science offer adults the possibility to study at three different levels. There is the opportunity to complete basic vocational training, higher vocational training and further vocational training that does not lead up to an exam.

Spain also offers an example of this, there are three routes to Higher Education, which depend on three entry requirements (for non-traditional applicants): an access route for people aged over 25; for those aged over 40, related to professional or work experience; and for those aged over 45. Another path is related to taking a Master Degree programmes either at public or private universities or in other institutions such as the Chambers of Commerce.

Source: Country reports

Programmes aimed at the personal and professional development of adults, including post-graduate degrees for adults – country examples

In **Luxembourg**, the Ecole de la 2e Chance (School of Second Opportunity) was launched in 2011 and targets 16-30 year old adults. It organises the *Diploma to access higher education (Diplôme d'Accès aux études supérieures – DAES)* starting 2016-2017, and offers adults the opportunity to enter higher education. The Lifelong

Learning Centre of the Chamber of Employees (*Chambre des Salariés*) also offers adults specialised short courses and tertiary degree programmes. The House of Training offers specialised sectorial training. The ISEC-Hdw (*Institut Supérieur de l'Économie - Hochschule der Wirtschaft*) is an institution of applied science offering dual training, with the knowledge delivered in the classroom, as well as practical work experience in companies.

Source: Country reports

Degree courses aimed particularly at those who have not followed a traditional education path previously – country examples

In **Portugal**, the opening up of higher education institutions to adult learners within a specific Bachelor type of programme is fairly recent (since 2006). Since 2014, there is another initiative targeted at those who are above 23 years of age and did not achieve a traditional formal education path. These learners are called non-traditional students. There is also the possibility of validation of non-formal and informal learning by learners enrolled in higher education degrees. Professional technical courses, a short cycle tertiary education allowing a professional technician diploma (level 5 of the national qualification framework), are also available at higher education institutions for people aged over 18.

Source: Country reports

There are also several examples of Member States where there are no special provisions aimed at attracting adults into higher education, as illustrated below.

In **Italy** for example, the country report emphasises that the concept of “adults” in higher education as such does not exist. According to the criteria concretely adopted by the public higher education institutions, adults are considered parents, working and part-time students. The tendency in the system is to focus on young people. Likewise in **Estonia**, there are no targeted training programmes specifically for adults in higher education.

Source: Country reports

3.2.6. Measures aimed at enabling adult employees to develop their work-related skills

The country reports highlight work-related skills training measures that are funded by public institutions, as well as employers, and other private organisations. At times, these courses overlap with those offered by institutions responsible for training unemployed individuals, but there are also additional programmes, which are only partially funded by public budgets and co-financing from the individuals themselves or their employers.

In **Estonia**, courses coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Research offer employees the opportunity to advance their work-related skills in publicly financed training courses. In some cases, the Unemployment Insurance Fund supports companies in providing training for their employees. This includes the training of

people with reduced workability and training for hiring new employees or in case of large reorganisations in the company.

In **Denmark** there is an extensive system of labour market training courses (AMU). These are aimed at unskilled and skilled employees in industry, commerce and public service. AMU courses receive general funding through a combination of state support and general/collective contributions from employers. The courses are provided by labour market training centres or by vocational schools or colleges. AMU courses can be categorized in four types: (1) certificate courses, training for publicly authorized certificates needed for certain jobs; (2) other courses in a certain trade; (3) transversal courses across trades, such as management and collaboration skills; (4) basic skills courses. Unskilled adult employees aged over 25 also have the opportunity to study for an upper secondary vocational degree (EUV).

In **Bulgaria**, non-formal work-related training for those in employment (targeted at individual and /or company level) is provided privately. It includes work-based training provided by both public and private companies, or by learning providers to individuals. Sometimes employees are legally obliged to attend training (e.g. legal obligatory training in health and safety; professional obligation to undertake certain training every year) related to professional standards. This is often organised by the employer, but an employer can also attend in-service training related to occupational standards at a higher education institution.

Source: Country reports

Summary of Main Types of Provision

Adult learning benefits individuals, employers and ultimately societies, particularly in rapidly changing economic conditions. Despite the recognition it has received in EU and national policies over the years, only a limited number of adults continue to access learning opportunities in most Member States.

This chapter drew upon the 28 country reports to review levels of adult participation in learning and in employment across the EU. Half of the Member States, had reached neither target in 2016²³ and were also below the EU average for both indicators. There were, however, also encouraging examples. **Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Netherlands, and Sweden** were the highest performing countries (those exceeding the headline targets for both employment levels and participation in adult learning) in 2016. Likewise, the **Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Lithuania, Luxembourg, and the United Kingdom** reached one of the two targets.

The chapter also provided an overview of adult learning provision across EU-28 and discussed different examples of measures, aimed at: helping adults improve their basic skills, achieve recognised qualifications, develop skills and knowledge for vocational and non-vocational purposes, facilitating transition to the labour market for the unemployed, and opening up higher education. Overall, there is a wealth of measures, across a range of types of provision which aim to support adult learning across EU-28. The relatively low participation rates in many countries in such measures, however, may indicate the presence of several challenges: the mismatch between adult learning needs and the measures that are in place; the level of awareness about existing opportunities, as well as

²³ According to EU LFS data (2016).

access to them; their relevance to the demands from the labour market; and ultimately, individual attitudes towards education and training throughout the life course, as well as its perceived costs and benefits.

4. GOVERNANCE AND TARGETS IN ADULT LEARNING

This section of the report looks at national governance arrangements and national targets for adult learning (also in the context of EU targets which apply).

4.1. Governance in Adult Learning

'Governance' is concerned with the way that the authority or responsibility for various aspects of adult learning within Member States is distributed between Government departments, agencies or organisations. The country reports and questionnaire evidence highlight the following characteristics of adult learning governance:

Responsibility is shared, reflecting the fact that adult learning is a cross-cutting policy area

Adult learning does often not align clearly with the remit of a particular Ministry or Government department at national level. Responsibility is often split or shared in various ways since adult learning relates to several different national policy competencies (e.g. education, skills and employment, ...) whilst also cutting across other policy concerns (e.g. social inclusion and welfare).

Arrangements reflect wider national governance arrangements

The way that adult learning governance is organised reflects the broader governance arrangements in place in national systems. In countries with decentralised governance structures, the responsibilities for the regulation of adult learning are shared between national and regional governments, or devolved to regional levels, with the national playing a more limited role than the regional governments. In these cases, legislation as well as implementation occurs at sub-national (e.g. municipality) level. In other more centralised Member States, national institutions hold most responsibility for the regulation and coordination of adult learning, but local authorities and other local organisations are responsible for the delivery of the various measures and programmes.

Adult learning is typified by a multiplicity of involved institutions and stakeholders

In many Member States, the responsibility for adult learning is divided not only vertically (between national and sub-national levels), but also horizontally (between different institutions). The country reports and the results of the questionnaire suggests that this vertical and horizontal division of governance is a key feature of adult learning systems.

The evidence also confirms there are a diversity of arrangements in place reflecting the difference in national governance arrangements and the range of institutions and agencies in the field. The Ministries of Education and Labour (including Public Employment Services) tend to be the key institutions responsible for adult learning policies and their implementation (together with their regional and local agencies or associated institutions and organisations). There are also other institutions that may be involved in adult learning regulation (e.g. Ministries of Culture, Finance/ Economy and Agriculture). There is also a variety of specific national agencies responsible for adult learning policies such as the National Agency for Education (**Sweden**), the National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (**Bulgaria**), the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education (**Croatia**), the National Education Development Agency (**Latvia**), and the

National institute for the Development of Continuing Vocational Training (**France**). The range and number of involved stakeholders in the adult learning field partially explains issues of fragmentation with adult learning governance, responsibilities and delivery.

The country reports, and the results of the questionnaire confirm that adult learning governance arrangements vary between national contexts, reflecting the fact that the area cuts across policy fields. They also highlight the diversity of arrangements in place, reflecting the difference in national governance systems, and the diversity and number of involved institutions and agencies in the field. The complexities of adult learning reflect the varied national learning traditions and cultures which have resulted in the emergence of a rich tapestry of adult learning approaches across Europe. In this context, each country (in line with the principle of subsidiarity) has the capacity to organise adult learning as best suits it, and tailor provision to its own circumstances.

To demonstrate the variation in the distribution of governance responsibilities between countries,

Table 4.1 sets out the distribution of responsibilities across national, regional and sub-regional levels by Member State, as reported by country experts. It should be noted that this does not constitute the official position of national government but does give an impression of how governance varies between countries according to country experts.

Table 4.1: Distribution of responsibilities for the governance of adult learning

	National players	Regional players	Local players
AT	✓	✓	✓
BE		✓	
BG	✓	✓	✓
HR	✓		
CY	✓		
CZ	✓		
DK	✓		
EE	✓		
FI	✓		
FR	✓	✓	
DE	✓	✓	✓
EL	✓		✓
HU	✓	✓	✓
IE	✓		✓
IT	✓	✓	✓
LV	✓		
LT	✓		✓
LU	✓		
MT	✓		
NL	✓		✓
PL	✓	✓	✓
PT	✓		✓
RO	✓	✓	✓
SK	✓	✓	
SI	✓	✓	
ES	✓	✓	
SE	✓	✓	✓
UK	✓	✓	

Source: As reported by country experts, in country reports 2018.

The country reports indicated that **national institutions** have responsibility for adult learning in all Member States except Belgium, where the regional and community parliaments and governments have jurisdiction over relevant areas such as education and economic policy. The **regional level of governance** is identified as prominent amongst nearly half of Member States, irrespective of whether national systems are devolved (for example the **UK, Germany, Spain and France**). For a similar proportion of Member States, **local players** are involved in adult learning governance (for example **Ireland, Lithuania, Portugal**). National systems for which the responsibility for adult learning governance is distributed across national, regional and local levels include **Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania, Sweden and France**.

The country experts indicated the level of influence that various levels of government (central, regional and/or local, as well as other bodies or agencies) have over three dimensions of adult learning: **regulatory policy, provision** and the **allocation of public funding**.²⁴ The responses reveal some interesting insights and trends as follows:

Central/ state government is the most prominent player across all three dimensions. The national level of government has the most influence in the area of regulatory policy, for which 23 of 27 country experts (85%) outlined that central government holds full or significant responsibility in this area. National actors remain prominent, but are less influential in relation to the allocation of public funding. Here, just over half of country experts outlined that this level of government has full or significant responsibility (15 of 27 country experts, 56%). In terms of adult learning provision, the national level is the most prominent; just under half of the country experts were of the view that the central/ state government held full or significant responsibility. Whilst national governance is an important actor in adult learning regulation, provision and funding allocation, it does not have universal control and ultimate responsibility for adult learning across Member States. Particularly in terms of provision, the national level of governance is reported as having less of a remit, compared to its influence over funding allocation and regulation. Whilst a prominent actor overall, the central government has no or limited influence for one third of Member States (as reported by 9 country experts, 33%), whilst regional government and other agencies/ bodies have more of a role in governance here. For instance, 7 country experts reported that other agencies/ bodies have full or significant responsibility in adult learning provision for their Member State.

Regional Government is a prime actor for a notable proportion of Member States across all three dimensions; *regulatory policy, provision* and the *allocation of public funding*.

In the area of provision, five country experts (19%) outlined that regional government has full or significant responsibility. A similar proportion (four country experts, 15%) considered that regional government has full or significant responsibility for regulatory policy and the allocation of public funding respectively. The level of influence held by regional government varies significantly between Member States, identified by experts as having no or limited responsibility in the areas of regulatory policy (reported by 12 experts, 44%), provision (reported by 10 experts, 44%) and funding allocation (7 experts, 26%). Overall regional governance has significant levels of influence over adult learning in a number of countries, reflecting the devolved and federal structures in place, but not exclusively so. For example, in **Poland** regional government is deemed influential by the country expert in provision and funding allocation (more so than for regulation, reflecting that legislative power rests with the central government). The regional level is considered to have significant responsibility for adult learning provision in **Bulgaria**. For the majority of countries however, regional government is less influential than national governance.

Local Government is identified by country experts as being less prominent in terms of influence over regulation, provision and funding allocation. This is particularly the case in the area of regulation, with the majority of country experts (23 of 27, 85%) outlining local

²⁴ Central and/or State Governments operate at the national or State level. Regional Governments operate at the level of regions if applicable (and could for example include a regional council). Local Governments could include districts, city or municipality councils or other local authorities. The experts could assign different levels of responsibility for each of the four government levels, i.e. 1 no responsibility at all; 2 limited responsibilities; 3 some responsibilities; 4 significant responsibilities; 5 full responsibility. The analysis is based on answers that were provided for 28 countries (with the exception of Portugal).

government as having no or limited responsibility in this area. Around half of country experts identified that local government has no or limited responsibility in provision (48%, 13 experts), and funding allocation (52%, 14 experts). Just one expert outlined a view that local government was influential over regulation and two experts considered that local government has full or significant influence over public funding allocation. A slightly more prominent role, can be seen in the area of adult learning provision – three country experts indicated that local government actors had full or significant influence here. Here we see a slightly more limited remit of national government in this area, reflecting that local agencies or bodies have a greater relative influence in provision.

As to the clarity of governance arrangements, whilst over half of the country experts (15 of 27, 56%) said that the distribution of responsibilities across levels of governance is clearly defined, the arrangements were considered to be sometimes unclear in 10 Member States (37%) and unclear in two Member States. This feedback suggests that the demarcation of responsibilities has scope to be better defined and understood in a number of countries, potentially reflecting in part the fragmentation acknowledged previously.

The expert questionnaire results do not suggest a correlation between the presence of devolved governance models and the degree of clarity in arrangements. The expert responses do not suggest that where governance responsibilities are shared to a greater degree across levels (national, regional, local), that arrangements are felt to be less well defined or less clear. An assumption that a greater number of governance levels with influence in adult learning results in higher relative complexity would seem unfounded on the basis of this evidence. Instead, the degree to which the distribution of responsibilities is regarded as clearly defined or otherwise, is likely to reflect a host of factors (for example, the amount and type of public communication available on the role and remit of governance institutions).

The questionnaire results suggest an overlap between the countries regarded as having an unclear or sometimes unclear distribution of responsibilities across levels of governance and those which are deemed to have 'other agencies or bodies' with full or significant responsibility for adult learning. For instance, in **Latvia** 'other agencies or bodies' are deemed by the country expert to have significant responsibility in the areas of adult learning regulatory policy, provision and the allocation of public funding, whilst the division of responsibilities is deemed unclear. Experts for **Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Germany** also identify that the division of responsibilities with regard to governance is 'sometimes unclear', whilst also reporting that 'other agencies or bodies' have full or significant influence over some dimension of adult learning (be it regulatory policy, provision and/ or allocation of funding). This does not represent a causal link, merely suggests that the involvement of additional agencies or bodies in the governance of adult learning means that systems are likely to be relatively more complex than otherwise. Whilst potentially offering various benefits, arrangements as they are understood by practitioners and lay people might be more unclear or convoluted than otherwise. Reflecting the type and number of involved stakeholders, the importance of communication within the adult learning field has a key role in clarifying remits and responsibilities so to avoid confusion and a lack of clarity.

Summary of Governance in Adult Learning

The questionnaire results point to a high level of heterogeneity between countries in the way that adult learning is governed, and the level of influence that different levels of

governance have over adult learning regulation, funding allocation and provision. The national level of governance is prominent in most Member States, particularly in the area of regulation. With respect to provision and funding allocation, regional actors can be seen as important. The level of influence afforded to regional governance is generally higher where countries have devolved/ federal structures as might be expected, but this is not exclusively the case. There is no apparent correlation between the **level of governance** most prominent at the member state level and the effectiveness of the governance and coordination of adult learning policies. As is illustrated by the **Dutch and UK** country report, decentralisation is aimed at better tailoring adult learning provision to local needs.

4.2. National targets on adult learning

This section summarises and compares national targets on adult learning including their scope and focus. National targets in this context refer to benchmark values intended to be reached by a particular date, defined by member states and often derived from quantitative statistical indicators.

In reviewing the targets in place for adult learning, it is useful to consider an intervention logic for adult learning provision, particularly the links between inputs, outputs and outcomes. 'Inputs' in this context consists of the learning activities undertaken, measured by a participation indicator. Output indicators then correspond to the results of the learning process for example, qualifications obtained, educational attainment. Early school leaving and tertiary attainment levels can then be regarded as intermediate output indicators. The ultimate impact (the outcome indicator) of adult learning impact is employment rate. This corresponds with the outcomes identified in the conceptual framework, which highlights the benefits of adult learning for individuals, employers and the wider community both in terms of employment rates but also some of the softer results that accompany increased employment rates (innovation, improved wellbeing etc).

This section draws on country report and questionnaire evidence to consider targets mostly related to participation in adult learning (or related programmes), and to a lesser degree, output/ result (e.g. gained qualifications) or outcome/ impact (e.g. labour market participation) targets. EU targets (especially in terms of participation) are discussed to the extent that that many national targets draw on EU targets.

The European level target states that 15% of adults should be participating in learning by 2020. This benchmark is linked to the Labour Force Survey (LFS) which provides data on 'participation in lifelong learning'. A breakdown of the data for the age 25-64 age range is thus reviewed to establish the proportion of adults participating in learning. It is worth noting that the benchmark on lifelong learning is being reformulated by the Commission to distinguish between lifelong learning as a 'cradle to grave' process and the participation of adults in learning.

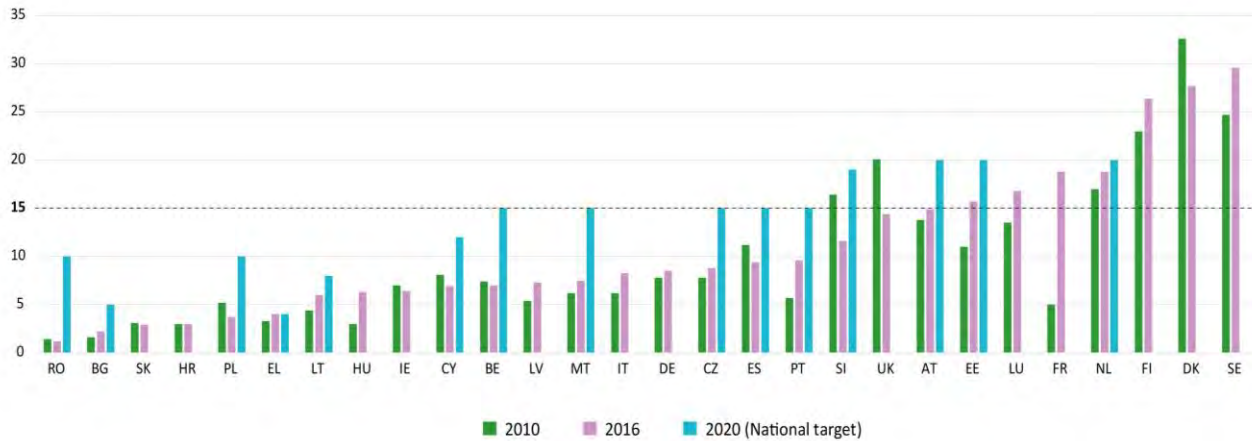
Most countries have translated the EU benchmarks into their own context and used the 'participation in lifelong learning' of the labour force survey benchmark as key indicator for measuring developments in adult learning. Also, the adult education survey (AES) is used for this purpose. In addition, many countries have national targets related to specific policy interventions and programmes. The targets are mostly related to participation in adult learning (or related programmes), whilst less emphasis is placed on outputs (e.g. gained qualifications) or outcomes/ results (e.g. labour market participation).

4.2.1. Targets related to participation of adults in learning

At European level a target for 2020 is set at 15% participation in lifelong learning as measured by the labour force survey (that is the participation in education of adults aged 25 to 64). An overview is provided in

Figure 4.1 below, which highlights national progress against this 2020 target, based on data provided for 2010 and 2016.

Figure 4.1 : Participation of adults in learning, data 2010, 2016 and targets for



2020 (if available). Progress 2010-2016 and distance to target is indicated.

Source: Eurostat, LFS and country reports. Calculations authors

The comparison of the progress between 2010 and 2016 with the distance to target shows in many countries that the targets set for 2020 are largely unrealistic. Only for two Member States (**the Netherlands** and **Estonia** and to a lesser extent **Lithuania**), are the targets within reach when the progression is continued towards 2020. In **Cyprus, Spain, Poland, Slovenia, Belgium** and **Romania** the development is negative, and the targets are out of reach given the progression shown.

In **Belgium**, the target is part of the Pact 2020 mission statement for the Flanders region, although participation has decreased from 7.6% in 2010 to 7.0% in 2016. Increasing the participation of adults in learning programmes is one of the greatest challenges **Cyprus** is facing. Despite the fact that the National Strategy for lifelong learning has been implemented for 4 years, the percentage of adults in learning fell to 6.9%, and it is still behind the national target of 12% and the EU2020 target of 15%. In **Estonia**, where increases in participation rates have been reported, there is an overall participation target, and a specific target set for the share of adults aged 25-64 with low educational attainment participating in learning (2020 target is 6.5%). The value in 2015 was 4.4%. The share has not increased in the period since the adoption of the target as expected²⁵. In **the Netherlands**, the 2016-value (18.8%) is close to the 2020 target of 20%. However, between 2000 and 2016 participation increased slightly by just under 4%; making it questionable whether the target will indeed be reached. In **Portugal**, the target of 15% is far from being achieved (2016: 9.6%), despite existing efforts within Portugal 2020 and

²⁵ Source: Adult Education Programme 2017-2020

the Qualifica programme. In **Slovenia**, participation rates are decreasing. The target of 20% is therefore not likely to be achieved. Both Portugal and Slovenia had been showing progress in the period up to the recession.

Table 4.2 : National targets on adult participation in learning

Country expert views- Is there a national target on adult participation in learning?		
	% country experts responding	MS' (based on country expert responses)
Yes	78	AT, BE, BG, HR, CY, CZ, EE, DE, EL, HU, IE, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, RO, SI, ES, SE
No	22	DK, FI, FR, IT, SK, UK

On the basis of the information reported from the country experts, it can be seen that the majority of Member States have national targets linked to adult participation in learning (see Table 4.2). Of these 21 Member States, five Member States have set a target which is more ambitious than the EU level target (**EE, NL, LU, SI, SE**), reflecting their relatively high performance in participation in adult learning.

For those countries where it was reported that no national targets were in place relating to adult participation in learning, four country experts reported the presence of other relevant targets linked to the field (**FI, FR, SK, UK**), whilst for two countries (**DK** and **IT**) no related national target has been established. It can be observed that a lack of national target for adult participation in learning does not signal a lack of relative performance in a particular country.

Table 4.3: How does the national target compare to the EU target?

Country expert views- If yes, how does this national target on participation in lifelong learning compare to the EU (specifies that 15% of adults aged 25-64 should take part in adult learning by 2020.)		
	% country experts responding	MS' (based on country experts responses)
Below EU target (set at a lower level)	43	BG, HR, CY, EL, IE, LV, PL, RO, ES
At EU target level	29	AT, BE, CZ, HU, LT, MT,
Above the EU target (set at a higher level)	24	EE, LU, NL, SI, SE

As Table 4.3 highlights, national targets related to participation of adults in education and training have in some cases been set to reflect the European level target (reported for 6 Member States). There are some example of national targets in the field, also including

targets on adult participation in general education, VET and higher education. For example, in Hungary, a target is in place to increase the rate of adult population aged 16-74 taking part in online courses from 3% to 6% by 2020. In Ireland, a target was set, and largely met for there to be 339,283 beneficiaries of FET provision in 2016.²⁶, whilst other targets are for 10% of new entrants to higher education coming from the further education sector by 2019²⁷ and for there to be 19,000 cumulative new traineeship registrations by 2020.²⁸

There are a number of countries that have set participation or input targets related to specific interventions, such as in **Ireland** where the target is specific to FET provision. In **Hungary**, specific attention is on participation in online courses. In **Croatia**, targets are related to a voucher system and finally, in **Austria**, targets are set for specific types of adult learning. A number of other countries have targets around apprenticeship starts/contracts (UK) and distance learning (Estonia), which whilst aren't defined as focusing on adult participation, engagement with adult learners is seen as an important contributor to reaching the target.

The country reports also include quantitative targets related to training and the support of specific **target groups**. In **Austria**, a specific target is focussed on promoting gender balance in those funding by the Public Employment Service (PES). Here, 50% of the Public Employment Service funding is dedicated to women (for example, the development of career guidance and offers for professional qualifications). Targets relating to training or reskilling low-skilled or low-qualified adults is mentioned a number of times. In **Cyprus**, reflecting the results of the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC²⁹), an objective is in place to reduce the share of the population with low basic skills, although this objective is not quantified. Similarly, in **Greece**, there is an objective to assist unemployed people in acquiring new skills or upgrade their existing skills in order to return to the labour market on a more permanent basis, although this is not formalised as part of a quantifiable target. In **France**, training is foreseen for 500,000 jobseekers with low level of qualifications, with 650,000 jobseekers being reached in 2016. In **the Netherlands**, a quantitative target linked to a particular programme is to have 45,000 new participants enter a language course to improve their language proficiency across the period 2016-2018. In **Estonia**, a target was established for the share of the population aged 16-74 with digital skills to increase to 95% by 2020 by 95% (set in 2012). In 2015 this rate had already reached 87%. In **Romania**, a 2016 target set out that by 2020 45,000 low skilled adults should be trained in basic skills and 100,000 low skilled employees should receive a grant to obtain transversal skills.

4.2.2. Result indicators: Targets related to obtaining qualifications and educational attainment

Whilst a range of targets exist to measure levels of adult participation in learning, against which to benchmark progress, it is also important to consider the indicators of the results achieved; that is output indicators. The country reports also include evidence of output

²⁶ The definition of beneficiary full-time courses, ranging from for example, a thirty-three week course delivered over an academic year, and a part-time course delivered over a number of weeks for five hours a week. See FET Services Plan 2016 and SOLAS Annual Report 2016

²⁷ The National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education

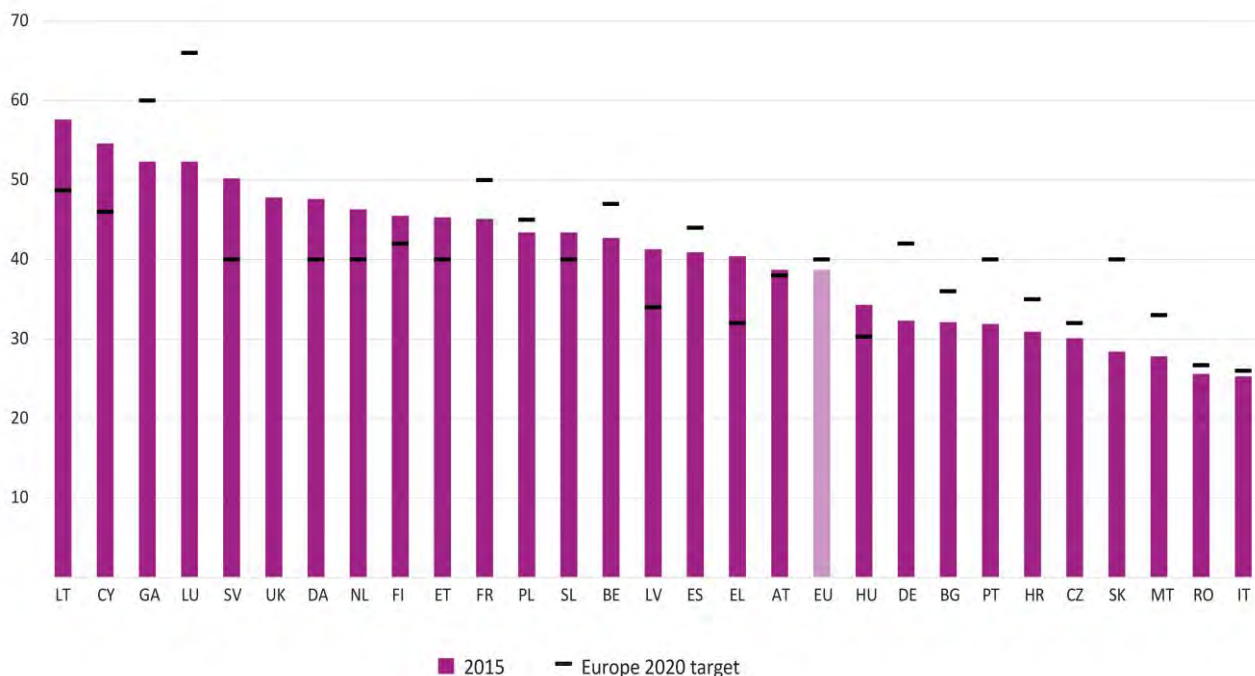
²⁸ Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland 2016-2020

²⁹ Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies

indicators being in place, that is targets on qualifications obtained and educational attainment. This relates for instance to obtaining a higher education qualification, as linked to other EU2020 strategy benchmarks (by 2020 40% of young Europeans have a higher education qualification³⁰). Many country reports relate adult learning to this objective as well, as where adult learning increases, the level of qualifications and educational attainment amongst adults would likely increase. The most appropriate way to measure such result indicators would be the qualification level of the overall population (excluding young people) whilst the level of tertiary attainment within the adult population (25-64) would also give an indication of this.

Figure 4.2 below provides an overview of the targets and achievements in 2015.

Figure 4.2 : Tertiary educational attainment in the EU Member States (% of those aged 30 to 34 having successfully completed tertiary education)³¹



Source: Eurostat (2016), Europe 2020 education indicators in 2015 More and more persons aged 30 to 34 with tertiary educational attainment in the EU and fewer and fewer early leavers from education and training

The figure shows a mixed picture. Many countries in 2015 already reached their EU2020 target (such as **Lithuania, Cyprus, Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, Finland, Estonia, Slovenia, Latvia, Greece, Austria, Hungary and Ireland**). Other countries have nearly reached their targets (such as **Poland, Spain, Czech Republic, Romania, and Italy**). A last group of countries are still quite far off (such as **Luxembourg, France, Belgium, Germany, Bulgaria, Portugal, Croatia, and Slovenia**).

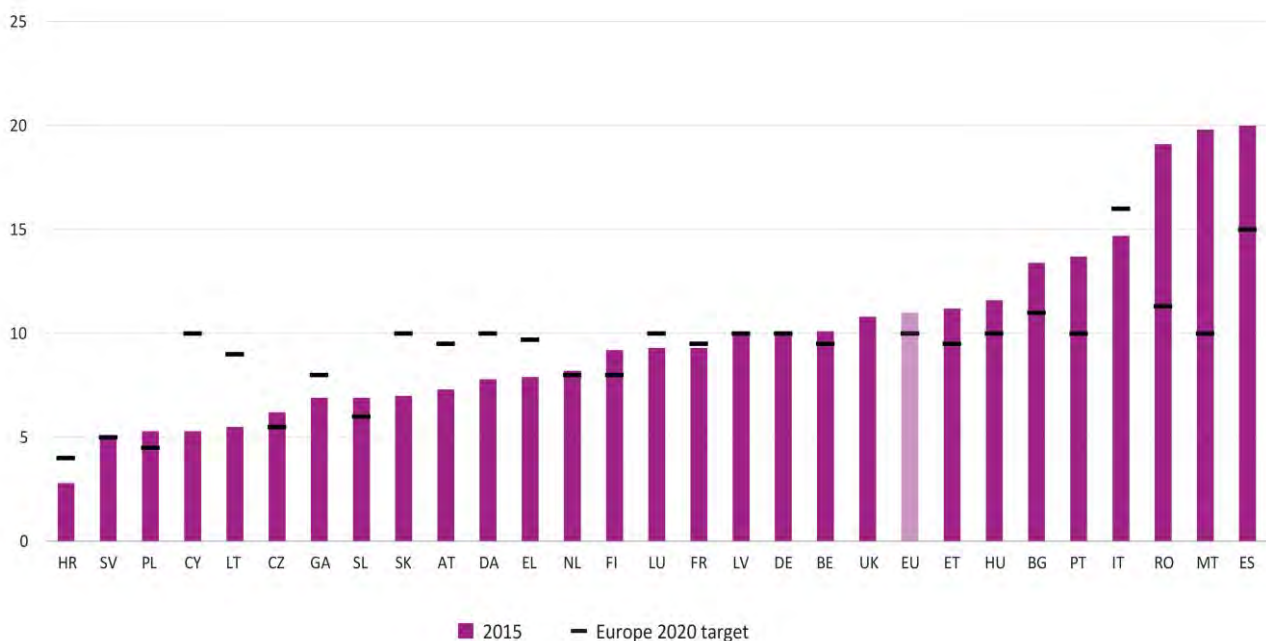
³⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/higher-education_en

³¹ No national target for the United Kingdom.

The national target for Germany includes post-secondary non-tertiary education (International Standard Classification of Education 1997 level 4).

The country reports also refer to another European 2020 indicator, namely on reducing early school leaving. Figure 4.3 below provides an overview of the targets and achievements for all EU Member States in 2015.

Figure 4.3 : Early leavers from education and training in the EU Member States (% of those aged 18-24 with at most lower secondary education and who were not in further education or training)



Source: Eurostat (2016), Europe 2020 education indicators in 2015 More and more persons aged 30 to 34 with tertiary educational attainment in the EU and fewer and fewer early leavers from education and training

In relation to this EU target, a large group of countries had already reached their specific target in 2015 (such as **Croatia, Lithuania, Ireland, Sweden, Austria, Denmark, Greece, Luxembourg, France, Latvia, Germany and Italy**). Another group had nearly reached the target value in 2015 (such as **Slovenia, Poland, Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, the Netherlands, Finland and Belgium**). The final group comprises countries that are at a considerable distance from the target (such as **Estonia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Portugal, Romania, Malta and Spain**).

Table 4.4 below offers some examples of country specific targets in the area of adult learning (mainly participation or output targets), drawn from the country reports.

Table 4.4 : Overview of targets at national level

Member States	Target (target figure and date to be achieved by)	Adoption date	Initial value (at date of adoption)	Current value
AT	Training up to 18. All under 18-year-olds should, if possible, complete an education beyond the compulsory school-leaving certificate.	July 2017	Approx. 5,000 young people leave the training system in Austria each year without having a qualification beyond the compulsory school-leaving certificate.	
HR	Number of participants (adult learners) who have obtained qualifications	2014	5,000	
HR	Participants with pre-tertiary education (ISCED 1 to 4)	2014	17,000	
EE	Share of adults aged 25-64 with no professional qualifications (target by 2020: 25%)	2012	30%	28.5% (2016)
EE	Share of drop-out in distance learning in general education (target by 2020: 30%)	2013	35%	36% (2015)
EE	Share of students aged 25+ in vocational education (target by 2020: 33%)	2013	26%	32% (2015)
EE	Share of youth aged 18-24 who are not in education (target by 2020: less than 9%)	2012	10.3%	11% (2016)
FR	Alternating training schemes: objective = 500,000 contracts	2014	280,000 Initial budget: 1 Billion Euros	In 2016: 300 000
EL	Facilitate the entrance of Vocational Schools and Training Institutes in the labour market through the implementation of an apprenticeship programme	11-08-17	3,406 placement positions	N/A

IE	31,000 cumulative new apprenticeship registrations by 2020	2017	0	3,472 apprentice registrations forecast for 2016
IE	19,000 cumulative new traineeship registrations by 2020	2017	0	2,500 traineeship registrations forecast for 2016
LV	Qualified youth (40%; 2022)	22.05.2014	30% (2012)	35% (2017)
PT	50% of working population holding secondary education by 2020	2014	43.3%	46.9% (2016)
RO	151,200 adults with certified competences (2020)	2015		131 persons in 2016, cf NAE
RO	125,000 apprenticeship contracts for low skilled youth (2020)	2016		167 persons In 2016

Source: Examples offered by country experts in country reports on adult learning

Summary of Targets Related to Adult Learning

All countries have targets related to adult learning. The country reports and questionnaire highlight that most national targets are mostly related to participation in adult learning (or particular programmes), whilst less emphasis is placed on output (e.g. gained qualifications) or outcome (e.g. labour market participation) indicators and targets. In terms of participation targets, most countries have translated the EU benchmarks into their own context and used the 'participation in lifelong learning' of the labour force survey benchmark as key indicator for measuring developments in adult learning. Also the adult education survey (AES) is used for this purpose. Countries have in some cases set their target lower (identified in 9 countries) or higher (identified in 5 countries) than the EU benchmarks depending on progress to date.

In addition, many countries have national targets related to specific policy interventions and programmes and the type and range of targets here varies.

The country reports whilst providing evidence on national targets, and national progress toward EU2020 benchmark targets, do not provide comparative evidence around how national level targets have been determined (for example whether they have been set at an ambitious/ realistic level in relation to the EU2020 benchmark target). The country experts offer views as to how realistic it is that national level targets might be reached, but there is no evidence that strategic approaches are adopted at the national level to define how targets might be reached through specific actions and interventions. This is

especially clear in the countries having highly ambitious targets and (almost) no positive development related to the target. The country reports did identify indicators related to specific policies or (ESF-related) programmes and projects. The relationship between the targets set and the interventions is much clearer in these cases. Country experts were not explicitly asked to report on the way in which national targets were determined and whether this was accompanied by strategic planning on how said targets might actually be achieved, which may be an interesting future area of enquiry.

5. POLICY FRAMEWORKS FOR ADULT LEARNING

This section of the report reviews the adult learning policy frameworks that exist in Member States. By policy frameworks, we mean the set of strategies or legislation which establish the direction for adult learning, as well the policy which defines particular approaches or activities. The expert reports and questionnaire has offered new levels of insight around 'what exists' across Europe in terms of policy for adult learning. This section reviews the policy landscape with respect to what is in place within national contexts, and offers a comparative perspective as to how they differ or align.

Policy frameworks often comprise a number of layers. Countries exhibit different elements of policy frameworks, although the following aspects are often in place:

- **Main legislative act(s)** establish the governance system and responsibilities for adult learning. Such acts might be overarching, usually without an end-date;
- **Main strategy(-ies)** set vision, goals and directions for the development of adult learning. These might apply over the long-term;
- **Main implementing act(s)** act to set concrete actions, budgets, targets for adult learning as well as guiding the implementation of national adult learning policy, usually applying over a short-term (often with a defined end/ implementation date).

The country experts reported on the various elements making up the policy framework for their own country. Section 5.1 explores what can be seen across EU28 according to the perspective of these country experts.

5.1. Main legislative act(s) governing the provision of adult learning

Adult learning is governed by many different legislative acts, often having a broader focus than solely adult learning, for instance might focus on general, vocational or higher education. This reflects the breadth of the adult learning sector in many countries, covering provision from public employment services; the formal education system; the non-formal education system, and what is delivered through companies.

Table 5.1 outlines an overview of main types of legislative acts as reported by country experts in the questionnaire and country reports. In the final column the year of the latest major reform on adult learning at the national (or nearest relevant) level is indicated.

Table 5.1: Adult learning coverage in national education and employment law

	Adult education laws	General education laws	Vocational Education and Training laws, incl. Continuing VET	Higher education laws	Labour laws / PES	Other	Year latest reform ³²
AT	X		X	X		X ³³	2014
BE	X				X		2007
BG	X	X	X	X	X		2015
HR	X	X	X			X ³⁴	2010
CY	X	X	X				2012
CZ		X		X	X	X ³⁵	2006
DK	X					X ³⁶	2017
EE	X						2015
FI	X	X		X			2018
FR			X		X		2015
DE	X		X	X	X		2014
EL	X						2010
HU	X		X			X ³⁷	2013
IE			X			X ³⁸	2011
IT	X	X	X		X	X ³⁹	2014
LV		X	X	X			2016
LT	X						2017
LU	X		X				2012
MT	X					X ⁴⁰	2015
NL	X	X	X	X		X ⁴¹	2015
PL		X		X	X		2012
PT	X	X	X	X		X ⁴²	No data
RO	X	X	X	X	X		2015
SK	X		X		X	X ⁴³	2011
SI	X	X	X				2018
ES	X	X	X			X ⁴⁴	2015
SE	X	X	X	X	X		2000
UK			X		X	X ⁴⁵	2017
Total	22	14	19	11	11		

Source: Country reports

³² Based on the assessment of the country researchers. No data for PT.

³³ Law on the National Qualifications Framework

³⁴ Croatian Qualifications Framework Act

³⁵ Act on Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results; Trade Licensing Act

³⁶ Act on Special Education for Adults; Act on Danish courses for adult foreigners

³⁷ Government Decision the Digital Transformation of Education, Vocational Education, Higher Education and Adult Education, and the Digital Education Strategy of Hungary

³⁸ National Framework of Qualifications

³⁹ National system of competence certification

⁴⁰ Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning Regulations; Malta Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning Regulations

⁴¹ Participation Act; Library act

⁴² National qualification framework; Validation on non-formal and informal learning in higher education institutions

⁴³ Acts regulating certain professions and their continuing education; Strategy for Roma Integration until 2020

⁴⁴ Act on Sustainable Economy: introduces changes in the production system that has influence in education – mainly in VET

⁴⁵ The countries have skills acts.

On the basis of the information reported by the country experts, it can be seen that all Member States have some sort of legal basis for adult learning in place. In most Member States, adult learning has coverage simultaneously in a number of different types of national education and employment laws. The primary means of adult learning coverage in law is through inclusion directly within specific adult education laws – this was reported by country experts as being the case in 22 countries. This is encouraging since it indicates some degree of prioritisation of this theme in national policy terms. Coverage via general education laws is reported in 14 countries, and in a number of cases this is not mutually exclusive with the inclusion within specific adult education laws. For example, **Sweden, Spain, Slovenia, Romania, Portugal, the Netherlands, Italy, Finland, Cyprus, Croatia and Bulgaria** have both adult education and general education laws in place which establish the policy direction for adult learning in their respective Member States. Adult learning is outlined as being covered in Vocational education and training (VET) laws, including continuing education and training (CVET) in 19 of 28 Member States. In fact, in those countries where adult learning is not a theme included within VET laws, there are specific adult learning laws in place (**Malta, Lithuania, Greece, Finland, Estonia, Denmark, Czech Republic and Belgium**), indicating that a particular focus on adult learning is assured via other legal coverage. The exception to this is **Poland**, the expert for which reported that whilst adult learning is not addressed in VET or adult education laws, it does have some coverage within general education laws, as well as higher education laws and labour laws. A similar, modest proportion of Member States can be seen to have adult learning mentioned within higher education or labour laws, with experts for 11 Member States reporting this in each case. Only a small group of countries were reported as having adult education coverage within both higher education and labour laws; **Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Poland, Romania, Sweden**.

Overall, on the basis of this ‘mapping’ of legislative coverage, it is apparent that adult learning is generally covered within a number of types of education and employment law in each country. This can be taken to indicate a certain prioritisation of adult learning at the national level, and it might be assumed that where adult education laws are in place (i.e. in 22 countries), there is a stronger policy framework in place for adult learning, by virtue of it constituting a specific focus of legislation. Of course, the number of different types of legislation covering adult learning in a given country, is not in itself indicative that the policy topic has a strong legislative basis establishing a solid basis and direction for adult learning), nor that policies are effectively coordinated. Mapping what is in place in Member States does not point to an apparently more popular model – there are variations between countries in this respect in terms of the myriad national policies that address adult learning.

Here below, the different elements of legal frameworks are illustrated with examples from the countries, drawn from the country expert reports.

5.1.1. Adult Education Laws

Many Member States have specific Laws that cover (part of) the adult learning in the country. These laws can cover the entire adult learning provision (such as in Denmark); they can focus on a specific part of the adult learning system, such as the formal provision or the non-formal provision instead (see for instance **Estonia, Slovenia or Hungary**). On the other hand, it can have a very specific orientation, such as the recognition of prior learning (**Portugal**).

The most comprehensive adult learning Laws can be found in the Nordic countries. In **Denmark** for instance, there is a separate legal framework for adults alongside the legal framework related to initial education. The box below provides further details on the different Laws in place in this country.

Legal framework in Denmark⁴⁶

General adult education:

Act on general adult education and the recognition of prior learning in relation to the subject in general adult education, the higher preparatory training and education to secondary school (AVU (almen voksenuddannelse: General Adult Education) Act; most recent version 2013);

Act on higher preparatory examination courses (HF (Higher Preparatory Education); most recent version 2015);

Law on Institutions of general secondary education and general adult education etc. (most recent version 2016);

Act on Preparatory Adult and dyslexia education for adults (most recent version 2016).

Adult vocational education:

Act on labour market training, etc. (most recent version 2014);

Act on vocational training and higher education (further education) for adults (most recent version 2017);

Act on vocational education (including provision for adult vocational education – most recent version 2017);

Act on open education (vocational adult education) etc. (most recent version 2017);

Act on institutions for vocational education (most recent version 2016).

Popular adult education:

Act on popular adult education, educational voluntary associations, adult education centers and, 'open' universities ('Folkeoplysning' act, most recent version 2011).

Transversal:

Act on Special Education for Adults (most recent version 2015);

Act on Danish courses for adult foreigners (most recent version 2015).

In **Estonia**, the main governance system of adult learning is outlined in the Adult Education Act⁴⁷ as the central act of the adult education system. It stipulates the obligations of the state and local governments in the coordination of adult training, the obligation of employers to grant study leave to learners engaged in distance learning, evening courses, external study or part-time study and outlines the minimum requirements in place for all institutions offering courses. In **Slovenia**, adult education, in particular general, non-formal adult education, is regulated by the Adult Education Act⁴⁸, whilst a number of other countries (**Lithuania, Latvia**) have specific legislation on non-formal adult learning. All types and levels of formal education for adults (elementary, secondary, vocational and higher) are regulated by special sections within respective special Acts.⁴⁹ In **Hungary**, the

⁴⁶ All Danish legislation is available online through the website <https://www.retsinformation.dk>.

⁴⁷ Adult Education Act <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/529062015007/consolide>

⁴⁸ *Zakon o izobraževanju odraslih*, adopted in 1996 and amended in 2006:

<http://www.uradni-list.si/1/objava.jsp?sop=2006-01-4673>

⁴⁹ e.g. within Elementary School Act there are articles setting rules for adult participants.

Adult Training Act⁵⁰, aimed at focusing on employer needs, strengthening the labour market orientation of adult learning system; raising quality; increasing the level of knowledge acquired in adult training outside the school system to the level of knowledge obtained within the school system; providing more transparent regulation; providing more efficient supervision of the sector in order to ensure benefits of public investments (safeguarding national and EU resources). In **Portugal**, specific legislation published since 2000 regulates other forms of provision outside the formal general, higher and vocational educational provision such as recognition of prior learning, and adult education and training courses that lead to a formal school certification and/or professional qualification⁵¹.

Overall, it can be seen from the country reports that specific Laws have been enacted in many Member States which relate to a specific aspect of adult learning. The Nordic countries offer examples of where laws cover all adult learning provision, whilst a more common position is that laws would cover some elements of adult learning (whether with a focus on a type of adult learning) e.g. formal provision or a more specific focus (e.g. the recognition of prior learning). It is common that at the national level, the legal basis for adult learning is comprised of a number of different laws, enacted at different points in time.

5.1.2. General Education Laws

General education laws that cover aspects of adult learning can be distinguished into two types. Education laws that cover the whole education sector (including primary, secondary, vocational, higher and adult education) and education laws that focus on 'general' education, i.e. primary and secondary education. Concerning the latter, second chance education is often governed by these legal frameworks at the national level. **The Netherlands** is an example of this. In the Netherlands, second chance education (voortgezet algemeen volwassenenonderwijs: vavo), aimed at obtaining a secondary education qualification is covered by the Adult and Vocational Education Act and the general education law: Secondary Education Act⁵². **Poland** is an example of an overarching legal framework for education. In Poland, the Education System Act⁵³ introduced daily, evening, extramural, distance, and out-of-school learning. It paved the way for the creation of public and non-public adult schools and other institutions in Poland. Importantly, it separated the continuing education centres (CKU) and practical education centres (CKP) from schools, and allowed for the creation of regional and national networks

⁵⁰ Act LXXVII of 2013

⁵¹ Recognition of prior learning (in Portuguese *Reconhecimento, Validação e Certificação de Competências*) - Portaria n.º 211/2011, 26/05; Portaria n.º 232/2016, 29/08, and adult education and training courses (in Portuguese *Cursos de Educação e Formação de Adultos*) (Portaria n.º 817/2007, 27/07; Portaria n.º 230/2008, 7/03; Portaria n.º 710/2010, 17/08; Portaria n.º 1100/2010, 22/10; Portaria n.º 283/2011, 24/10; Despacho n.º 334/2012, 11/01). These forms of provision can be developed by the Qualify centres (in what refers to the recognition of prior learning) and also by other organisations (concerning adult education and training courses and modular training). Qualify centres are part of larger organisations (public, profit-making or civil society). These centres may integrate quite different organisations. In September 2017, 300 centres were operational, of which most of these operated in public schools and in vocational education and training centres under the Institute of Employment and Vocational Education and Training. A few centres were in very diverse institutions, including in civil society organisations such as third sector, social solidarity and local development associations. The existing centres can carry out recognition of prior learning leading to school certification. Some of these are allowed to develop recognition of prior learning leading to professional qualification (According to official numbers from <http://www.portaldasqualificacoes.pt/Pesquisa/pesquisarCQEP.jsp>, accessed on 20/09/2017)

⁵² Adult and Vocational Education Act (Wet educatie en beroepsonderwijs: WEB: 1995) and the Secondary Education Act (Wet op het voortgezet onderwijs: WVO 1963; revised in 1998): <http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0002399/2017-08-01> [accessed 20-10-2017].)

⁵³ Education System Act of 1991 (*Ustawa o Systemie Oświaty*), which was subsequently amended in 1998 and 2003

of continuing education institutions. In **Portugal**, the general law of the education system from 1986 refers to formal second-chance education (basic and secondary education) that leads to a school certification (of 9th or 12th years of school education). This provision can be found in regular schools, vocational education, training schools, and centres. Adult basic and secondary education is provided by State-funded (public or private) schools. Compulsory education (basic and secondary education)⁵⁴ comprises 12 years of school education. In formal second-chance education, traditional school subjects are provided based on modular units in adult secondary education.

In summary, adult learning can have legislative coverage via general education laws, either those which cover the whole education sector, or just general education (primary and secondary education).

5.1.3. VET Laws

In many countries, parts of adult learning are closely related to the VET sector. This concerns both IVET and CVET. Often, the distinction between what is legally arranged for young people and adults is not so clear, as the same arrangements apply to both target groups. In **Sweden**, vocational training is regulated in the Government Ordinance SFS (2000:634). It aims to strengthen the employability skills of individuals. Only those who are at least 25 years old and registered at the employment office can access vocational training, however, also those with illnesses that affects their working ability, youth on "youth guarantee" schemes and refugees under 25 can access this training. Validation of prior learning is regulated in the same Ordinance as vocational training.⁵⁵ In **Ireland**, the VET framework also has an extended scope. Further education and training in Ireland is largely state regulated. Public funding for the sector is channelled by the Department of Education and Skills through SOLAS, the further Education and Training Authority⁵⁶. The functions of SOLAS, which are set out in the Further Education and Training Act 2013 are wide-ranging, incorporating strategic development for the sector, funding for the main providers of training in the sector - the Education and Training Boards (ETBs), evaluation of ETBs, and programmes and development of new and existing further education and training (FET) programmes. The first step in this task for SOLAS was to publish the Further Education and Training Strategy 2014 to 2019⁵⁷. This document is the current key policy framework underpinning FET in Ireland⁵⁸.

Five high level strategic goals were identified:

1. Skills for the Economy: to address the current and future needs of learners, jobseekers, employers and employees and to contribute to national economic development,

⁵⁴ Decreto-lei n.º 85/2009, 27/08.

⁵⁵ In March 2016, a new Act (2016:145) and Ordinance was introduced (SFS 2016:157). This Ordinance regulates recognition of vocational qualifications in line with the EU directive 2013/55/EU (Amending Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications and Regulation (EU) No 1024/2012 on administrative cooperation through the Internal Market Information System ('the IMI Regulation'): <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32013L0055>

⁵⁶ <http://www.solas.ie/Pages/Homepage.aspx>

⁵⁷ SOLAS. (2014). Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019. Dublin. SOLAS. <http://www.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/FETStrategy2014-2019.pdf>

⁵⁸ SOLAS. (2014). Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019. Dublin. SOLAS. <http://www.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/FETStrategy2014-2019.pdf>

2. Active Inclusion: to support the active inclusion of people of all abilities in society with special reference to literacy and numeracy,
3. Quality Provision: to provide high quality education and training programmes and to meet the appropriate national and international quality standards,
4. Integrated Planning and Funding: FET provision will be planned and funded on the basis of objective analysis of needs and evidence of social and economic impact,
5. Standing of FET: to ensure a valued learning path leading to agreed employment, career, developmental, personal and social options.

In **Germany**, the Federal Law on Vocational Education and Training⁵⁹ regulates the principles of initial and continuing VET and covers thus also the key regulations for professional further education in relation to certain areas of advancement qualifications, such as master craftsmen. In addition, the Law on Financial support for advanced professional qualification (e.g. master craftsmen programmes⁶⁰) regulates the personal and programme requirements which are to be fulfilled in order to be entitled to receive public grants and loans.⁶¹

5.1.4. Higher Education Laws

Traditionally, higher education legal frameworks have provision for adult learners as well. Usually, this is possible through opening up opportunities to participate in higher education for example through providing more flexibility in how the learning takes place, be it through part-time or distance learning for instance. In **Bulgaria** for instance, the higher education law is not specifically addressing adults, but it defines that higher education is open for adults to participate⁶² – defines types of higher schools; defines the system for upgrading vocational qualification). In **Portugal**, the higher education legal framework sets the entrance path for adult learners. In **Austria**, the Limited Higher Education Entrance Examination (*Studienberechtigungsprüfung*) was regulated for all tertiary institutions in the three respective laws: the University law, the law for the Universities of applied science and the law for Higher Education Act. The study qualification examination prepares for a specific study program. However, the definition of concrete requirements and the content to be tested is decided by the tertiary institutions autonomously.

5.1.5. Labour laws / PES Laws

The more complex and diverse area of legal frameworks related to adult learning is what is related to labour laws, social security and the functioning of the Public Employment Services. In some countries, part of the education sector, usually the VET sector is (partially) governed by employment laws. In **Germany** for instance, SGB II and SGB III (Social security code – books no. II and III⁶³) regulate Initial and Continuing Vocational

⁵⁹ Berufsbildungsgesetz: BBiG

⁶⁰ Gesetz zur Förderung der beruflichen Aufstiegsfortbildung: AFBG

⁶¹ Whereas the loans are provided by KfW banking group – the federal government covers also the costs of interest subsidies during the training period

⁶² Higher Education Act (1995, last amendments 2017)

⁶³ Some years ago, laws regulating different aspects of social security and social legislation, more in general, have been brought under one overarching formal "rule", which was then called "Sozialgesetzbuch" and simply numbered I to XII so far. For example, SGB III refers to the law previously called "Arbeitsförderungsgesetz" (Employment Promotion Act), while SGB II comprises the "Grundsicherung für Arbeitssuchende" (Basic Social Security for Job-seekers)

Education and Training for job-seekers with different pre-conditions and pre-qualifications. For those without a formal qualification, it regulates the principles of support to gain a formal qualification or a higher formal qualification. SGB III regulates VET for the unemployed. The distinction may look somewhat artificial: the latter concerns those receiving unemployment benefits, which is usually ensured for a period of up to one year (which requires that the unemployed person has been in employment for at least two years prior to entering into unemployment), while the former concerns those, who are no longer recipients of unemployment benefits, rather than are entitled to basic social welfare allowance.

In **Belgium (Flanders)**, related to employment-related training, the main providers are the PES (Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding: VDAB)⁶⁴ and Syntra⁶⁵.⁶⁶ VDAB is best known for targeting their services towards job-seekers and helping them increase their chances of a successful job application, they also support employers through helping them with training. Syntra's main focus is on entrepreneurs as they are specialised in enterprise training.

In **Belgium (Wallonia)**, in relation to 'labour market training', Le Forem⁶⁷ is the Walloon counterpart of the VDAB, and is the main office for Vocational Education and Employment, mainly targeting its' services to job-seekers, guiding them through the process, helping them to secure employment, on the one hand through training, but also through helping jobseekers writing their CV (Curriculum Vitae). IFAPME (Institut wallon de Formation en Alternance et des indépendants et Petites et Moyennes Entreprises) is the equivalent of Syntra in Flanders, targeting the self-employed, helping them to set up and maintain their own business through enterprise training⁶⁸.

In the **Czech Republic**, regulations and rules related to work performance concern the Labour Code (professional development of employees), the Employment Act (provisions on the development of human resources) and regulations for carrying into effect the Acts. In addition, the Act on Promoting Small and Medium-sized Enterprise enables to provide support, among others, for education and training in upper secondary school programmes completed with an apprenticeship certificate, and to enhance professional qualifications of adults.

5.1.6. Other Laws

A significant part of the country reports mention legal arrangements concerning the establishment and implementation of the National Qualifications Framework as having an effect on the adult learning system, but this is however not explicitly stated. For instance, in **Austria**, the NQF law includes adult learning in the governance structure. The law on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) that came into force on March 15, 2016,

⁶⁴ <https://www.vdab.be/>

⁶⁵ <http://www.syntra.be/>

⁶⁶ Decreet VDAB:

http://www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/cqi_loi/change_lg.pl?language=nl&la=N&cn=2004050753&table_name=wet and Decreet SYNTRA Vlaanderen: <https://codex.vlaanderen.be/Portals/Codex/documenten/1013081.html> VDAB was established in 1984 and Syntra's predecessor was VIZO (Vlaams Instituut voor Zelfstandig Ondernemen), which had been established through the signing of a Decree in 1991.

⁶⁷ Le Forem was initially set up by a Decree signed on 16 December 1988, but further operationalised by Decrees signed in 1999 and 2003. Le Forem legal basis:

<http://www.pesmonitor.eu/Database/DatabaseNew.aspx?Lang=EN&PES=34&Topic=1&Content=5>

⁶⁸ IFAPME was established by Decree in July 2003 (Décret IFAPME:

<https://wallex.wallonie.be/index.php?doc=4042>)

regulates the allocation and recognition procedures of qualifications. The structures for the implementation of the NQF and for the recognition procedures are defined by law; adult education is also represented in the governance structure. The assignments of the formal sector are now largely completed; as a next step, the non-formal sector is to be assigned. NQF service bodies will be established, which will advise and support the educational institutions in the process of assigning qualifications.

Member States also have specific legal frameworks related to regulated professions that can impact the adult learning system. In **Slovakia** for instance, the Slovak Trade Licence Act specifies that for some regulated professions, the person wishing to be granted a trade licence has to satisfy the conditions for professional capacity and competency.⁶⁹ Also in **Czech Republic**, the Trade Licensing Act specifies requirements for fulfilling professional competence to acquire particular trade licenses which include notifiable trades (vocational and professional trades) and also permitted trades where a proof of professional competence is required.

Another framework is the special adult education and the training of migrants in **Denmark**⁷⁰.

In a number of countries decentralisation laws have passed that affect how adult learning is governed and provided. This is mentioned in for instance the following country reports:

- **France:** New Territorial Organisation of the Republic⁷¹ aims at reinforcing the competences of the Regions and of the Public Establishments for the Cooperation among the neighbouring municipalities. It therefore has direct impacts on the provision of learning opportunities. The territorial instruments of the Public Employment Service – such as Missions locales, Maisons de l’emploi, agences Cap emploi, Écoles de la deuxième chance – will be placed under the responsibility of the Regional Councils from the 1st January 2016 on.
- **Netherlands:** An important development related to the governance of adult learning is the decentralisation of responsibilities for social and employment policies from the national government to local governments. The most prominent legislative framework is the ‘Participation Act’⁷². This Act supports all people that can work but need some kind of support in order to work.⁷³ Municipalities are responsible for providing/organising counselling, support, additional training, supported employment, reintegration trajectories and employment subsidies. The idea is that at local level, better and more tailored support can be provided. At this level the coordination between different organisations involved in different

⁶⁹ European Commission; Cedefop; ICF International (2014). European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2014: country report Slovakia.

http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2014/87077_SK.pdf

⁷⁰ Act on Special Education for Adults (most recent version 2015); Act on Danish courses for adult foreigners (most recent version 2015)

⁷¹ a.k.a Law NOTRe), Law no 2015-991 (7 August 2015). This Law belongs to the Act III of the Decentralisation Law implemented during the 2012-2017 Presidency.

⁷² Participatiewet. See for the legal text: http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0015703/geldigheidsdatum_01-01-2015 [accessed 20-10-2017]

⁷³ The act, which was enacted starting from January 1st 2015, replaces the ‘Wet Werk en Bijstand’ (WWB), ‘Wet Sociale Werkvoorziening’ (WSW) and parts of the ‘Wet werk en arbeidsondersteuning jonggehandicapten (Wajong)’ See: <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/participatiewet> [accessed 20-10-2017]

types of support can be effectively and more efficiently organised.⁷⁴ The recent developments in relation to decentralisation concern primarily an amendment of the governance structure. Secondly, these initiatives aim to deliver better quality (at reduced costs).

- **UK:** For the most part⁷⁵, adult learning in the UK is a devolved responsibility of administrations (and government agencies) in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales. Within the largest of these, England, there have been further discussions about the devolution of skills decision-making on funding to English regions and/or cities. In many areas, devolution of skills planning agreements is likely to be enacted in 2017/18 as a partnership between local authorities, business representatives, learning providers, and executive agencies of central government. This is part of a much wider debate in the UK about the most effective spatial level for policy implementation. How spatial planning intersects with industry sector planning is a key part of the system in the UK.

In other countries, such as **Germany, Italy** and **Spain**, the main responsibility for governing adult learning, lies at the level of the Regions. In **Germany**, for instance, the federal level has limited legislative responsibility in relation to adult learning, limited to vocational education and training as well as for the unemployed. The remaining responsibility lies with the states (Länder), which have introduced laws of further education, covering non-vocational adult learning, particularly for general, political and cultural adult learning. In **Italy**, in addition to the legal acts, the federal level as well as the states operate via regulations, which do not have the same status as a law, and or funding programmes. With regard to adult learning, such programmes concern modalities of funding programmes for individual support as well as for programme or project related measures. For example, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research has established funding regulations for development projects targeting (functionally) illiterate people in relation to the 'Decade on Alphabetisation and Basic Education' as well as in support of opening up higher education for non-traditional students, for research projects on Innovation in Further Education, as well as for the training vouchers etc. The states act on a similar basis, e.g. establishing Lifelong Learning Networks or their funding regulations for training vouchers or active labour market policy-programmes etc. The **Spanish** report refers to the federal education laws and the regional ones. For instance, Andalusia's Education Act (2007) refers to education for adults and learning networks, and stresses the role of ICT and distance education.

Summary of Adult Learning Laws

In reviewing what is in place in terms of legislation for adult learning, the country reports and questionnaire have informed what in basic terms might be considered a 'mapping exercise' – that is the types and combinations of legislation that comprise the legal

⁷⁴ The introduction of the Participation Act faced criticism. The criticism mostly concerned that local governments were considered not to be fully equipped to carry out the new tasks and that the shift of responsibilities came at the same time as a severe budget cut in social and employment policies. More fundamental criticism concerned that the act insufficiently takes into account the high unemployment rate, especially under low educated. Secondly, the employment positions in which many of the target groups will have to be re-integrated are difficult to find and hence it remains to be seen whether it is feasible to create the required number of jobs. See for instance: Tinnemans, Will (2014), Participatiewet wordt een drama april 2014, Sociaal Bestek: <http://www.mogroep.nl/thema/transities-transformatie/nieuws/3090-scherpe-kritiek-op-participatiewet> [accessed 20-10-2017]

⁷⁵ Some aspects of policy to support for unemployed people is made on a UK-wide or Great Britain (i.e. England, Scotland, and Wales) Basis.

framework for adult learning. Adult learning is covered by one or more (usually a combination of) adult learning laws, general education laws, VET/ CVET laws, higher education laws, labour laws and some other legal provisions (e.g. relating to validation).

On considering what exists and is in place across different Member States, a number of observations can be noted on the basis of information from the country reports and questionnaire:

- All Member States have some sort of legal basis for adult learning in place;
- Most Member States offer coverage for adult learning across a number of different types of national education and employment laws;
- The primary means of adult learning coverage in law is through inclusion directly within specific adult education laws as can be seen to be the case within 22 countries, which could be taken as an indicator that adult learning is prioritised in national policy terms;
- Coverage of adult learning via general education laws is reported in half of Member States, and in a number of cases specific adult education laws are also in place;
- Mapping what is in place in Member States does not point to an apparently more popular model – there are variations between countries in this respect. There is a myriad of national types of policy making up the legislative framework for adult learning. No 'ideal type' of policy framework arrangement emerges on the basis of the country report and questionnaires, as the quality and content of coverage varies. For instance, some national lifelong learning strategies will only briefly mention adult learning whilst some will be more prescriptive about what adult learning should focus on and how it should be delivered.
- The policy framework in place in decentralised systems can be seen to offer a variation on policy framework arrangements since regulation may be enacted at different spatial levels (in some cases with varying levels of status, as per the example of federal versus state policy in **Germany**). This offers a model for tailoring local policy.

Overall, on the basis of this 'mapping' of legislative coverage, it is apparent that adult learning is generally covered within a number of types of education and employment law in each country. What this quantitative assessment doesn't indicate however, is the quality of provisions laid out with respect to this policy priority, nor the degree to which adult learning has been mainstreamed as a consideration incorporated across a range of relevant and cross-cutting policy areas. Coverage of adult learning via adult education laws (as in 22 countries), and/ or through inclusion in a range of policy types, is welcomed and of course is suggestive that there is a certain priority placed on adult learning. On the basis of the country reports and questionnaire, many Member States, seem to have an established legislative basis for adult learning in place, though to consider the quality of legislative provisions, we need to consider how the legislative intent is translated into provision. We look next to the role of national strategies in this context.

5.2. Strategies related to adult learning

Besides the main legal frameworks, countries have strategic plans and priorities which indicate the extent to which adult learning might be prioritised and delivered within specific national contexts. The following table draws on information from the country reports to map the different types of strategies that can be seen to be in place.

Whilst coverage of adult learning within legislation can be seen as relatively established across Member States, coverage of adult learning within national strategic documentation can be seen as more piecemeal. Inclusion can often be seen within overarching lifelong learning strategies, in 13 Member States overall. However, it should be noted that lifelong learning strategies tend to refer to a broader process of 'cradle to grave' learning rather than specifically covering adult learning issues. Overall, the coverage of adult learning within such documentation appears limited. Notwithstanding this, this kind of strategy is the main vehicle through which adult learning legislation is translated into policy provision. Coverage of adult learning within specific skill strategies or reform strategies (such as in the area of VET or Higher Education) is not a particular common approach when it comes to defining provision for adult learning. Worth noting is that adult learning is included in generic skills/ competitiveness strategies in 8 Member States – perhaps indicating that adult learning is indeed recognised as a key to increasing economic productivity and growth. Conspicuous by its absence is inclusion of adult learning within social inclusion strategies, although adult learning may be recognised as having a social equity aspect within the coverage offered through more economic focussed strategies.

Table 5.2: Adult learning coverage in national socio-economic strategies

	Overarching lifelong learning strategies	Strategy on specific skills (i.e. literacy, digital etc.)	Reform strategies for VET / HE	Skills strategies / competitiveness strategies	Other (for instance internationalisation, validation, quality and guidance)
AT				X	X ⁷⁶
BE				X	
BG (ND)					
HR (ND)					
CY	X				
CZ		X	X	X	X ⁷⁷
DK	X				
EE	X			X	
FI	X				
FR					X ⁷⁸
DE (ND)					
EL (ND)					
HU	X	X			
IE (ND)					
IT (ND)					
LV	X				
LT				X	
LU	X		X		
MT	X				
NL		X	X		
PL	X			X	
PT					X ⁷⁹
RO	X				
SK (ND)					
SI	X				
ES	X		X	X	
SE	X	X			X ⁸⁰
UK		X		X	
Total	13	5	4	8	

⁷⁶ Professionalisation and Quality Assurance; Educational guidance and counselling; Austrian Validation Strategy

⁷⁷ Youth Support Strategy 2014-2020

⁷⁸ Not a specific strategy, but strong willingness to reduce the labour market segmentation by "improving vocational education and training", in particular for job seekers. There is the objective of promoting decent jobs adapted to current issues such as globalisation, technological shift and the greening of the economy.

⁷⁹ Not a specific strategy, but aim to revitalise adult education and training as a central pillar of the qualifications system

⁸⁰ National strategy for validation; Proposition on experimental work with branch schools; National Strategy for Internationalisation of Universities and University Colleges

Source: Country reports

Here below, the different types of strategies are illustrated with examples from the countries.

5.2.1. Overarching lifelong learning strategies

European Union Member States were encouraged by the European Commission to establish lifelong learning strategies. The Memorandum on lifelong learning (2000) stimulated Member States in establishing structures to reach adults and to include them in the learning society. The memorandum was followed by a Communication on making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a reality (2001), contributing to the establishment of a European area of lifelong learning, to empower citizens to move freely between learning settings, jobs, regions and countries, making the most of their knowledge and competences, and to meet the goals and ambitions of the European Union and the candidate countries to be more prosperous, inclusive, tolerant and democratic. The Member States were encouraged to take up the message and to invest in their lifelong learning policies in order to increase the participation of adults in learning. The Council resolution on lifelong learning reconfirmed the importance of implementing lifelong learning strategies in 2002.⁸¹ Explicit lifelong learning strategies have been adopted by the majority of countries.⁸² Some of the countries did this in response to the European policies (Lisbon strategy and the Memorandum on lifelong learning), for instance **Estonia, Latvia, and Bulgaria**; others already had developed such a strategy, for example **Sweden, the Netherlands, and Belgium (Flanders and Walloon Region)**. Most countries developed their lifelong learning strategy before the publication of the Action Plan on Adult Learning in 2007⁸³. In 2017, not in all countries these lifelong learning strategies are still in place or provide a political guidance in improving lifelong learning policies and provision. The analysis of the 2017 country reports show that 13 Member States have a recent lifelong learning strategy. In the Member States that have a lifelong learning strategy, the term is often not more than a label for educational policies in general. In this context, very limited attention is paid to adult learning.

Two groups of countries can be identified in relation to lifelong learning strategies and the attention that adult learning receives in them; namely, countries that developed a broad strategy in relation to all educational sectors and in which the focus is more on initial education (broad lifelong learning strategies); and countries that developed a strategy that explicitly focuses on adult learning (strategies focused on adult learning). Compared to a mapping conducted in 2011, the current examples show a shift to more adult learning related strategies instead of broader education strategies.⁸⁴

In **Cyprus**, the national priorities for adult education were established in the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2014-2020⁸⁵, which was approved by the Council of Ministers

⁸¹ Council of the European Union (2002), COUNCIL RESOLUTION of 27 June 2002 on lifelong learning (2002/C 163/01)

⁸² European Commission (2009), Key competences for a changing world, Draft 2010 joint progress report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the "Education & Training 2010 work programme", COM(2009)640 final

⁸³ European Commission (2007), Communication from the Commission of 27 September 2007 presenting the Action Plan on Adult learning - It is always a good time to learn [COM(2007) 558 final.

⁸⁴ See Research voor Beleid, Broek, S.D., Buiskool, B.J., Hake, B. (2011), Impact of ongoing reforms in education and training on the adult learning sector (2nd phase) Final report, p. 70.

⁸⁵ See: http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/csr2014/nrp2014_cyprus_en.pdf [accessed 08/08/2016]

in June 2014. In light of the persistent high unemployment rate and the low level of skill attainment by the adult population, the strategy planning represents an effort to combat these challenges through education and training. The strategy has four priority pillars⁸⁶: improving access to lifelong learning for all and recognising learning outcomes; improving the quality and efficiency of education and training; promoting research and development to support lifelong learning; and improving employability by promoting entry and re-entry to the labour market. In **Hungary**, all of the different initiatives corresponding to the field of adult learning, were collected and incorporated into the 'Lifelong Learning Policy Framework Strategy 2014-2020' that was adopted by the government in November 2014. The LLL strategy makes efforts to visualize linkages and explore synergies between different parts of the education system, as well as to define complex areas of interventions in a lifelong approach under the identified three comprehensive objectives: 1) expanding the participation in lifelong learning and improving its accessibility; 2) strengthening the principles of lifelong learning in the educational and training systems as well as in adult learning; 3) making the quality and the achievements of learning visible and valued and acknowledged. The 2009-2011 **Luxembourg** Lifelong Learning strategy made provisions for a number of measures to be taken to give higher visibility to lifelong learning and to increase its efficiency. Within the strategy new approaches to adult teaching were foreseen. The renewed 2012 Lifelong Learning strategy⁸⁷ defined six measures: creation of a Lifelong Learning (LLL) Consultative Commission; a Luxembourg Qualification Framework (CLQ); LLL adaptation to the learner and diversity of the Luxembourgish society; a single platform; quality; professionalisation of guidance; and, the creation of the position of adult trainer.⁸⁸ To ensure quality of training and trainers, Luxembourg developed a series of indicators in the framework of EQAVET under which qualifications of teachers in IVET is required by law.⁸⁹ In **Slovenia**, the Minister for Education, Science and Sport adopted a Lifelong Learning Strategy in 2007⁹⁰. The main weakness of this document was its lack of feasibility due to absence of corresponding action programme, which actually was a part of the original document, but which has not been approved. **Denmark** has a long-standing lifelong learning strategy still being relevant today (see box).

In **Denmark**, the most important strategic document for adult learning is '**Denmark's strategy for lifelong learning**' which was introduced in 2007⁹¹. The document was not a result of focused strategy development, but was a report to the European Commission summarising Danish education policy. It drew on the work of the Danish Globalisation Council, a high-level task force established by the Prime Minister and including also other ministers, chairmen of the key employer and employee

⁸⁶ Information taken from the National Strategy of Lifelong Learning 2014-2020. Available at: [http://www.dgepcd.gov.cy/dgepcd/dgepcd.nsf/499A1CB95981643FC2257C7D00486172/\\$file/National%20%20Lifelong%20Learning%20Strategy%20in%20English%20\(Summary\).pdf](http://www.dgepcd.gov.cy/dgepcd/dgepcd.nsf/499A1CB95981643FC2257C7D00486172/$file/National%20%20Lifelong%20Learning%20Strategy%20in%20English%20(Summary).pdf) [accessed 20/09/2017]

⁸⁷ Anefore, (2012), Livre blanc stratégie nationale du lifelong learning [White paper for a national strategy of lifelong learning], <http://www.men.public.lu/catalogue-publications/adultes/informationsgenerales-offre-cours/livre-blanc-lifelong-learning/131025-s3l-livreblanc.pdf>

⁸⁸ The 2012 strategy defined 6 transversal principles; the adaptation of learning to the different phases of the learner's journey; student-centred learning; professional learner orientation; coordination; certification and quality assurance; and, enhanced access.

⁸⁹ INFPC, (2016). Supporting teachers and trainers for successful reforms and quality of vocational education and training: mapping their professional development in the EU – Luxembourg. Cedefop ReferNet thematic perspectives series, https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2016/ReferNet_LU_TT.pdf

⁹⁰ http://www.mss.gov.si/fileadmin/mss.gov.si/pageuploads/podrocje/razvoj_solstva/IU2010/Strategija_VZU.pdf

⁹¹ Danish Ministry of Education (2007), Denmark's strategy for lifelong learning Education and lifelong skills upgrading for all: http://asemilhub.org/fileadmin/www.dpu.dk/asemeducationandresearchhubforlifelonglearning/nationalstrategy/resources_2221.pdf

organisations, other stakeholders and experts. The Globalisation Council focused on education and research, seeing a high level of educational attainment and good educational opportunities as some of the most important preconditions for strong national competitiveness and welfare.

The lifelong learning strategy uses a broad concept of lifelong learning, including all types of education that people may engage in through the life course. For adult education and learning the report describes a shared responsibility with a division of labour between the different actors in the field and lays out some key goals to be promoted.

The shared responsibility envisaged is that individuals are responsible for continuously developing their competences: enterprises are responsible for the development of the competences of employees in line with the needs of work and the labour market; the social partners should contribute to the development of competences and to learning at work; and, authorities should 'provide a good framework, relevant education programmes of high quality and the necessary incentives to ensure that everyone in the labour market has good opportunities to participate in adult education and continuing training'.⁹²

The goals defined are:⁹³

Everyone shall engage in lifelong learning;
Adult education and continuing training efforts must be effective and flexible. They shall support good job opportunities for individuals, good competitiveness in enterprises and high employment and prosperity in society;
Adult education and continuing training must provide everyone with opportunities to improve competences – not least those with the lowest level of formal education;
Adult education and continuing training must reflect changes in the qualification requirements and needs of the labour market.

Since the publication lifelong learning strategy, no comprehensive strategic platforms for adult learning have been presented by Danish governments. A reason for this could be that education policy during this period has increasingly focused on other sectors of education, in particular basic school education (primary and lower secondary) and higher education. Another reason could be that the system of adult learning and education in Denmark is well developed (and participation is high) so that needs for change mainly manifest themselves in the sub-sectors of adult learning. It may be concluded that the shared responsibility and the general goals defined in the 2007 report are still a valid characterisation of Danish adult learning strategy.

Lithuania's Progress Strategy 2014-2020, although in name not a lifelong learning strategy, aims to foster adult education as one of the priorities. The Strategy indicates that each citizen (not only excluded groups) should have the opportunity to fulfil their potential,

⁹² Danish Ministry of Education (2007), Denmark's strategy for lifelong learning Education and lifelong skills upgrading for all, p. 21.

⁹³ Danish Ministry of Education (2007), Denmark's strategy for lifelong learning Education and lifelong skills upgrading for all, p. 22.

and be active in lifelong learning, knowledge creation, creativity and entrepreneurship. This Strategy plans to increase the quality of education, accessibility and service variety with a special emphasis on creating adult learning possibilities and incentives. Besides, the Strategy plans to secure effective support in matching learners to professional plans⁹⁴. In **Latvia**, The Lifelong Learning Policy Guidelines for 2007-2013 (Lifelong Learning Strategy)⁹⁵ states its long-term goal as being 'to ensure lifelong education according to the residents' interests, ability and the socioeconomic development needs in the regions'. The sub-goals include ensuring access to lifelong learning for residents, irrespective of their age, gender, and educational background, place of residence, income level, ethnicity or functional disability. It also includes creating a quality education offer for adults that provides sustainable competencies for work, civic engagement, personal growth, and promotes the development of the knowledge economy and democratic society in Latvia; and creating a comprehensive policy framework and effective management of resources"⁹⁶. The guiding principles for future development of the adult learning sector were set out in the Education Development Guidelines 2015-2020. According to these guidelines (specifically the section on 'adult participation in educational activities'), for Latvia to achieve the target of 15% participation in adult education by 2020, the adult learning programmes offer should be expanded, effective management of resources (including financial) should be ensured, and more effective use of existing facilities, e.g. libraries, museums, cultural centres and other institutions providing adult learning, including informal learning opportunities, should be encouraged⁹⁷.

5.2.2. Strategy on specific skills (i.e. literacy, digital etc.)

There is also some coverage of adult learning within strategies focused on specific skills. Member States might also establish strategies which focus on building skills in particular areas, and in so doing address specific skills gaps. Member States establish specific strategies to solve specific skills gaps. These strategies are interesting in the framework of the Upskilling Pathways as often these relate to basic skills and digital skills.

In **the Netherlands**, in 2011, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science published the Action Plan 2012-2015 to combat low-literacy levels.⁹⁸ The Action Plan strived to improve the literacy level of adults. This plan contained the following actions: 1) in adult education, focus on language and numeracy; 2) increase quality and effectiveness of the courses; 3) improve the transparency concerning price and quality of courses; 4) test new innovative approaches in pilot-projects; 5) improve mobilisation strategies to reach low-literate persons; 6) monitor progress and effectiveness of the Action Plan. As a follow-up of the Action Plan, in 2016 a new programme was initiated and is currently being implemented. The action programme 'Count on Skills' ('Tel mee met Taal')⁹⁹ is a recent

⁹⁴ 2014–2020 metų Nacionalinės pažangos programa
http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=439028&p_query=&p_tr2=2

⁹⁵ <https://m.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=153578>

⁹⁶ EC. Eurydice (2016) Latvia: Lifelong Learning Strategy. Retrieved from https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Latvia:Lifelong_Learning_Strategy [accessed 12.10.2016.]

⁹⁷ Legislation, Cabinet of Ministers, (2015). Izglītības attīstības pamatnostādņu 2014. –2020.gadam īstenošanas plāns 2015.–2017.gadam [Education Development Guidelines for 2014- 2020 Implementation Plan 2015-2017], §10. Retrieved from <https://www.vestnesis.lv/op/2015/126.9> [accessed at 9.09.2016]

⁹⁸ Ministerie van OCW (2011), Geletterdheid in Nederland, Actieplan laaggeletterdheid 2012-2015; <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten-en-publicaties/richtlijnen/2011/09/08/bijlage-1-actieplan-laaggeletterdheid-2012-2015-geletterdheid-in-nederland.html> [accessed 20-10-2017]

⁹⁹ Ministerie van OCW (2016), Actieprogramma 'Tel mee met Taal'; <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/volwassenenonderwijs/documenten/kamerstukken/2015/03/06/actieprogramma-tel-mee-met-taal> [accessed 20-10-2017]

policy programme that is developed in cooperation with several departments, including the Ministry of Education, Culture & Science, the Ministry of Health, Welfare & Sport, and the Ministry of Social Affairs & Employment. The overall aim of the programme is to combat the perception that people with a low literacy level do not 'count' in society and to prevent people with limited language skills from becoming marginalised. **Germany** and **Bulgaria** also offer experience in promoting literacy through specific skill strategies.

Concerning digital skills, in **Hungary**, the Government Resolution on Digital Education Strategy for Hungary¹⁰⁰ was accepted in 2016. The resolution ensured the implementation of Digital Education Strategy highlighting some of the measures in the field of adult learning. The Government Resolution confirms the right of every Hungarian adult citizen to get access to provision of key digital competences at basic level for free of charge, at maximum 30 km distance from the place of residence. It also underlines measures to promote learning and promote digital competences as well as measures on how adult learning provisions can exploit digital tools and learning to a higher extent. It also refers to the national reference framework for info-communication that describes digital competences in the dimensions defined by DIGCOMP¹⁰¹.

In the **Czech Republic**, a strategy for promoting digital literacy was adopted in 2015, with a main focus of supporting Czech citizens to develop their use of digital skills as part of their lifelong learning. In particular, in the context of education and training, the strategy highlights the ways in which ICT-based approaches can support lifelong learning.¹⁰²

In the **UK**, the UK Digital Strategy 2017 is a policy paper that outlines the UK's plans to be a world-leading digital economy, reflecting a projected skills shortage in this area. For this, it is argued, it is crucial that everyone has the digital skills they need to participate fully in society. This aspect of the strategy is targeted at the ten million people who are digitally excluded in the UK¹⁰³. The Northern Ireland Skills Barometer also repeated the need for increased education and training provision in STEM and digital subjects. The Report of the STEM Review published in 2009 stressed the need for investment in these areas.¹⁰⁴ These findings have been reflected in policy papers since 2011, in the Government's response to the review Success through STEM,¹⁰⁵ and in Strategic Goal 4 of Success through Skills – Transforming Futures.¹⁰⁶ The Programme for Government 2011–2015: Building a better future also aimed to 'increase uptake in economically relevant Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) places.'¹⁰⁷ The Department for Education is

¹⁰⁰ 1536/2016. (X. 13.) Korm. Határozat a köznevelési, a szakképzési, a felsőoktatási és a felnőttképzési rendszer digitális átalakításáról és Magyarország Digitális Oktatási Stratégiájáról (Government Resolution No 1536/2016 (X.13) on the Digital Transformation of Public Education, Vocational and Higher Education and Adult Education System and the Digital Education Strategy for Hungary (<http://www.kozlonyok.hu/nkonline/MKPDF/hiteles/MK16155.pdf>)

¹⁰¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/digcomp/digital-competence-framework>

¹⁰² <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/czech-republic-new-strategy-promoting-digital-literacy>

¹⁰³ Gov.UK. (2017). *UK Digital Strategy*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-digital-strategy> [Accessed: 9 October 2017]

¹⁰⁴ Department for the Economy. (2009). *Report of the STEM Review*. Available <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/del/report-of-the-stem-review.pdf> [Accessed: 9 October 2017]

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/del/STEM%20Strategy-Success%20through%20STEM.pdf> [Accessed: 9 October 2017]

¹⁰⁶ Department for the Economy. (2016). *Success through Skills: transforming futures*. Available at: http://www.oph.fi/download/145612_success-through-skills-transforming-futures.pdf [Accessed: 9 October 2017]

¹⁰⁷ Northern Ireland Executive. (2011). *Programme for Government 2011-15*. Available at: <https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/nigov/pfg-2011-2015-report.pdf> [Accessed: 9 October 2017]

responsible for STEM curriculum design and innovation in the schools and university system, while the Department for the Economy has responsibility for vocational education and training (VET) and adult learners. In *Economy 2030: A consultation on an Industrial Strategy for Northern Ireland*, published in January 2017, the Government promises to 'meet the bespoke upskilling needs of employers' and focus on 'high growth, high technology areas such as data analytics, cyber security, cloud computing and software engineering' in order to provide for 'the economy's growing need for transformative digital skills.'¹⁰⁸ The Skills Barometer of June 2017 asserted that 'the research has shown for a second year that STEM related subjects are under-supplied.'¹⁰⁹

5.2.3. Reform strategies for VET / HE

Many Member States are, partly under influence of European developments such as the establishment of the European Qualifications Frameworks and consequently National Qualifications Frameworks; the renewed emphasis on work-based learning and the Bologna process, implementing strategies to reform formal VET and higher education systems. In the **Czech Republic**, for instance, a strategic document¹¹⁰ builds on previous documents setting out long-term aims for education and operates in accord with the Educational Policy Strategy of the Czech Republic up to the Year 2020. It sets the main goals of regional education as follows:

CZ: Main goals of regional education:

- One of the primary goals in the area of adult education for the period will be the restructuring of the financing system and further development of the system of validation of non-formal and informal learning based on the act 179/2006 on the Validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) and the National Register of Qualifications.
- Each person 18 years of age or older with completed lower secondary education or those undergoing retraining according to the law governing employment can make use of the system of validation of non-formal and informal learning, based on the act on the VNFIL and the National Register of Qualifications.
- The goal of the Ministry for Education, Youth and Sport is to continue to develop and support this system of validation and further integrate it with other national and international qualification systems in order to increase its universal applicability;
- At the national level the issue of insufficient development of key competences of adults, their basic skills and civic education has never been systematically addressed. For this reason, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport intends to increase support to low skilled and socially disadvantaged citizens primarily to improve their situation in the labour market.

¹⁰⁸ Northern Ireland Executive. (2017). *Economy 2030*. Available at: <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/consultations/economy/industrial-strategy-ni-consultation-document.pdf> [Accessed: 9 October 2017]

¹⁰⁹ Ulster University. (2017). *Northern Ireland Skills Barometer* report. Available at: <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/economy/NI-Skills-Barometer-2017-Summary-Report.pdf> [Accessed: 9 October 2017]

¹¹⁰ Long-term Aims of Education and the Development of the Education System of the Czech Republic for the Period of 2015-2020 (Dlouhodobý záměr vzdělávání a rozvoje vzdělávací soustavy České republiky na období 2015-2020)

In the **Netherlands**, the Lifelong Learning Policy Brief¹¹¹ includes a number of initiatives that require adjustments of the legal framework for higher education and VET. To allow experimentation in higher education, making it more attractive for adult learners, a legal framework is developed to surpass some legal provisions¹¹².

In **Spain**, a reform of the vocational training system that responds to the need of the labour market that started in 2014 and was derived from the implementation of the 'The Organic Act on the Improvement of the Quality of Education' ('Ley Orgánica para la mejora de calidad educativa'). It includes developments concerning: 1) establishing the National System of Qualifications and Vocational Training (SNCFP) in 2002¹¹³. In addition, a Catalogue of Vocational Qualifications (CNCP)¹¹⁴ that sets out how to recognise and accredit professional competences. 2) The promotion of distance education through the Centre for the Innovation and Development of Distant Education (CIDEAD¹¹⁵) created in 1990. 3) Updating the National Catalogue of Vocational Qualifications.

In the **UK**, In **England**, the Post-16 Skills Plan 2016 proposes the development of 15 new Technical Routes (T Levels) based on the apprenticeship standards, and formalises this approach further by separating academic and vocational learning more explicitly, while given parity of esteem to both. The Plan was published following a review of technical education led by Lord Sainsbury. For young people who are not yet ready for an employment or college based technical training route, the Post-16 Skills Plan introduces a 'transition year' which government wants to be made available at the same time as the reforms so young people, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities do not lose out.¹¹⁶ In **Northern Ireland**, Apprenticeships Securing our Success, the Strategy on Apprenticeships,¹¹⁷ published in June 2014, outlines the future direction of apprenticeships. The new apprenticeship model is driven by strategic partnership; puts employers at its very heart; aligns supply with demand; and, affords opportunities in a wider range of occupations and offers a flexible progression pathway across professional education and training. The new employer-led model will provide an alternative pathway to recruit and train skilled individuals and will extend apprenticeships into a wider range of occupational areas. Apprenticeships will be offered from skills level 3 to 8 and provide a pathway to higher level qualifications including at degree level and above. Apprenticeships will deliver a range of benefits to participants by supporting a variety of learning preferences through

¹¹¹ 'Leven Lang Leren. Brief van de regering' (Life long learning. Letter from government): Tweede Kamer (Second Chamber) (2014), Leven Lang Leren. Brief van de regering (Life long learning. Letter from government). 2014-2015. <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2014/10/31/kamerbrief-leven-lang-leren> Tweede Kamer (Second Chamber) (2015), Voortgangsrapportage Leven Lang Leren (Progress Life Long Learning policies). 2015-2016.

<http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2015/10/26/kamerbrief-over-voortgang-leven-lang-leren>

¹¹² A so-called 'Algemene Maatregel van Bestuur (AMvB)': see Tweede Kamer (Second Chamber) (2015), Voortgangsrapportage Leven Lang Leren (Progress Life Long Learning policies). 2015-2016. P. 4:

<http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2015/10/26/kamerbrief-over-voortgang-leven-lang-leren>

¹¹³ http://www.educacion.gob.es/educa/incual/ice_legislacion.html

¹¹⁴ http://www.mecd.gob.es/educa/incual/ice_CualCatalogo.html

¹¹⁵ <http://www.mecd.gob.es/educacion/mc/cidead/portada.html>

¹¹⁶ Department for Education. (2016). *Post-16 Skills Plan*. Available at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/536043/Post-16_Skills_Plan.pdf [Accessed: 9 October 2017]

¹¹⁷ Department for the Economy. (2016). *Securing our Success*. Available at:

<https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/securing-our-success-northern-ireland-strategy-apprenticeships> [Accessed: 9 October 2017]

both on-the-job and off-the-job training, and affording opportunities for well-paid jobs and sustainable employment.

Finland aims to make VET more attractive to respond to perceived market and industry needs. The main goal of the VET reform is to improve the status of VET in Finnish society. The funding system and structure will be renewed while keeping the various educational paths open. Preserving the eligibility for further studies and ensuring regionally comprehensive education network are seen as important aspects when planning the reform. One of the targets is to strengthen the interaction between educational institutions and working life. Until now there has been a separation between VET provision for young people and VET for adults. In the new system all VET provision will be one and the same. The reform is built on a competence-based approach.¹¹⁸ The reform aims to be customer-oriented, which implies that VET is designed to meet the needs of students and working life. The aim is, for example, to increase learning in workplaces and enable students to apply for training throughout the year. Apprenticeship training will also be reformed by easing the administrative and financial burden of employees. The reform takes effect from the beginning of 2018.

Specifically related to reforms in Higher Education, in **Poland**, in 2014, amendments of the Act on Higher Education alongside with certain other acts were adopted. The Act established an institution that validates learning outcomes in non-formal and informal education. The objective was to facilitate access to higher education by people with several years of experience in occupation, and who hold a secondary-school leaving certificate. In order to enhance validation processes in education further, academic senates (the self-governing elected bodies of the universities) have been obliged to pass resolutions on the organisation of validation of outcomes in academic learning until 30 June 2015. A vast majority of universities have proceeded to do so successfully by implementing such rules. The above mentioned amendment also introduced the possibility of dual learning, i.e. a combination of academic courses delivered at a university and apprenticeships conducted in the workplace. According to Ministry of Labour, this type of learning will be particularly attractive to adults who will be able to combine it with their professional work by going through a part of the learning programme at work.

5.2.4. Skills strategies / competitiveness strategies

Adult learning is also related to broader economic strategies that focus on improving the skills levels and increase the competitiveness of countries. These strategies are not always directly linked with 'adult learning', but relate to human resource/ capital development and generally better aligning the education sector to the needs of the economy. In **Belgium**, for instance, both the Flemish Region and Walloon Region have a main social and economic strategic plan: the Vision 2050, which emerged from the 2020-2050 Vision plan; and the Marshall 4.0 plan respectively. Both plans start from the vision that the Belgian regions need to evolve towards competitive players in Europe and that the focus on human capital generation should increase. While the plans are not focussing on adult learning exclusively, it is clear that it plays an important role in both plans. Especially the Flemish strategy as laid out in Pact 2050 focuses on a long-term vision in which the region aims to become a lifelong learning society by the mid of this century. In fact, as the author suggests, this might be a smart move, as it is clear from statistical monitoring that participation rates in

¹¹⁸ Ministry of Education and Culture, see <http://minedu.fi/amisreformi>

lifelong learning and employment have remained rather stable over time. It might thus be too optimistic to expect strong changes in a limited number of years. Working out a long-term plan might be more effective. The Walloon Marshall plan 4.0 is written for the tenure of the current Walloon Government and is therefore mid-term in nature.

Skills for **Scotland** 2010 outlined plans to simplify the skills systems and strengthen partnerships. This led to a programme of reorganisation in the adult learning provider base with a stronger focus on jobs and economic growth. A Nation with Ambition: The Government's plan for Scotland 2017–18¹¹⁹ established a Strategic Board to focus enterprise and skills agencies on supporting the growth of key sectors and ensuring that adult learning providers produce the skills that businesses and individuals need. It included a commitment to increase the number of modern apprenticeships, to 30,000 by 2020, and empower communities to take more decisions themselves, placing greater control of budgets in the hands of local people. The Government will continue to invest £100 million (113 million Euro) per year in apprenticeships, flexible workforce development and individual training accounts. Skills Development Scotland will continue to assess the current and future industry demand for skills, and ensure that the system is closely aligned with evolving industry needs.

The **Austrian** skills strategy has been implemented together with the 'Adult Education Initiative' (Initiative Erwachsenenbildung) since 2012. The initiative provides adults (as well as young people) with basic skills and qualifications after the completion of compulsory schooling. Basic education or measures against functional illiteracy have been carried out in Austria since 1990. Since 2006, there has been a central counselling centre for basic education, which runs an Austria-wide Alfa telephone. Until the founding of the 'Adult Education Initiative', basic education and compulsory education were financed from project funds. The initiative has resulted in the transition from project funding to programme funding. The aim of the 'Initiative' is to enable young people and adults to acquire basic skills and educational qualifications free of charge - even after completing the school education phase.¹²⁰

The **Czech Republic** has several related strategies. The Employment Policy Strategy up to the Year 2020¹²¹. Of particular relevance to adult learning is priority 3: Adaptation of employers, employees and job-seekers to changes and requirements of the labour market. This priority responds to the need for better matching of supply and demand in the labour market, particularly in terms of qualifications, as well as skills and competences. It reflects the reality that initial education is not capable of responding to the dynamic development of technology and the economy, and is also not capable of preparing the workforce for their entire professional life. Greater focus is therefore placed on employment policy in the areas of predicting the development and demands of the labour market; and support for adult education. The Social Inclusion Strategy 2014-2020¹²² aims in general to reduce and prevent poverty and social exclusion. Among its main priority target areas are employment and training of people at the risk of social exclusion. In general it supports guidance and

¹¹⁹ Scottish Government. (2017). A Nation with Ambition: The Government's plan for Scotland 2017–18. Available at:

<https://beta.gov.scot/publications/nation-ambition-governments-programme-scotland-2017-18/documents/00524214.pdf?inline=true> [Accessed: 9 October 2017]

¹²⁰ <https://www.initiative-erwachsenenbildung.at/initiative-erwachsenenbildung/was-ist-das/>

¹²¹ Strategie politiky zaměstnanosti do roku 2020. This strategy was adopted by the government resolution number 835 on 15 October 2014.

¹²² Strategie sociálního začleňování 2014-2020 issued by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

motivation measures, closer cooperation of the Labour Office with local employers, programmes of work and social rehabilitation, local coordination of activities and better targeting of active labour market policies (ALMPs) etc. In addition, a study is conducted in relation to emerging job losses. It shows the need for policy action (see box).

A number of national skills strategies have also been developed in the context of the OECD Skills Strategy framework, through which the OECD has worked alongside countries as part of a 'diagnostic phase' and an 'action phase' to develop more effective national skills strategies¹²³.

Czech Republic: Initiative Labour 4.0

The study Iniciativa Práce 4.0 (Initiative Labour 4.0)¹²⁴ provides a very good insight into a very pressing theme, since the Czech Republic is among the countries which are most threatened by job loss due to automatization¹²⁵. It stresses the importance of further increasing accuracy of projections, taking into account Czech data and context, because current estimates of possible impacts vary significantly and most of them are very general and/or speculative. These impacts and solutions must be discussed with all relevant actors, since measures could be socially sensitive. The study also questions the meaningfulness of the current form of retraining provided by public employment services, because these courses do not provide necessary practice and do not take into account the individual needs of learners. This statement is supported by findings of the EEPO Review¹²⁶. Retraining courses are on average too short (1-3 months) and funding per trainee is small (roughly 300 Euro). New approaches in learning are emerging (e.g. connectivism) and adaptive education programmes based on self-learning software can be expected to be more effective. The study also suggests developing an education fund for adult learning based on a foreign functioning transferable model with contributions from the state and employers.

5.2.5. Other strategies (for instance on internationalisation, validation, quality and guidance)

Besides the types of strategies discussed in the previous sections, the country reports highlight a number of other strategies related to adult learning. Of particular relevance are the initiatives taken in **Austria** and **Sweden** related to improving the quality of adult learning, validation of prior learning, and providing guidance and counselling (see Box).

¹²³ <http://www.oecd.org/skills/nationalskillsstrategies/buildingeffectiveskillsstrategiesatnationalandlocallevels.htm>

¹²⁴ MPSV (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs), (2016). Iniciativa práce 4.0 Prepared by: Národní vzdělávací fond (The National Education Fund)

http://portal.mpsv.cz/sz/politikazamest/prace_4_0/studie_iniciativa_prace_4.0.pdf

¹²⁵ SPD (Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic), (2016). *Sladování nabídky a poptávky na současném trhu práce* (Harmonisation of the current labour market supply and demand)

https://www.socialnidialog.cz/images/stories/Dovednosti_cely_dokument.pdf

¹²⁶ EC (2015), European Employment Policy Observatory (EEPO) EEPO Review Spring 2015: Upskilling unemployed adults. The organisation, profiling and targeting of training provision: Czech Republic: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/keyDocuments.jsp?advSearchKey=EEPORevUUA2015&mode=advancedSubmit&langId=en&policyArea=&type=0&country=8&year=0>

Austria

- **Professionalisation and Quality Assurance:** In 2007, the Continuing Education Academy was established by the then Federal Minister of Education and Culture. The Academy was developed jointly by institutions of Austrian adult education with subsidies from the Ministry of Education and the European Social Fund. The Continuing Education Academy validates and accredits the competencies of adult educators, regardless of where they have acquired them. The basic pre-requisite is practical experience in adult education, but non-formal and informally acquired competences are taken into account in the recognition process as well. The Academy is based on a jointly developed curriculum (today: qualification profile) for teaching, counselling, education management and information management and librarianship. In December 2011, AT-Cert (Ö-Cert)¹²⁷ was founded. AT-Cert was developed by scientists, including representatives of the provinces and of the adult education sector. AT-Cert is a supra-regional model for the recognition of quality assurance measures of adult education organisations. AT-Cert recognizes different quality certificates and creates uniform quality standards for education providers all over Austria.
- **Educational guidance and counselling:** In 2011, the Ministry of Education set up the Education Guidance and Counselling Initiative (*Initiative Bildungsberatung Österreich*). It was based on previous initiatives in all provinces, which were supported by the Ministry of Education funds and European Social Funds (ESF). The aim of the Guidance and Counselling Initiative is to offer free advice for adults as a first starting point for educational interests in a nationwide and non-proprietary educational information and counselling system. These consultancy services are offered by project networks set up in each province.¹²⁸
- **Austrian Validation Strategy:** The validation strategy was developed with the involvement of relevant stakeholders as well as adult education representatives. The validation strategy provides both summative and formative procedures, which also accounts for practical experience in adult education. Working groups dealing with quality, professionalization, communication and system synergies are working on the implementation of the strategy.

Sweden

- The **National strategy for validation** (2017)¹²⁹ aims to realise that significantly more individuals will have their real competence validated. Validation shall be possible all over the country, in all levels in the education system and directed to wider qualifications in working life.
- The **Government Proposition on experimental work with branch schools** (2016)¹³⁰ gives the municipalities the possibility to make an agreement with a branch school, implying that the school can execute teaching in vocational subjects.

¹²⁷ <https://oe-cert.at>

¹²⁸ https://erwachsenenbildung.at/themen/bildungsberatung/angebot/initiative_eb.php

¹²⁹ SOU (2017), En nationell strategi för validering: <http://www.valideringsdelegation.se/om-validering/en-nationell-strategi-for-validering/>

¹³⁰ Swedish Government (2016), Propositionens huvudsakliga innehåll: <https://data.riksdagen.se/fil/41EF1DFF-3615-4B65-8C54-C6B607F6C764>

- The **Commission on National Strategy for Internationalisation of Universities and University Colleges** (2017)¹³¹ is commissioned to suggest goals for a national strategy on how more students can receive an international perspective in their studies, and how Sweden can be more attractive for foreign students.

Summary of Strategies related to Adult Learning

Overall, the information from the country reports and questionnaire suggests that whilst adult learning is established within all countries through some sort of legislative framework, coverage within national strategies can be seen to be variable – in terms of the type of strategy offering coverage, and the extent and quality of coverage. Adult learning is addressed in lifelong learning strategies in nearly half of Member States (13) although this coverage can be seen to vary from tokenistic reference to more comprehensive coverage. The presence of a lifelong learning strategy is not, for instance, an assurance that adult learning is concretely considered and promoted within that Member State – as consideration is limited in many such strategies. The Danish example however offers an indication of how commitment and consideration for adult learning and how it might be delivered is covered within a lifelong learning strategy.

Whilst a number of Member States have adult learning coverage as part of specific skill strategies (5 countries) or reform strategies, such as in the area of VET or Higher Education (4 countries) this is not a particular common approach when it comes to defining provision for adult learning. More prominent is a focus on adult learning in strategies focussing on developing economic competitiveness, or skills strategies aiming to address skills shortages. Whilst this then suggests that adult learning is indeed recognised as a key to increasing economic productivity and growth, although it is not so clear that adult learning is promoted as a right and opportunity for citizens, reflecting goals of inclusion and social development.

5.3. Quality Assurance of Provision

An important governance tool in adult learning is the quality assurance (QA) of provision. The extent to which quality assurance systems are in place for different parts of the adult learning system is an indication of whether those parts are governed by (state) actors. In this section we provide an overview of overarching QA systems; discuss QA systems that are closely linked to formal education and QA approaches for non-formal adult learning.

The section then moved to consider the monitoring and evaluation frameworks put in place to assess policies in adult learning on whether they are (still) delivering the envisaged results and whether adjustments are needed of the policies. Although comprehensive information is lacking on whether monitoring and evaluation practices cover the entire adult learning sector in the countries, the country experts were able to provide an assessment of whether regular monitoring and evaluation takes place, which is reflected in the analysis.

¹³¹ Swedish Government (2017), Ökad internationalisering av universitet och högskolor: www.regeringen.se/491b3e/contentassets/b9f7e2a174e04bf1b32ba185745415aa/okad-internationalisering-av-universitet-och-hogskolor-dir.-201719.pdf

5.3.1. *Overarching QA systems*

The formal sectors are generally more uniform in their objectives, type of organisation, target groups, and societal results, where the HE sector is even more uniformly organised than the VET sector. The content of the quality assurance systems in place, especially those in relation to organisational requirements, however, do not differ in a great extent between the HE, VET and non-formal adult learning sector. Some countries have **overarching quality assurance systems for adult learning**. For instance in **Austria**, quality management systems are standards in the adult education landscape that are applied by most organizations. In addition to ISO (International Organization for Standardization) certificates and TQM (Total quality management) certificates, LQW (Lernorientierte Qualitätstestierung in der Weiterbildung: learner-oriented quality assessment in education and training) is predominantly applied in Austrian adult education. The starting point of LQW is a definition of successful learning, which is the reason why this Quality Management System (QMS) is also preferred by many providers in adult education. Over the last five years there has also been an increase in the number of so-called province certificates (Ländertestate), which regulate the recognition of adult education organisations in the provinces. These certificates are not quality management systems per se, but they can be after several repetitions. The Austrian-wide test certificate AT-Cert (Ö-Cert)¹³² recognises various quality management systems and asks for further proofs from the educational organizations, such as the pedagogical expertise, which can be achieved through various qualifications, including through the Academy of Continuing Education.

In **Denmark** as well, institutions for adult education and training are obliged to control and document the quality of their work. For institutions of general adult education (Voksenuddannelsescenter: VUC) and institutions of labour market training (Arbejdsmarkedsuddannelser: AMU) this mostly is done by the institutions themselves following ministerial guidelines. For instance, AMU-centres are obliged to use the web-based system 'Vis kvalitet' (Show quality) where participant's evaluation of courses are summarised. An element of external quality control is also present; the independent governmental institute 'Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut' (EVA¹³³) can be called by ministries, institutions and others to evaluate educational institutions or programmes in the field covered by the Ministry of Children, Teaching and Gender Equality.

In **Ireland**, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI¹³⁴) are mandated through the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 to quality assure institutions of further and higher education and training, validates educational programmes and makes awards to learners. All providers offering QQI awards are required to have a quality assurance system agreed by QQI. Validation is the process by which QQI evaluates a programme, before it is delivered, to ensure that it can provide a learner with the opportunity to achieve a specified award. QQI monitors and evaluates programmes. Monitoring is a multi-faceted system of gathering information on providers' programmes, services and the quality assurance systems which support them. If the evaluation of this information indicates it is necessary, then either the validation of the programme or the agreement of the quality assurance procedures can be reviewed. Certification in the Further and Higher Education and Training Sector is usually in alignment with the National Framework of Qualifications – an awards framework of 10 levels which is aligned to the

¹³² <https://oe-cert.at>

¹³³ <https://www.eva.dk>

¹³⁴ <http://www.qqi.ie/Pages/Home.aspx>

European Framework of Qualifications¹³⁵. FET awards are generally made at Levels 1 to 6 of the National Qualifications Framework, while HE awards are generally made at level 7-10. In addition to programme validation, SOLAS has commenced the process of linking quality to funding. The funding guidelines in respect of 2016 grant allocations by SOLAS to agencies and bodies in the FET sector, contained a new condition in relation to funding based on the achievement of stated objectives.

In **Latvia**, Quality assurance of formal and non-formal programmes in adult education and in education overall is provided via licensing and accreditation.. The licencing and accreditation of HE programmes and institutions, is conducted by the State Educational Quality Service (SEQS). The SEQS is the main policy developer of regulation of quality assurance in Latvia. The full package of normative regulations was developed over the last years.¹³⁶ Policy recommendations for quality assurance in vocational education and training were developed in 2016- 2017¹³⁷. The quality criteria for non-formal education and suitability of its licencing as such has been subject of some debate recently.

5.3.2. *QA systems linked to formal education*

In many countries, the quality of (a large part of) adult learning is assured through quality assurance systems related to the formal education sectors. In order to monitor and assure the quality of education organised in education in **Belgium Flanders**, the Department for Education has an Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training in place. The inspectorate does not only undertake work in schools, but also in centres for adult education. VOCVO (Vlaams Ondersteuningscentrum voor het Volwassenenonderwijs) is the specific Flemish Support Centre for Adult Education that provides both organisational and pedagogical support to Centres for Basic Education and Centres for Adult Education offering Second Chance routes¹³⁸.

In **Denmark**, despite an overarching system, for higher vocational education the system is different. All higher education institutions, including those offering adult education, have to be accredited at regular intervals by the Danish Accreditation Institution (Danmarks Akkrediteringsinstitution)¹³⁹. Accreditation decisions are based on comprehensive documentation and a set of recommendations from an administrative accreditation unit, ACE Denmark. In **Estonia**, the activities of adult education institutions that offer formal education are regulated by the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act¹⁴⁰, the Vocational Educational Institutions Act¹⁴¹, the Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act¹⁴², the Universities Act¹⁴³ or the Private Schools Act¹⁴⁴, i.e. quality assurance measures are also applied to these educational institutions.

¹³⁵ [http://www.qqi.ie/Pages/National-Framework-of-Qualifications-\(NFQ\).aspx](http://www.qqi.ie/Pages/National-Framework-of-Qualifications-(NFQ).aspx)

¹³⁶ <https://ikvd.gov.lv/normativie-akti-un-attistibas-planosanas-dokumenti/>

¹³⁷ State Educational Quality centre, (2017). [Policy recommendations for working for quality assurance in vocational education and training](#). Riga: State Educational Quality Centre.

¹³⁸ VOCVO: <http://www.vocvo.be/>

¹³⁹ <http://akkr.dk/>

¹⁴⁰ <https://www.riiqiteataja.ee/en/eli/521062016007/consolide>

¹⁴¹ <https://www.riiqiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/505022014002/consolide/current>

¹⁴² <https://www.riiqiteataja.ee/en/eli/506062016006/consolide>

¹⁴³ <https://www.riiqiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/521032014002/consolide/current>

¹⁴⁴ <https://www.riiqiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/520122013001/consolide/current>

Adult education in **Hungary** taking place at schools and higher education institutions is regulated by the legislation regulating the sector concerned (i.e. school education and higher education), also regarding quality assurance.

In **the Netherlands**, state-regulated, formal education is subject to inspectorate and accreditation regimes. The Education Inspectorate (Inspectie van het Onderwijs)¹⁴⁵ is responsible for primary and secondary (vocational) education. The Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (Nederlands- Vlaams Accreditatieorgaan: NVAO) is responsible for the accreditation of higher education programmes.¹⁴⁶ There is no single institution in **Poland** tasked to provide quality assurance of adult education and training. The schools and institutions for adults which are included in the formal education system are subject to the same quality assurance mechanisms as schools for children and youth. The quality assurance of all schools is the responsibility of the Minister of National Education.

In **Spain**, in formal adult education, evaluation and quality processes are conducted by the Education Inspectorate and the National Institute of Educational Evaluation¹⁴⁷ at state level, and by other institutions in each territory.

The situation in **Cyprus** is illustrative for many countries how adult learning quality assurance is related to the quality assurance for other (formal) education sectors. There is no national comprehensive policy regarding quality assurance in adult learning provisions. Subsequently, different bodies and various policies are set at different educational levels. The main provider of adult learning in Cyprus is the State. Accordingly, issues regarding quality assurance are the responsibility of the State and the corresponding Ministries under which different provisions for adult education operate. As a result, the quality assurance of adult learning falls under the authority of other levels of education (i.e., primary, secondary, and technical).

Also the **Czech Republic** country report provides a clear example how quality assurance is organized and what part of adult learning is covered in quality assurance systems. The quality assurance in the institutions providing adult education depend on the type of individual educational institution.

Similar to Czech Republic, in **Lithuania**, in institutions of formal adult education, quality assurance is implemented in the same way as in general education schools that undergo regular external evaluations, follow standardized curriculum, keep to formal certification of school principals and formal assessment of learning achievements.¹⁴⁸ Accordingly, the quality of adult education in secondary school level¹⁴⁹ is measured according to 67 indicators across five school areas: school culture; education and learning; achievements; learner support; and strategic school management. However, evaluation of activities on

¹⁴⁵ Inspectie van het Onderwijs: <http://www.onderwijsinspectie.nl/> [accessed 20-10-2017].

¹⁴⁶ NVAO: <http://www.nvao.net/> [accessed 20-10-2017].

¹⁴⁷ <http://www.mecd.gob.es/inee/portada.html>

¹⁴⁸ https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Lithuania:Quality_Assurance_in_Adult_Education_and_Training

¹⁴⁹ Kokybės užtikrinimas ikimokykliniame, priešmokykliniame ir bendrajame ugdyme / Quality assurance in early, pre-school and secondary education: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Lietuva:Kokybe%C4%97s_u%C5%BEtikrinimas_ikimokykliniame_prie%C5%A1mokykliniame_ir_bendrajame_ugdyme

non-formal adult education providers is not subject to regulation.¹⁵⁰ The Law on Non-formal Adult Education and Continuing Education (active since January 1, 2015) states that the quality assurance of non-formal adult and continuous education, its self-assessment, external evaluation, self-evaluation of progress and learning achievements should be established by the Government, after consulting with the Lithuanian Non-formal Adult Education Council. The Law also indicates that the responsibility for adult non-formal and continuous education should lie with municipalities if they have established these organisations or on the providers of non-formal adult education themselves. The same situation can be found in Luxembourg. For the public providers, quality assurance is organised formally for the formal adult education. For non-formal adult education, it is taken more implicitly and assessed at the level of individual adult trainers, rather than organised formally through a quality assurance system to assess individual courses, workshops and the providers themselves. Yet a number of indicators have been recently defined in the framework of EQAVET.¹⁵¹

5.3.3. *Specific QA systems and approaches for non-formal or non-regulated adult learning*

The type and intensity of quality systems in place **differ between formal and non-formal adult learning**. With regard to system level quality assurance, the differences between higher education (HE), vocational education and training (VET) and non-formal adult learning are less related to the fact that the provision is intended for adults, but more to the fact that the HE and VET provide state-regulated qualifications, falling under the National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF). This often demands that all awards included in the NQF are quality assured, and a key objective of these frameworks is to promote and maintain standards. Besides that the formal adult learning or regulated adult learning is quality assured under the formal (HE, VET and General Education) systems, there are a number of initiatives mentioned in the country reports which are solely devoted to (parts of) the non-formal and non-regulated adult learning system. The non-formal sectors are less regulated through the government and more often grass-root, bottom-up approaches are applied to work on quality assurance (such as codes of conducts and development of sectoral quality labels).¹⁵² In 2017, based on the assessment of the country reports, the situation did not radically change compared to the assessment in 2013¹⁵³ although an important development is the emphasis on the inclusion of qualifications offered in the non-formal sector in NQFs (see box).

Influence EQF and NQF

Poland: The work to provide a quality assurance system for adult education has been given a new momentum with the development of the Integrated System of Qualifications (Act on Integrated System of Qualifications of 22 Dec 2015). The Act

¹⁵⁰ See:

https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Lithuania:Adult_Education_and_Training_Funding

¹⁵¹ INFPC (2016). Supporting teachers and trainers for successful reforms and quality of vocational education and training: mapping their professional development in the EU – Luxembourg. Cedefop ReferNet thematic perspectives series, https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2016/ReferNet_LU_TT.pdf

¹⁵² Broek, S.D., Buiskool, B.J. (2013), Developing the adult learning sector: Quality in the Adult Learning Sector (Lot 1)

¹⁵³ Broek, S.D., Buiskool, B.J. (2013), Developing the adult learning sector: Quality in the Adult Learning Sector (Lot 1)

provides inter alia the requirements for institutions to certify and validate qualifications.

The Netherlands: In the Netherlands, formal, state-regulated educational qualifications are en-bloc levelled to the NQF levels. For non-formal and non-state regulated qualifications a separate procedure is established.¹⁵⁴ This procedure consists of a validity-test for the owner of the qualification (e.g. education provider) and a levelling-procedure. The validity-test takes into account some quality assurance aspects. In 2017, the NLQF is evaluated to prepare the re-launch of the legislative process for establishing the NLQF. In the discussions in relation to the evaluation, thoughts were given to apply the validity-test more broadly as a quality assurance instrument in the non-formal and non-state regulated education sector.¹⁵⁵

Slovakia: The NSQ and NSO¹⁵⁶ systems were completed as results of national projects in 2015, and are basis for improvement of adult education quality. They both help to define what occupations are on the job market, and what qualifications linked to them, are needed. The training programmes can then be linked to the description of qualifications, qualification standards, as well as training and then testing or validation of results. The key tools for validation of adult education are in place, but they are not fully functional, and not all qualifications listed in NSQ have a validating institution assigned to them.

The linking of National qualification framework with the European one is very important. Continuous revision and update of the NQF is precondition for the efficient validation of non-formal education and informal learning, to guarantee of the quality comparable with formal education, and with adult education in other European countries.

Here below specific quality assurance systems related to non-formal and non-state regulated adult learning are presented:

- **Estonia:** besides the formal provision, quality assurance measures in continuing education are regulated by the Adult Education Act¹⁵⁷ as well as Continuing Education Standard¹⁵⁸. With these two documents uniform requirements have been established for institutions offering continuing education for adults regulating study programmes, disclosure of its activities and the documents issued upon completing the training. It is also required that the training institutions themselves define the principles for quality assurance. Although these regulations make institutions responsible for the quality of adult training, they give the institutions flexibility in making decisions about the content and organisation of training as well as the methods used to assure quality.

¹⁵⁴ <http://www.nlqf.nl/>

¹⁵⁵ Ockham IPS (2017), Onderzoek NLQF.

¹⁵⁶ National system of qualifications and National system of occupations SIOV (State Institute for VET), (2015), Národná sústava kvalifikácií, Národná sústava povolání , <http://www.kvalifikacie.sk/casto-kladene-otazky>

¹⁵⁷ <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/529062015007/consolide> From July 1st 2016 all institutions providing continuing education have to operate under the Adult Education Act.

¹⁵⁸ <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/126062015009>

- **Germany:** The Distance Learning Protection Law (Fernunterrichtsschutzgesetz: FernUSG) for distance and e-learning among other things, the law stipulates that distance learning courses require state approval, and defines comprehensive information and contractual obligations for distance learning courses subject to licensing.¹⁵⁹
- **Greece:** a National Framework for Quality Assurance in Lifelong Learning (π3) is established. The 'π3 framework' is based on 8 quality principles of Lifelong Learning that are linked to many dimensions of learning (inputs, procedures and outputs/outcomes). The 'π3 framework' suggests a broad spectrum of factors that can be taken into account for quality assessment in the area of lifelong learning in Greece and more particularly in the area of formal and non-formal adult education and learning, and at the same time complements the National lifelong learning strategy in terms of providing a general yet accountable framework for quality assessment.¹⁶⁰
- **Hungary:** Adult learning taking place at adult training providers outside the school system is mainly regulated by the Adult Training Act and related regulations. According to the earlier Adult Training Act (2001), the registration of providers was obligatory, while programme and institution accreditation were compulsory for some types of providers and programmes. The new Act of 2013 contains more demanding quality assurance requirements for some types of training programmes (those included in the National Qualifications Register, other vocational programmes and foreign language programmes), and fulfilling them is a prerequisite for registration and launch. Licensed adult training providers have to set up their own quality assurance systems in line with the legal regulations. The National Office of Vocational Education and Training and Adult Training licences and controls adult training providers. The Act provides the Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry with an important role, and the Chamber acts as an authority in this sector. It keeps the electronic register of the vocational programme requirements of adult training programmes. Registration, modification of registration, and removal from the register is decided by a committee of adult training programme experts composed of three members delegated by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry. One member delegated by the Chamber of Agriculture and one member by the ministry in charge of the profession concerned.
- **Luxembourg:** There is a Label de Qualité. The label can be obtained voluntarily by non-formal continuing education providers, but is coupled to state subsidies, which makes it attractive for municipalities and associations to obtain the label; hence it has a high degree of coverage. The label can also be used to attract new participants.¹⁶¹ The quality label consists of a series of quality criteria which relate to: (1) pedagogical aspects, (2) the programme and methodology, (3) student orientation and counselling, (4) evaluation and certification, and (5) the modalities of organization and finance. The quality label is awarded by the Service de la

¹⁵⁹ <https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/fernusg/>

¹⁶⁰ See as well Broek, S.D., Buiskool, B.J. (2013), Developing the adult learning sector: Quality in the Adult Learning Sector (Lot 1), Chapter on Greece.

¹⁶¹ See Broek, S.D., Buiskool, B.J. (2013), Developing the adult learning sector: Quality in the Adult Learning Sector (Lot 1), p. 40.

formation des adultes (SFA)¹⁶². Possession of the quality label allows a municipality or association to apply for government subsidies, which is a major reason for the high degree of nation-wide coverage of the label.¹⁶³

- **The Netherlands:** The non-publicly funded, non-accredited provision does not have a strict legal framework but operates according to a code of conduct. When providers operate according to this code of conduct, these training costs are VAT deductible. The quality in this area is the responsibility of the providers themselves. There are no strict legal requirements towards programmes not leading to an accredited degree. In case the private providers offer accredited degrees (e.g. Bachelor, master, VET diplomas), the programmes and the provider is subject to supervision and accreditation. The members of the Dutch Council for Education and Training (Nederlandse Raad voor Training en Opleiding)¹⁶⁴, sign the Code of Conduct for Training and Education and are also obliged to use the Terms and Conditions as drawn up by the NRTTO and the consumer organisation (Consumentenbond). The Code of Conduct for the members (i.e. the providers) includes rules concerning: information; guidance for teaching staff; work processes; learning material; guidance and counselling; education and exams; facilities; recruitment; complaints procedures; registration; and transparency.
- **Poland:** Under the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 20 December 2003, institutions that provide continuing education in non-school settings can voluntarily request an accreditation from the Head of Regional Education Authorities (REA). In order to encourage institutions to seek accreditation, the services have been exempted from VAT.
- **Portugal:** The Qualify centres have their own quality assurance processes, concerning the performance of the centre itself, namely targets that each centre has to achieve during a specific period, adult educators/professional development assessment established by and for each centre, and recognition of prior learning quality assurance. Recognition of prior learning involves validating non-formal and informal learning through an assessment taken by adult learners. Assessment is carried out by a jury which includes people who are locally and socially recognised and are not directly involved in recognition of prior learning and by several experts from a professional field in the case of recognition of prior learning directed at professional recognition. Additionally, quality assurance measures to support assessment methodologies are carried out when the electronic platform makes available most information concerning recognition of prior learning (such as general information on learners, adult learners' enrolment, participation in education and training, etc.) for adult educators and trainers and other staff working in these Qualify centres. Besides, the National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training has produced and disseminated a set of methodological guidelines and a guidance for quality assurance in the Qualify centres. According to the existing legislation, annual reports on quality assurance referring to recognition of prior (of school certification and professional

¹⁶² <http://www.men.public.lu/fr/annuaire/?idMin=1052>

¹⁶³ See Broek, S.D., Buiskool, B.J. (2013), Developing the adult learning sector: Quality in the Adult Learning Sector (Lot 1), p. 283.

¹⁶⁴ <https://www.nrto.nl/>

certification) would have to be made public, but these reports are not in the public domain¹⁶⁵.

- **Slovakia:** The training providers have no obligation to obtain certification or accreditation of their programmes. However, the set of existing accreditation criteria constitute a certain standard and the Association of Institutes of Adult Learning leads debates on how to assess the quality of institutions, programmes and lecturers.
- **Slovenia:** The Slovenian Institute of Adult Education (SIAE) developed the model 'Offering quality education to adults', based on self-evaluation, which is used by most organisations for adult education. The model encompasses: self-evaluation planning, methodology for the acquisition and evaluation of data, implementation of self-evaluation, evaluation of the acquired data, planning of measures of improvement and evaluation of the action results. In addition, SIAE offers training and advice and promotes the achievements of organizations for adult education by conferring quality certificates.¹⁶⁶
- **United Kingdom:** For non-formal adult learning in **England** and **Wales** providers are encouraged to use the RARPA (Recognising and Rewarding Progress and Achievement) approach. Since 2016, in **England** government funding guidance has included information on the RARPA approach linked to quality assurance and inspection regimes.¹⁶⁷

In the country reports quality assurance measures were mentioned related to **professional training**. For instance in **Bulgaria**, since 2009 the National Employment Agency has been applying a new methodology for evaluating the proposals for professional orientation and adult education. It assesses the three main factors for providing training: teaching curriculum, teaching staff and facilities. The evaluation of proposals for vocational training is made by external experts nominated by the social partners.¹⁶⁸ In **Belgium (Flanders)**, Quality control at the level of VDAB and Syntra is introduced through the need for trainers to hold certificates and train-the-trainer programmes. A concrete example is a training programme for mentors working with trainees in companies. Furthermore, work by SYNTRA is systematically evaluated every three years. Currently, research is being undertaken by the University of Leuven to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of training organised by VDAB and SYNTRA¹⁶⁹. In **Belgium (Wallonia)**, Le Forem and IFAPME also have a range of quality assurance mechanisms in place, including an annual evaluation of training policies set out by the Walloon government. In **Germany**, the Social Code Book III [Sozialgesetzbuch III - SGB III] includes the Recognition and Certification

¹⁶⁵ European Commission, Cedefop and ICF International (2014). *European Inventory of Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning 2014. Portugal*. Retrieved 19/04/2017, from www.cedefop.europa.eu/validation/inventory

¹⁶⁶ [https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Slovenia:Quality Assurance in Adult Education and Training](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Slovenia:Quality_Assurance_in_Adult_Education_and_Training)

¹⁶⁷ Learning and Work Institute. (2017). *RARPA Guidance and Case Studies*. Available at: <http://www.learningandwork.org.uk/resource/updated-rarpa-guidance-and-case-studies/> [Accessed: 9 October 2017]

¹⁶⁸ [https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Bulgaria:Quality Assurance in Adult Education and Training](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Bulgaria:Quality_Assurance_in_Adult_Education_and_Training)

¹⁶⁹ Onderzoek leerrendement van opleidingen in het beleidsdomein werk: <https://hiva.kuleuven.be/nl/onderzoek/onderzoeksprojecten/2015-2016-Leerrendement-opleidingen-beleidsdomein-Werk-conceptuele-analyse-ontwikkeling-meetsysteem>

Ordinance [Anerkennungs- und Zulassungsverordnung (AZWV)] for continuous vocational education and training (CVET) in the field of the Federal Employment Agency.

In quality assurance and development, **adult learning staff is of importance too**. In **Austria**, quality Management Systems are one part of quality assurance. Quality is implemented by the staff members and the teachers, so the quality is also determined by the skills of the staff and instructors in adult education. Quality assurance and quality development are therefore closely related to professionalization. The Academy of Continuing Education is based on a qualification profile (formerly a curriculum) developed specifically for adult education, and validates and certifies the skills of adult educators, thereby contributing to the professionalisation of adult education. In the institutions of adult education, work is also being done to improve the quality of the training staff. For example, the model of classroom observation has been implemented in the Vienna adult education centres (*Volkshochschulen*)¹⁷⁰, in addition, methods of peer review gain importance.¹⁷¹ In **Luxembourg**, for non-formal adult education, it is taken more implicitly and assessed at the level of individual adult trainers. The performance of adult trainers is assessed with the same criteria used for initial education teachers. The position of adult trainers has been created in the context of the Lifelong Learning Strategy. New teaching and evaluation methods have been defined.¹⁷²

5.3.4. Regular monitoring and evaluation of policy

Besides quality assurance frameworks, Member States can have put in place monitoring and evaluation frameworks to assess policies in adult learning on whether they are (still) delivering the envisaged results and whether adjustments are needed of the policies.

Although comprehensive information is lacking on whether monitoring and evaluation practices cover the entire adult learning sector in the EU28, the country experts were able to provide an assessment of whether regular monitoring and evaluation takes place. The following figure provides an overview of this assessment. It should be highlighted that this assessment is made on the basis of the country expert's experience and knowledge, and in some cases it might be assumed that comprehensive information on monitoring and evaluation approaches may not be in the public domain. There are certain observations that may be drawn from the assessment. There does not appear to be any regional aspect to the variation, for example the Nordic Member States show variation in approaches/traditions. Neither do larger Member States (in terms of both area/ population) seemingly have more developed systems in place. Most Member States are in the position of having some monitoring or evaluation in place, although the regularity, consistency and follow up can be seen to vary. So for example, for 8 countries experts reported that a culture of regular monitoring is established, whilst evaluative practice (reflection and plans for improvement) is not so developed. This cluster of countries included **Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Lithuania** and **Romania**. However,

¹⁷⁰ Cf the contributions to classroom observation in:
http://magazin.vhs.or.at/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/OVH_Magazin_251_01_2014.pdf

¹⁷¹ <http://www.praline-project.eu/>

¹⁷² The provisions of the grand-ducal regulation of October 24th, 2011, regulating the training of adult trainers will no longer be valid for adult trainers recruited for 2016-2017 academic year. The dispositions of the Law of July 30th, 2015 (cf. art. 6, p. 3912) will be applicable. See: INFPC (2016). Supporting teachers and trainers for successful reforms and quality of vocational education and training: mapping their professional development in the EU – Luxembourg. Cedefop ReferNet thematic perspectives series, p.15,
https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2016/ReferNet_LU_TT.pdf

regular monitoring and evaluation, where results are followed up, is reported as established practice in **Belgium, Latvia, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Sweden** and **the UK**.

Whilst monitoring and evaluation does not appear to be an established and consistent priority in three Member States with decentralised/ devolved systems (**FR, IT, ES**), two Member States with such systems in place (**UK, BE**) do exhibit sophisticated systems of monitoring and evaluation in that there is regular monitoring and evaluation which is followed up consistently.

Table 5.3 Monitoring and evaluation of adult learning policies in Member States, as reported by country experts

Assessment of monitoring and evaluation in place	Country (country experts identified that approach is established in country).
Regularly monitored, evaluated and evaluation results followed up	BE, LV, NL, SI, SE, UK
Regularly monitored but without a regular evaluation and follow up	AT, BG, CZ, DK, EE, FI, LT, RO
Monitored and/or evaluated only on an ad-hoc basis	HR, DE, EL, HU, LU, MT, SK
Rarely monitored and/ or evaluated	CY, FR, IT, PL, ES

Source: Questionnaire (Q11.1: Given the definition, please indicate whether the adult learning policies in your Member State, with regards to monitoring and evaluation are...), n=26 (PT, IE no assessment)

Overall, on the basis of the information reported from the experts as part of the questionnaire, the tradition and practice of quality assurance seems somewhat established across Member states. There is a cluster of countries where monitoring and evaluation are executed on a piecemeal and irregular basis, although for most Member States, aspects of good practice have been identified as in place i.e. that monitoring and/or evaluation takes place (albeit irregularly). Developed systems of quality assurance which reinforce improvements via regular evaluation and follow up are reported by experts in a lesser number of Member States, for 6 countries. This indicated that whilst some aspects of quality assurance are in place for adult learning, that in fact, there is some way to go in the development and implementation of 'intelligent' systems which reinforce transparency, accountability and continuous development and improvement. There may be some scope for European level support and encouragement to facilitate development and consistency between Member States in this area, through shared information and good practice.

5.4. Alignment of policy frameworks

The reports and questionnaire results offer some information around the degree of alignment between sectors, policy areas, and legal frameworks when it comes to adult

learning. Fragmented policy frameworks are those where adult learning is not considered to be one sector and where there is generally no coordination concerning the governance of adult learning between different sectors in which adult learning takes place (i.e. VET, HE, non-formal, public/private, PES, in-company etc.). It can also mean that policy frameworks relate to different levels of governance whereby certain aspects are arranged at national, and others at regional or municipality level. Aligned policy frameworks on the other hand are those frameworks where there is an overarching perspective on adult learning that transcends the specific sectors in which adult learning takes place. This can be provided for instance through a comprehensive adult learning law or lifelong learning strategy. Some policy frameworks are in between fragmentation and alignment. This could mean that there are many separate policies for different sectors in which adult learning takes place, all having their own specific approach to adult learning, but that structured approach has been established to improve the coordination between those policies.

The following figure provides an overview of whether the policy frameworks covering adult learning are considered to be fragmented or aligned as reported by country experts. Experts provided an assessment of the degree to which the policy framework in their country is comprehensive, that is: aligned and coordinated.

Error! Reference source not found. Table 5.4 below is based on the assessment of the country experts.

Table 5.4 Alignment or fragmentation of adult learning policies

Alignment or fragmentation of adult learning policies	Country (country experts identified that approach is established in country).
Mostly aligned	DK, FI, IE, LU, MT, SK, SI
Rather aligned with some fragmentation	BG, PL, PT, RO, SE
Somewhat aligned with significant fragmentation	AT, EE, FR, DE, LV, NL, UK
Mostly fragmented	BE, HR, CY, CZ, EL, HU, IT, LT, ES

Source: Questionnaire (Q9.1: Please indicate whether the adult learning policies in your Member State, with regard to their alignment are...), n=28 (PT is based on post-coding)

In general, country reports mention that the policy framework is fragmented and not always well aligned between sectors, policy areas and legal frameworks related with adult learning. The figure reports the findings of the questionnaire. Here we see that the adult learning sector is not generally characterised by alignment and coordination, rather that fragmentation is a feature of systems in most countries. There is a group of countries where adult learning policies are reported as being mostly aligned across different aspects of the policy framework. This group includes two **Scandinavian** countries, which might perhaps be considered high performers in adult learning provision. Where adult learning receives higher relative public investment, has high relative participation and an established policy 'agenda', it may follow that adult learning policies are more clearly articulated and coordinated. Alignment also appears perhaps easier to achieve in smaller Member States (e.g. **Luxembourg and Malta** are reported as being mostly aligned).

Other countries have aligned legal frameworks, perhaps reflecting a focus on establishing lifelong learning policies (for instance, **Slovakia** has a Lifelong learning Act in place), aligning with European level goals.

Alignment and coordination appears more of a challenge for decentralised systems (**Italy, Spain, Belgium** are reported as mostly fragmented, whilst **Denmark** and **the UK** are reported as having significant fragmentation).

Some examples help us to picture the challenge of alignment in a policy area for which responsibility (governance) and policy frameworks are often complex. The **Cyprus** report mentions for instance: "A lot of official acts, laws and regulations concerning Adult Learning are scattered throughout many pieces of legislation, often at other levels of education, i.e. Primary (responsible for Adult Education Centres), Secondary (responsible for Evening Gymnasiums-Lyceums) or Technical (responsible for Evening Technical Schools)." In **France**, adult learning is governed by many laws which are closely related to the labour laws, career security, and social security, creating a rich, but complicated policy framework.

Summary of Alignment of Policy Approaches

With respect to the alignment of adult learning policy frameworks, overall, the information from the experts suggests that adult learning tends to be more characterised by fragmentation than alignment. This in part reflects the complexity of the sector and the vertical as well as horizontal distribution of responsibilities in the sector. This context in part explains why the picture with respect to the finance for adult learning is 'fuzzy', and unclear. We go on to examine this aspect next.

6. INVESTMENT IN ADULT LEARNING

6.1. Introduction

This section of the report reviews investment and finance for adult learning across the EU-28. It considers what national frameworks exist to finance adult learning and provides an overview of the investments allocated to adult learning with a particular focus on public and EU resources.

The following issues are addressed:

- The amount of public investment in adult learning;
- How the level of public funding has changed since July 2010;
- How adult learning is financed and through what mechanisms;
- How transparent the financing framework is.

In addressing the above areas, the section draws on information in the country reports, the questionnaire with experts, but also some wider literature and reports recognising that there are limitations to the information the experts have been able to collect.

6.2. Limitations

In the area of investment and financing in adult learning there is a particular issue around the transparency and availability of data, reflecting that some investment information is not readily available in the public domain or systematically reported. Public funding for adult learning is often included within broader budget lines for education investment as a whole. Hence a lack of funding breakdowns by adult learning or aspects of adult learning limit the degree to which consistent and direct comparisons can be made between member states. Often national governments or statistical offices are not easily able to ascertain exactly what has been spent in their own country on adult learning.

The lack of national data on funding in adult learning reflects that adult learning is not part of the formal education system, and is very heterogeneous. Even though the focus of this review is on public investment, it is important to acknowledge that the state does not necessarily play a key role in (direct) funding. The adult learning sector is quite cross-cutting in its nature – for instance cuts across various sub-sectors, and involves various ministries and stakeholders. Where ministries have a direct responsibility over some aspect of adult learning (e.g. ministries of education and/or labour and social affairs) they are likely to invest in adult learning on account of their particular areas of responsibility, e.g. the Ministry of Health in relation to the training of nurses and other medical staff. However, in the absence of a specific and defined budget line for adult learning, national spend in this area is usually accounted for across a range of budget lines. In this case, the budgets allocated to adult learning, as reported by country experts are likely to be higher than presented – while those of school and higher education are probably lower. Adult learning is sometimes covered as sub-sector of post-secondary education and not accounted for separately (e.g. Schuller/Watson 2009).

These limitations therefore need to be recognised when reading this section.

6.3. Investment in adult learning

Here we present some information relating to the amount of public funding investment in adult learning, but also on the sufficiency of funding in the eyes of country experts, drawing on the questionnaire results.

The financing of adult learning has been at the core of several studies in recent years, including those commissioned by Cedefop (PPMI/FiBS 2012), the European Commission (FiBS/DIE 2013) and conducted by the OECD (2017). Also the UIL – UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning set out to shed some light on funding volumes in its 2nd Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE) (UIL 2013). Despite some recent studies in the field, there remains a lack of clarity around exactly what funding is invested in adult learning across EU-28, reflecting the limitations set out above. The information reported by the country experts is restricted on account of the limitations cited, and whilst directly comparable investment information over consistent time periods cannot be deduced from the country reports. Whilst this does not give a basis for sound analytical assessment in terms of how Member States vary in terms of their funding, it does demonstrate some of the limitations associated with the nationally available financial data.

Perhaps the best source to consider in terms of adult learning investment is a study by FiBS/DIE (2013), which is, according to OECD (2017) the only study providing relatively comprehensive data on funding for adult learning. The below Figure 6.1 draws on this study to present data on the distribution of funding for adult learning by funding source (e.g. the proportion of adult learning funded by various financiers – the state, employers etc.) whilst

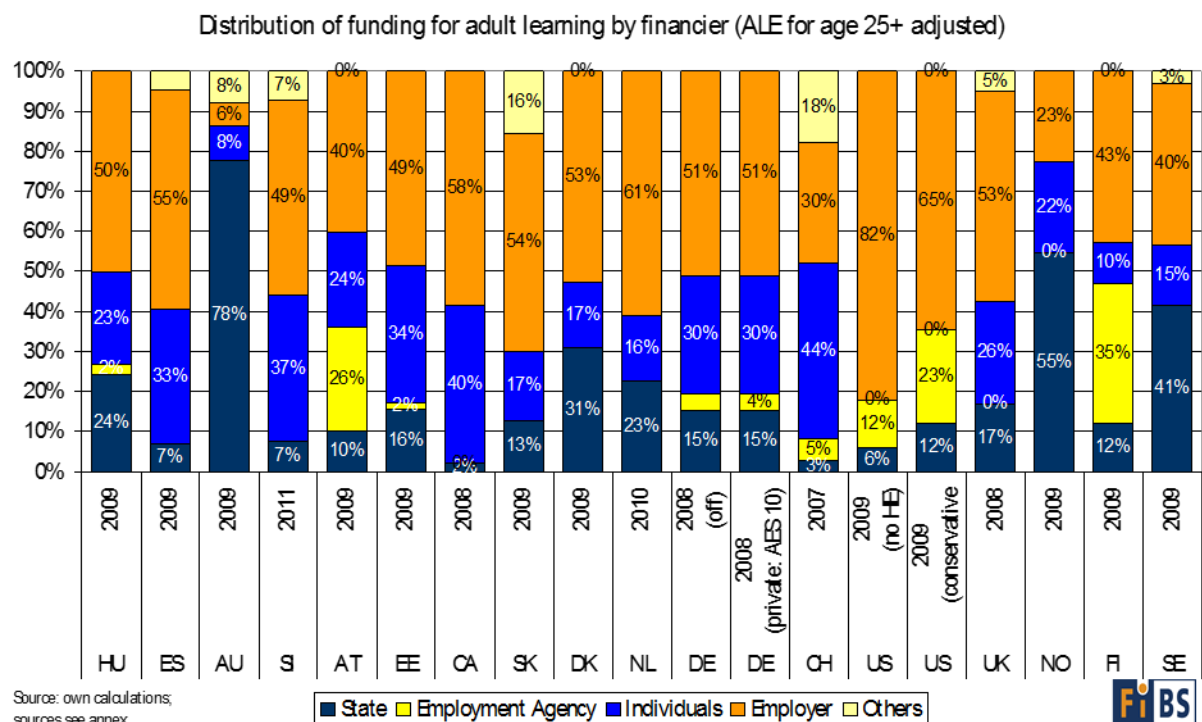
Figure 6.2 then expresses expenditure as a percentage of GDP adult learning.

In Figure 6.1 we see a breakdown of adult learning funding by financier for a number of countries, within the European Union, and also outside of it. It indicates that the proportion of adult learning funded by the public sector varies a great deal between countries. Levels of public investment as a proportion of adult learning funding is shown to be relatively low in **Spain** (7%), **Slovenia** (7%), **Austria** (10%), **Finland** (12%) but accounting for a higher relative proportion in **Hungary** (24%), **Denmark** (31%), **the Netherlands** (23%). Those countries for which public funding accounts for a mid-range proportion of overall adult learning expenditure include **Estonia** (16%), **Germany** (15%) and **the UK** (17%). This compares with a much higher proportion of public investment in a number of countries outside the EU-28 such as **Australia** (78%) and **Norway** (55%) but also a much smaller proportion in **Switzerland** (3%) and **the US** (6%).

The proportion of funding for adult learning contributed by employment agencies is only noticeable in a few countries, and can be regarded also as public funding, therefore bolstering the levels of public sector investment in **Austria** (by 26%), **Finland** (35%), **Germany** (4%) and **Hungary** (2%).

Whilst the public sector is clearly an important contributor to adult learning, it is clear from Figure 6.1 that employer contributions are a more prominent funder of adult learning at the national level. For example, we see employer contributions accounting for 50% or more of adult learning in a number of countries including **Hungary, Spain, Slovakia, Germany, Denmark** and **the UK**. Of the EU countries for which there is data, **the Netherlands** sees the highest relative proportion of employer contribution to adult learning, perhaps in part subsidising the lower than average proportion invested by individuals (16%).

Figure 6.1: Distribution of expenditure for adult learning by source of funding financier

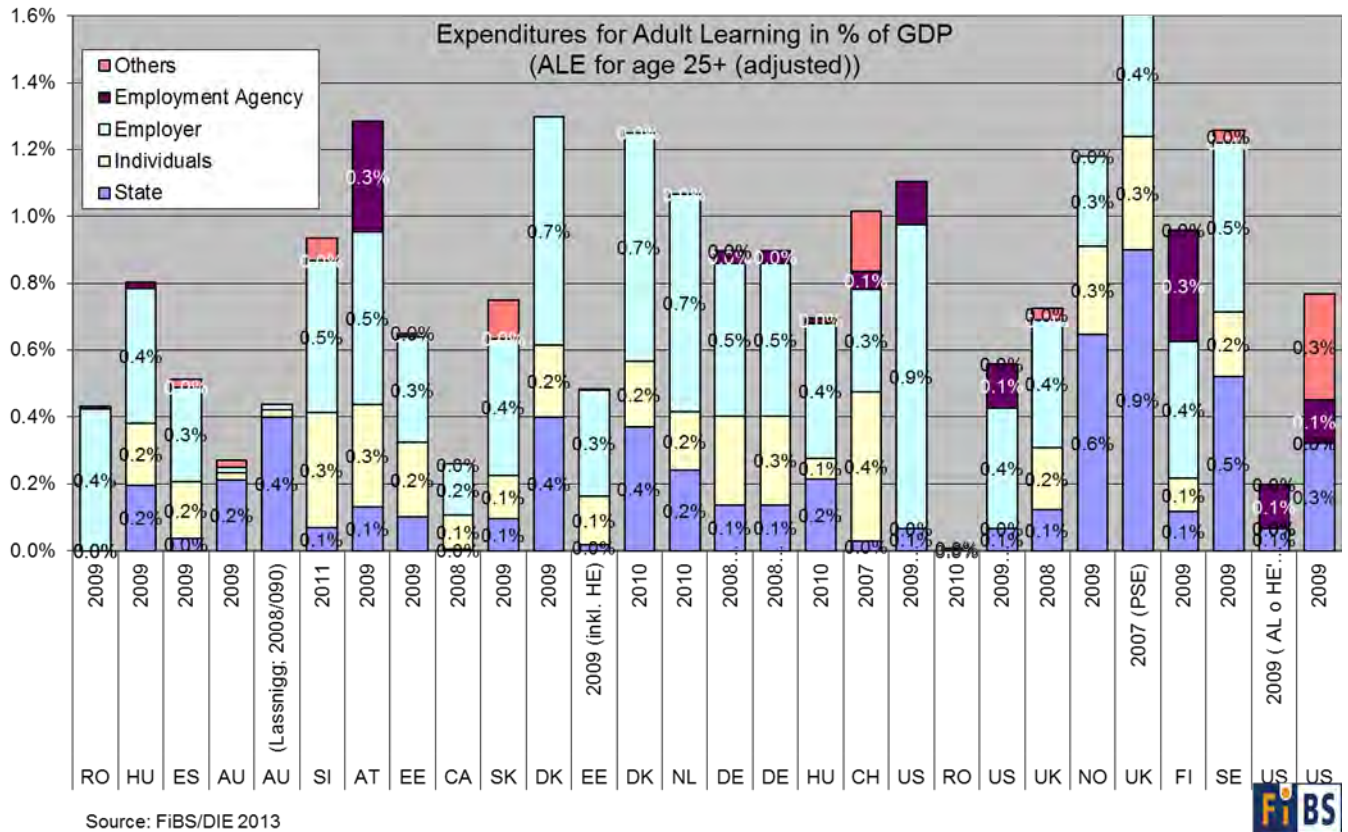


Source: FiBS/DIE 2013

Turning attention to

Figure 6.2 below, it can be seen that whilst expenditures on adult learning vary in terms of the public sector contribution, there is actually some consistency when the amount of public funding is contextualised as a proportion of national GDP. In most countries shown in the figure, the public sector investment in adult education equates to 0.1% of national GDP (**Slovenia, Slovakia, Austria, UK, Germany, Estonia, Finland**) or 0.2% as is the case in **Hungary** and **the Netherlands**. There are a few exceptions presented by **Denmark** (0.4%), **Norway** (0.6%) and **Sweden** (0.5%), suggesting that a pattern of higher proportionate public spending on adult learning can be seen in the Scandinavian countries (aside from **Finland**).

Figure 6.2: Expenditure for adult learning as a % of GDP



Source: FiBS/DIE 2013

Whilst the data drawn on here shows a partial picture in that there is no available data for all EU Member States, there does appear to be some trends in that employer contributions are generally a more prominent funder than the public sector but that there is some consistency between public sector investment when considered as a proportion of GDP.

When we consider the quantity of funding for adult learning, an interesting consideration is one of sufficiency; that is: whether the amount of investment for adult learning in any particular Member State is adequate in the context of the national goals. Here we refer to the views of the country experts as outlined in the questionnaire. Whilst some degree of subjectivity must be borne in mind (see limitations), when we consider the views of experts an interesting picture nonetheless emerges. As Table 6.1 shows, just over half of country experts considered that 'public funding for adult learning allocated in the most recent budget is not sufficient and not targeted enough to allow my Member State to move toward its expected goals'. In 15% of Member States, experts deemed funding to be sufficient in terms of volume but not adequately targeted to support a movement toward national goals. Nearly one fifth of experts deemed the public funding allocation in the most recent budget to be sufficient or just about sufficient, in terms of supporting their Member State move towards expected goals.

Table 6.1: Questionnaire results; 'Which statement best describes your assessment of public funding linked to adult learning in your Member State in 2016?'

Country expert views; 'Which statement best describes your assessment of public funding linked to adult learning in your Member State in 2016?'		
	<i>% country experts responding</i>	Country (country experts identified that approach is established in country).
Public funding for adult learning allocated in the most recent budget is more than sufficient for my Member State to move toward its expected goals	7%	SE, IE
Public funding for adult learning allocated in the most recent budget is just about sufficient and adequately targeted to allow my Member State to move toward its expected goals	11%	EE, SI, MT
Public funding for adult learning allocated in the most recent budget is sufficient but not adequately targeted to allow my Member State to move toward its expected goals	15%	DK, HU, LU, ES
Public funding for adult learning allocated in the most recent budget is not sufficient but targeted enough to allow my Member State to move toward its expected goals	15%	AT, BE, CY, NL
Public funding for adult learning allocated in the most recent budget is not sufficient and not targeted enough to allow my Member State to move toward its expected goals	52%	BG, HR, CZ, FI, FR, DE, EL, IT, LV, LT, PO, RO, SK, UK

In considering the experts' assessment, there is some link with the data presented in Figures 6.1 and 6.2. For instance, **Sweden** is shown to have devoted a higher than average proportion of public funding (equating to 0.5% GDP) to adult learning and the expert for this country deems the level of public funding more than sufficient in the context of national goals. At the same time, this country exhibits high relative rates of participation. On the other hand, for some of the countries where a lower proportion of public funding is allocated (0.1% of GDP), experts are more likely to deem the levels of public funding invested in adult learning as insufficient (**Slovakia, United Kingdom, Finland, Germany**). There are exceptions, since experts for **Estonia** and **Slovenia** deem public funding to be 'just

about sufficient' whilst figure 6.2 indicates that public investment is equivalent to 0.1% of GDP.

Table 6.1 also highlights the importance of targeted funding, in that some experts consider a lack of targeting as hampering national progress toward goals, even where the most recent public funding allocation is deemed sufficient (this is the case for **Denmark, Hungary, Luxembourg** and **Spain**). On the other hand, experts for **Austria, Belgium, Cyprus** and the **Netherlands** see the targeting of funding as a somewhat compensatory measure, since public funding is deemed 'not sufficient but targeted enough' to allow these respective Member States to move toward expected goals in adult learning.

The coverage of public funding for adult learning is an important consideration, since the 'sufficiency' of funding or otherwise might depend on whether a national strategy seeks to promote adult learning specifically amongst certain groups, rather than the whole population. It is useful therefore to examine the expert's questionnaire response on the issue of public funding coverage (Table 6.2).

Table 6.2: Questionnaire results; 'Which statement best describes your assessment of the coverage of public funding in your Member State?'

Country expert views; 'Which statement best describes your assessment of the coverage of public funding in your Member State?'		
	<i>% country experts responding</i>	<i>Member State (as reported by country experts)</i>
Public funding coverage is universal. It covers all adult learners	11%	FI, LU, SE
Public funding covers a majority of adult learners	30%	BE, DK, EE, FR, MT, PL, ES, UK
Public funding covers only a minority of adult learners	52%	AT, BG, HR, CZ, DE, EL, IE, IT, LV, LT, NL, RO, SK, SI
Don't know	7%	CY, HU

The survey data with regard to coverage indicates that public funding tends to cover a minority of adult learners, which was the view amongst 52% of country experts, perhaps suggesting a trend toward targeted funding/ interventions in these Member States. A lesser proportion (30%) of country experts identified that public funding covers a majority of adult learners, whilst country experts for three Member States considered that public funding is universal in that it covers all adult learners.

Overall, however, the questionnaire results do suggest that disadvantaged groups are prioritised in adult learning funding in the majority of Member States (see Table 6.3). The majority of country experts identified (85%) that those from disadvantaged groups who want to access adult learning do receive public subsidies either systematically or some of the time (37% and 48% respectively) in their Member State. In a lesser proportion of Member States, country experts considered that disadvantaged groups were 'almost never' (15% of country experts; **Croatia, Cyprus, Slovakia** and **Spain**) recipients of public subsidies for this purpose.

Table 6.3: Questionnaire Results; 'Do those from disadvantaged groups who want to access adult learning receive public subsidies?'

Country expert views; 'Do those from disadvantaged groups who want to access adult learning receive public subsidies?'		
	<i>% country experts responding</i>	<i>Member State (as reported by country experts)</i>
Systematically	37%	DK, EE, FI, IE, LV, LU, MT, PL, SI, SE
Some of the time	48%	AT, BE, BG, CZ, FR, DE, EL, HU, IT, LT, NL, RO, UK
Almost never	15%	HR, CY, SK, ES

Turning attention to public funding for business to support adult learning, a similar pattern is seen as for coverage (Table 6.4), in that 41% of experts outlined that public funding covers only a small proportion of businesses, and a slightly lesser proportion (37%) reporting that a majority of businesses are covered. A more universal approach is suggested in **Germany** and **Luxembourg** for which experts outlined that public funding covers all businesses. The European Social Fund is a route through which those from disadvantaged groups might receive support.

Table 6.4: Questionnaire results; 'Which statement best describes your assessment of the coverage of public funding for businesses in your Member State?'

Country expert views; 'Which statement best describes your assessment of the coverage of public funding for businesses in your Member State?'		
	<i>% country experts responding</i>	<i>Member State (as reported by country experts)</i>
Public funding covers all businesses	7%	DE, LU
Public funding covers a majority of businesses	37%	BE, BG, DK, FI, FR, HU, IE
Public funding covers only a small proportion of businesses	41%	AT, HR, EE, EL, IT, LI, NL, PL, RO, SK, SI
Don't know	15%	CY, CZ, MT, SE

6.4. Changes in public funding since 2010

The questionnaire with country experts revealed a trend toward increased national public funding for adult learning since 2010 (see Table 6.5). Just under half of the experts identified this direction of travel. A notable proportion however (22%) outlined that in their view, national public funding had decreased for their Member State since 2010. In a number of cases, experts considered that funding has remained at the same level since 2010 (15%) whilst the same proportion did not know the direction that public funding had

taken in their Member State. This indicates that adult learning is maintaining traction as a funding focus nationally, but has not increased as an investment priority consistently across Member States since 2010. The questionnaire does suggest that funding allocations to adult learning are a particular challenge for some Member States, in that those experts identifying that public funding has decreased since 2010 are also those reporting that public funding is not sufficient for their Member State to move toward expected goals. An exception here was **Spain**, for which the expert identified that the targeting of funding as an issue rather than the sufficiency of funding volumes. A challenge of decreasing budgets in the context of insufficient public funding is particularly evident in **Finland, Greece, Lithuania, the Netherlands** and the **UK**, based on the views of country experts. A word of caution here in that whilst experts can be quite objective around whether national funding is decreasing or increasing in their Member State, there is more subjectivity around funding allocations being deemed sufficient or otherwise in the context of national goals. For example, national goals will invariably be set at different levels in different Member States reflecting the model of provision, adult learning culture, levels of ambition etc.

Table 6.5: Questionnaire results; 'How has the level of public funding changed since July 2010 in your opinion and based on the data that you have collected for your country report?'

Country expert views; 'How has the level of public funding changed since July 2010 in your opinion and based on the data that you have collected for your country report?'		
	<i>% country experts responding</i>	<i>Member State (as reported by country experts)</i>
Public funding for adult learning has increased since 2010	48%	AT, BG, HR, EE, DE, HU, LT, MT, PL, RO, SK, SI, SE
Public funding for adult learning has decreased since 2010	22%	FI, EL, LT, NL, ES, UK
Public funding for adult learning has remained the same since 2010	15%	DK, FR, IE, IT
Don't know	15%	BE, CY, CZ, LU

Table 6.6: Questionnaire results; 'Are measures taken to improve cost efficiency? These could include for example evaluations which cover assessment models or outcome-based indicators?'

Country expert views; 'Are measures taken to improve cost efficiency? These could include for example evaluations which cover assessment models or outcome-based indicators?'		
	<i>% country experts responding</i>	<i>Member State (as reported by country experts)</i>
Yes	41%	AT, BG, DK,FI, IE, LV, LT, NL, RO, SI, UK
No	33%	HR, CY, ES, DE, HU, IT, LU, SK, ES
Don't know	26%	BE, CZ, FR, EL, MT, PL, SE

Country experts highlighted that measures are taken to improve cost efficiency in adult learning for their Member State in 41% of cases, whilst a third (33%) considered that such measures are taken. Experts seem more ambivalent on this issue, especially since one quarter of country experts stated that they did not know whether cost-saving measures are being undertaken or not, suggesting that there is a potential lack of awareness about such initiatives (perhaps suggesting a lack of public/ stakeholder engagement/ communication in this area).

6.5. How adult learning is financed

Here we consider the distribution of responsibilities for the allocation of public funding but also discuss the instruments/mechanisms for adult learning across EU-28. In terms of how public funding is allocated, see Figure 6.3 below which outlines the distribution of responsibilities for adult learning as reported by the country experts.

- The expert questionnaire results indicate that in approximately 50% of the Member States, the central/ state level of government has full responsibility for the allocation of public funding.
- In **Belgium**, however, the regional government is fully responsible for the allocation of public funding for adult learning; in **France** and **Germany**, the regional and local government have significant responsibility, while the central/ state government has a more limited responsibility in the allocation of public funding for adult learning.
- In **Austria, Italy, Poland, Spain**, and the **UK** the central/ state and regional levels of government share responsibilities for the allocation of public funding for adult learning.
- The regional level also has a relatively important level of responsibility in the allocation of public funding for adult learning in **Bulgaria, Denmark** and **Romania**.

- The local level generally has a more limited responsibility for the allocation of public funds across the Member States, but there are nevertheless a number of countries where it plays a relatively important role (e.g. **Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, and Sweden**).

Figure 6.3 : The distribution of responsibilities for allocation of public funding

Country	Allocation of public funding			
	Allocation of public funding - Central and/or State Government	Allocation of public funding - Regional Government	Allocation of public funding - Local Government	Allocation of public funding - Other agency or body
Austria	Some responsibility	Some responsibility	Some responsibility	Significant responsibility
Belgium	.	Full responsibility	Some responsibility	Limited responsibility
Bulgaria	Full responsibility	Some responsibility	No responsibility	Limited responsibility
Croatia	Full responsibility	No responsibility	No responsibility	No responsibility
Cyprus	Full responsibility	.	No responsibility	.
Czech Republic	Full responsibility	Some responsibility	No responsibility	.
Denmark	Significant responsibility	Some responsibility	Significant responsibility	.
Estonia	Full responsibility	.	Some responsibility	Limited responsibility
Finland	Some responsibility	No responsibility	Some responsibility	.
France	Limited responsibility	Significant responsibility	Limited responsibility	.
Germany	Some responsibility	Significant responsibility	Some responsibility	Significant responsibility
Greece	Full responsibility	No responsibility	No responsibility	.
Hungary	Full responsibility	Limited responsibility	No responsibility	Limited responsibility
Ireland	Full responsibility	No responsibility	No responsibility	Full responsibility
Italy	Some responsibility	Some responsibility	Limited responsibility	.
Latvia	Full responsibility	No responsibility	Limited responsibility	Full responsibility
Lithuania	Full responsibility	.	Some responsibility	.

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Luxembourg	Full responsibility	.	No responsibility	No responsibility
Malta	Limited responsibility	.	Full responsibility	No responsibility
Netherlands	Some responsibility	.	Some responsibility	.
Poland	Full responsibility	Full responsibility	Some responsibility	.
Romania	Full responsibility	Some responsibility	Some responsibility	No responsibility
Slovakia	Limited responsibility	Limited responsibility	No responsibility	Limited responsibility
Slovenia	Full responsibility	.	Some responsibility	Some responsibility
Spain	Some responsibility	Some responsibility	Limited responsibility	No responsibility
Sweden	Some responsibility	.	Some responsibility	Some responsibility
United Kingdom	Some responsibility	Some responsibility	No responsibility	.

* The darker the colour, the higher the level of responsibility for each level of government.

Now we move to consider the nature of funding instruments for adult learning. The instruments in Table 6.7 below covers professional/vocational as well as non-vocational (general) adult learning and varies in relation to the sector focused, as mentioned also in the above sections. The table highlights different approaches across the EU member states. While the number of instruments and models is quite high in some countries, particularly **Germany** (48 instruments for individuals counted by Dohmen 2018), **Italy** (31) and **Austria** (27),¹⁷³ while the number of instruments is much smaller in other countries. The high number of instruments in some countries (**Germany, Italy, Austria**) mentioned is due to the federal structure and the state-level responsibility. The lowest number of instruments can be observed in countries with a centralised structure and/or where a focus is on providing support to companies, rather than individuals. This is particularly the case in **Central and Eastern Europe** (PPMI/FiBS 2012; Dohmen 2018).

In addition, a small number of instruments can also emerge if a country employs only one or few large-scale instruments, which is, for example, the case in **Sweden**, while large numbers are likely to indicate targeted approaches for certain target groups. So far, research has not been able to arrive at a clear conclusion whether policies relying one (or

¹⁷³ Other studies, however, provide different numbers, e.g. the country case study, referring to Wagner (2015), mentions a figure of 245 instruments, incl. those of the Chamber of Labour and the Chamber of Commerce, for example. For Germany, Dohmen (2018) arrives at more than 100 instruments in total, if also the project-based and employer oriented models are reported. Employer funding will also drive the number of instruments in France and the Netherlands, the number of training is at around 100 in each country.

two) instruments for all or with a larger number of targeted instruments are more successful.

Table 6.7 Existing funding instruments for individuals by level of operation

Existing Funding instruments for individuals by level of operation (as reported by country experts)		
	National level	Regional level
Tax incentives	13 Member States AT, CZ (2), DE, EE, FI (2), IE, HR, LT, LU, LV, NL, PT, UK	Not reported
Vouchers, grants, ILA	19 Member States AT (4), BE, BG, CZ, DE (3), DK (2), EE, EL, FI (6), HU, IT, HR (2), MT, NL, PL, PT (2), SE, SI, UK	5 Member States AT (18), BE (2), DE (10), IT (24), UK.
Loans	19 Member States AT, BG, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IT, LT, LU, LV, NL (2), PL (2), PT, SE, SK, UK (2).	1 Member State UK
Training leave	2 Member States BE (2), DE (14)	
Saving schemes	1 Member State AT	
Fee Redemption		2 Member States BE (2), DE
Supply side funding	19 Member States AT (2), BG, CY (4), CZ (4), DK, EE (2), EL, ES, HU (2), IT (2), LV (3), MT, NL (3), PL (2), PT, RO (3), SE (3), SI (3), SK (2).	3 Member States BE (2), DE (16), UK (4).
Conditional supply side funding	5 Member States BE, DK, HU, IT (2), HR (3)	2 Member States BE, HR
100% grants	7 Member States AT, DE, DK (2), EE, FI, NL (2), RO	1 Member State ES
Total	180	100

Remarks: *) Officially, Germany has an instrument which is called a saving scheme, however, this is only a regulation that allows withdrawal of funds from a general savings scheme and therefore not considered a saving scheme. **) The number of fee redemption regulations is probably underestimated

Source: Cedefop data base, FiBS/DIE 2013, Dohmen 2018

Information on the existence and details of funding instruments are often a snapshot of a certain point in time as they are relatively dynamic, in that they can be launched or discontinued at any point in time.

6.6. Level of transparency in the financing framework

The term 'traceability' has been employed here as a way of explaining how easy it is to access information on funding allocation at the national, but also sub-national level. As per Table 6.88 and table 6.9, country experts considered that the allocation of public funds is more traceable at the national compared to the sub-national level (37% identifying that funding allocations were fully traceable at the national level compared to 7% at the sub-national level). This reflects the challenges that country experts had in identifying full details on expenditure on adult learning in their Member State. There was furthermore a higher level of awareness about how traceable funding allocations were at the national, compared to sub-national level (i.e. one country expert considered that they didn't know about how traceable the funding was at national level compared to six country experts at the sub-national level). Whilst from the questionnaire the traceability of financial information doesn't emerge as a particular challenge 'in principle', the expert's own endeavours in finding investment information suggests that there are indeed issues around data availability, transparency and consistency. These are likely to reflect fragmentation in the sector i.e. adult learning lacks coordination and alignment between various parts of its policy framework.

Table 6.8 : Questionnaire results; National funds - 'Which category best explains the allocation and traceability of public funds linked to adult learning in your Member State?'

Country expert views; National funds - 'Which category best explains the allocation and traceability of public funds linked to adult learning in your Member State?'		
	<i>% country experts responding</i>	<i>Member State (as reported by country experts)</i>
The allocation of funds is fully traceable (i.e. available publicly for example)	37%	BE, BG, DK, FI, HU, MT, NL, SI, SE, UK
The allocation of funds is partially traceable (upon request for example)	41%	AT, HR, CZ, EE, FR, DE, IE, IT, LT, RO, ES
The allocation of public funds is not traceable	19%	CY, EL, LU, PO, SK
Don't know	4%	LV

Table 6.9 : Questionnaire results; Subnational/ Regional/ local funds - 'Which category best explains the allocation and traceability of public funds linked to adult learning in your Member State?'

Country expert views; Subnational/Regional/local funds - 'Which category best explains the allocation and traceability of public funds linked to adult learning in your Member State?'		
	<i>% country experts responding</i>	<i>Member State (as reported by country experts)</i>
The allocation of funds is fully traceable (i.e. available publicly for example)	7%	BE, SE
The allocation of funds is partially traceable (upon request for example)	44%	BG, DK, FI, FR, DE, IE, IT, LT, NL, RO, ES, UK
The allocation of public funds is not traceable	26%	AT, HR, EE, EL, LU, PL, SK
Don't know	22%	CY, CZ, HU, LV, MT, SI

6.7. Summary of Investment in Adult Learning

We here summarise the findings in relation to finance and investment for adult learning.

With respect to the amount of public investment in adult learning, there are wide variations around the proportion of public funding that contributes to adult learning investment at a national level. Despite this, there is some consistency in the proportion of GDP contributed to adult learning. The public investment of many Member States equates to around 0.1% though investment is higher in some **Scandinavian** countries.

Nearly half of country experts responding to the questionnaire indicated that funding volumes have increased since 2010, whilst around one quarter indicated that funding volumes had decreased. Although there may be some links to development of participation rates, this is not necessarily the case in all countries. Despite this confidence in the direction of investment overall, there remains issues around the availability and transparency of data on adult learning investment – which was a challenge cited by a majority of country experts. The main finding here is that information on national investment in adult learning is not recorded and made available in a way that supports quantification and comparison between countries. This may simply reflect that volumes invested in adult learning are reported against broader and various other budget lines, since adult learning cross-cuts across a number of ministerial or policy sectors. There are implications then for how data-collection and availability might be promoted in such a way as to support an increase in understanding around investment in adult learning across Europe. .

In terms of the instruments for adult funding, the review of funding mechanisms across all member states shows a large variety of the models employed and the overall level of uptake. The mere number of instruments is particularly high in DE, IT and AT, countries

with a federal system and relevant sub-national responsibilities, while it is relatively low in most countries, particularly those in **Northern and Central and Eastern Europe**. The underlying policies vary, though: while some countries, such as e.g. **Sweden** and **Finland**, employ very few instruments, which address (almost) all adults, other address only certain target groups, as most Central and Eastern European countries.

With respect to the transparency of the financing framework, according to experts, national funds are fully traceable in ten countries, for another eleven it is stated that they are partially traceable, while they are not traceable in five countries. Not surprisingly, traceability is more difficult at the sub-national level (i.e. at regional or local level). Only **Belgium** and **Sweden** report full traceability; for 12 countries it is said that they are partially traceable. Regional or local level funds are not traceable in seven countries, though this reflects that a number of these countries do not have a strong regional or local level with regard to adult learning provision. It is not fully clear to what extent this assessment is in line with the provision of data on funding volumes in the country reports, as this seems far more scattered across EU member states. For example, funding figures for all funders are presented for very few countries only (e.g. **Austria, Denmark**) and even here concerns exist, whether these data provide the “final” picture for adult learning in particular. For example, depending on the data sources relied on, funding in **Germany** varies between 0.5% and 1.0% of GDP, while it arrives at 0.9 to 1.0% in **Austria**. For most countries, only some data could be presented, which does not allow to draw any “objective” conclusion on sufficiency of funds.

In their assessment, more than half of experts consider public funding insufficient and not targeted to move forward towards the expected goals. Experts from two countries (**Sweden, Ireland**) mention that funding is more than sufficient and three state that funding is at least just about sufficient and adequately targeted. While **Sweden** is among the countries with highest participation rates in general as well as for low-qualified, this is not the case for the other countries, where funds are stated to be sufficient. In contrast, **the Netherlands** show high participation rates, with insufficient, but well targeted provision. Thus, it might be that proper targeting may overcome at least the cost and funding barrier in some countries. Yet, incomplete data inhibits the drawing of conclusions; moreover, some statements are somewhat surprising if participation rates are considered.

7. ASSESSMENT OF ADULT LEARNING SYSTEMS IN THE EU

This section assesses the adult learning systems across the EU28 by drawing on evidence from the country reports and the survey responses from country experts. The section firstly synthesises the main strengths and weaknesses of adult learning systems from the points made in the country reports and the expert survey. The section then assesses the adult learning systems by looking at the extent to which they cover the key factors for successful policy articulated in the conceptual framework developed by the European Commission in 2015¹⁷⁴. This framework highlights the key building blocks for success in adult learning, meaning it is a relevant and useful 'lens' through which to assess Member States adult learning systems.

7.1. Strengths and weaknesses of adult learning

This subsection draws on the expert survey and country reports to look at the strengths and weaknesses of adult learning systems across the EU28. Each expert was asked to highlight a minimum of three strengths and three weaknesses of the adult learning system which resulted in 171 separate statements, 82 of which were strengths and 89 were weaknesses. Each of the 171 separate statements were coded to identify common and reoccurring strengths and weaknesses¹⁷⁵. These codes allowed for the identification of six broad themes or groups summarised in the table below and explained further in this section.

Table 7.1 Strengths and Weaknesses - Themes

Strengths	Weaknesses
Collaborative working	Complex provider landscape
Targeting groups most in need	Insufficient funding
Demand- led provision	Poor use of data

Each of these points are dealt with below.

7.1.1. Strengths

Collaborative working

Strong collaborative working was seen as a key strength of adult learning systems in the EU28 where country experts identified a recent and notable increase in partnership working in this policy field across different agencies and levels, particularly over the last 3-5 years. Around 70% of experts highlighted this point as a key strength of their adult learning system in the survey and 65% of country reports also highlighted this issue as a strength. Recognising that the adult learning agenda links to different competencies including

¹⁷⁴ European Commission, Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (2015). *An in-depth analysis of adult learning policies and their effectiveness in Europe*

¹⁷⁵ Country experts were asked open ended questions about the key strengths and weaknesses of their adult learning systems. The experts short replies were then coded centrally to help analyse and then identify similar and related issues which were grouped under six prominent themes.

education, employment, labour force development and lifelong learning- experts highlighted a genuine attempt in Member States to work collaboratively.

It was interesting to note that the country reports often stated that up until a few years ago (often at the beginning of the 2014-2020 period) the adult learning agenda was often the sole responsibility of a single Government Department with little in the way of joint planning, development and implementation. In recent times the scope and depth of collaborative and cross working between different organisations has increased greatly as Member States recognised that effective adult learning systems needed a multi-dimensional approach which, according to the country reports, stimulated the pooling of funding, the sourcing of more effective solutions and the generation of a more holistic approach. Collaborative working was often present across a range of different types of adult learning systems and across many Member States as the examples below demonstrate.

Examples to evidence such collaborative working arrangements were found in **Estonia** where the Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 encourages coordination between different levels and forms of learning including Government Departments and agencies responsible for education, labour markets, employment and enterprise. Together, these agencies coordinate, plan, monitor and implement various programmes linked directly and indirectly to adult learning, with the Lifelong Learning Strategy helping to focus their attention in a single document. From the development of this document, Estonia had rolled out various working groups, committees and partnership meetings as vehicles through which collaborative and joint working took place.

In the **Czech Republic, Lithuania, Latvia, Spain** and **Austria** there was further evidence and examples of collaborative working involving collaborative and joint decision making at the programme level. This was particularly prevalent in **Austria** where their adult learning system is characterised by cooperative processes that correspond to multi-level governance. This includes the Conference on Adult Education in Austria (KEBO), which is attended by an array of relevant stakeholders, and which helps inform the development of programmes and measures and discusses key opportunities and threats to the implementation of an effective adult learning policy.

Targeting groups most in need

A second key strength of adult learning systems in the EU28 highlighted in the country reports, and also the expert questionnaire, was a focus of provision on specific target groups. 80% of country reports highlighted this as a strength with reports mentioning that provision was focussed and targeted at groups rather than the entire adult population more generally. Target groups mentioned the most in the country reports were the low skilled, those out of work and, to a lesser extent, older workers. The Member States who were seen to particularly focus their adult learning provision on these target groups were **Denmark, Finland, Latvia, Luxembourg** and the **UK**. In all of these cases, the targeting of specific groups had become much more prevalent in the last 3-6 years with a recognition that it increased both the effectiveness and efficiency of adult learning provision. Interesting, in all of these countries except **Denmark**, the targeting of adult learning provision on groups was linked to the 'prioritisation' of resources on those most in need and on groups that would not normally take up adult learning provision in the absence of additional intervention.

For example, in **Latvia**, policy actions focus on funding learning for disadvantaged and difficult-to-engage groups, including the economically inactive and unemployed. The country's Lifelong Learning Strategy highlights the low skilled as particular targets of provision and highlights that provision needs to particularly recognise the 'uniqueness' of specific groups. The strategy calls for targeted guidance, support services and promotion of programmes to learners in these under-represented groups.

In **Luxembourg**, there are several programmes targeting the low skilled and disadvantaged with a wide range of adult education measures that should have an effect in future years, even if at present uptake from the low skilled remains poor. It is interesting to note that **Luxembourg, Finland and Denmark** mentions 'outcomes' that it expects to see specifically for the low skilled (in terms of numbers of low skilled supported and numbers of low skilled gaining employment).

In the **UK**, although participation in learning is relatively high, it is highly diverse, depending on prior educational attainment, job level, disabilities, and where people live. All regions in the UK are expected to produce a strategy aimed at those groups least likely to participate in adult learning, which are generally recognised as the low skilled, older workers, and younger people recently out of formal education. Similar to Luxembourg, Finland and Denmark, as well as the strategies simply stating that target groups are important, the UK also puts forward specific funding directly encouraging providers to target the low- skilled.

Demand- led provision

The third key strength of adult learning systems identified in the country reports and by the experts in the survey is linked to available learning offer becoming more demand-led particularly in relation to matching it more closely to the needs of the labour market and employers. Around half of country reports stated a more demand led adult education system particularly focussing in on VET which was backed up in the expert survey where 55% of experts mentioned this as a key strength. Those reports which identified this as a strength often set this within the broader 'modernisation' of adult learning provision which takes closer account of what the labour market and employers need. Nearly half of the country reports talked about curriculum 'relevance, alignment or employer focus' to ensure there was a clear economic outcome of adult education with **Cyprus, France, Finland, Denmark, Portugal and Poland** all being the most prevalent in this instance. For instance, in **Cyprus** 'important progress' has been made to adapt the adult education programmes towards the enhancement of VET, the modernisation of out-dated adult education schemes, and the inter-connection or linking of education to the labour market to make provision and the curriculums more relevant.

A separate but interconnected strength was around the stronger use of evidence to make provision more relevant to the demands of business and the wider economy. In all of the six Member States mentioned in the above paragraph, the reports cite a stronger 'data driven' and evidence base that looks at the needs of business. In **Finland, Poland and France** there has been a particular step change in the way adult learning uses large-scale surveys of businesses to develop provision that is more in line with demand rather than supply. In all of these cases, adult learning provision has focussed on more basic skills activity coming as a consequence of various surveys which these three Member States now regularly undertake. The use of data and evidence was often highlighted by experts as a key way in which their adult learning provision had been 'modernised'. Nine reports refer

to Member States using the analysis of the OECDs most recent Survey of Adult Skills undertaken in 2012¹⁷⁶. Despite data being seen as a strength in some Member States in others this was seen as a key weaknesses as set out later in this sub section.

Tied in with this strength was the development of the qualification system/ framework (EQF). In **Romania**, 'the adoption of the National Qualification Framework, together with the updating of the national registers for qualifications and of the training providers, managed by the National Authority for Qualifications (NAQ), makes more transparent the orientation through the training provision.' In **Poland**, modernization of the qualification system has led to an Integrated Qualification Register (IQR) opened to various educational approaches. In **France**, all qualifications under the National Qualifications Framework now have the same currency as formal education qualifications. The National System of Occupations is linked to the National Register of Qualifications through the Central Database of Competences. The Central Database of Competences is a unique system which not only connects both systems but is also the common and respected tool for the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

7.1.2. Weaknesses

Complex provider landscape

40% of country reports and 43% of experts in the survey highlighted weaknesses around a complex and fragmented provider landscape in their country. This was particularly an issue in **Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece** and **the UK**. One of the reoccurring issues in these countries was a lack of coordination and planning on the provider side at the local level where providers did not work together nor even communicate on a regular basis to help discuss various supply and demand issues. For instance, in **Belgium** and **Austria** providers were seen to work by themselves when designing and implementing provision, leading to an 'overly complex' array of courses and learning activities, some of which duplicated each other. In these two Member States, and also in **Cyprus** and **Denmark**, the experts noted that this led to confusion among adult learners and also businesses about what provision was actually on offer. In the Cypriot report the complex provider landscape meant that learners had to visit many different websites belonging to a range of different providers to gain a clear idea of what courses were on offer.

The fragmentation of the provider base was partly seen as being a symptom of the open market in adult learning found in many Member States where Further Education institutions and the private sector were generally free to deliver what provision they considered relevant. This lack of coordination was particularly seen to hamper any forward planning and any long-term understanding of what providers should be delivering in the coming years. For example, in **Finland and Belgium** the country reports highlighted the short-sighted nature of providers who did little to work together to understand the needs of learners in 3-5 years' time, or what the future economy will need in order to grow. The lack of a 'critical mass' and joined-up provider base referred to in reports meant there was

¹⁷⁶ OECD (2016), Skills Matter: Further Results from the Survey of Adult Skills, OECD Publishing, Paris.

no pooling of resources to properly understand and predict future demand from the provider side.

Insufficient funding

80% of country reports and 75% of experts stated that a lack of funding in adult learning was a key weakness of their adult learning system. It is interesting to note that reports which particularly highlighted that funding was a pressing issue were the **UK, Bulgaria, Italy, Denmark and Spain** meaning the issue was widespread across different countries, European areas and education systems in the EU28.

Many country reports noted a gradual fall in funding over the last 5 years, as public sector finances come under increasing pressure. In most Member States the country reports did not state the actual drop in funding experienced in the adult learning field but based on the four reports that did contain figures the drop ranged from around 5-20%. However, it is interesting to note that 30% of the reports also talked about funding levels being 'insufficient' to cope with demand rather than funding levels actually falling. **Bulgaria** is a good example of this point as the report highlights that low investment in adult learning has resulted in an imbalance of provision across different regions. Similarly, in the **UK, Germany and Denmark** there has been a recognised rise in the demand for new skills in the workplace partly because rising employment levels have put further pressure on public finances.

'Insufficient' funding has led to a lack of targeting of harder to reach groups, and also a lack of quality in some countries with these issues being mentioned in 40% of reports. Although targeting was seen as a strength in many Member States (see sub-section above), there was a recognition that supporting harder to reach groups was more resource intensive and sometimes required additional funding. This meant that providers were asking for additional funding at a time when finances were becoming tighter. In the **UK** report, the increase in 'unit cost' per beneficiary from provision supporting harder to reach groups was challenging and did not agree with the general pressure on finances faced by all stakeholders in the adult learning field.

Finally, in **Croatia, Bulgaria and Spain**, the insufficient funding from national sources of finance meant there was an over reliance on EU funding to support adult learning. These country reports noted that EU funding was being channelled into adult learning but this replaced national funding from central sources. In **Spain** there was a concern expressed that this left the adult learning agenda exposed to 'competition' from other education themes which ESF in particular supported.

Poor use of data

Interestingly, although the use of data to inform adult learning was seen as a strength by some experts, there was a similar number of country reports that highlighted it as a weakness. About a third of countries highlighted 'poor data use' and a lack of a robust evidence base as a weakness which led to experts stating that funding and provision was generally not based on real and 'proven' need. The country reports of **Romania, Slovakia, Croatia and Hungary** were those that had the most significant criticism around a lack of data to inform provision. The data which was seen to be lacking normally related to two types of information. The first was data on the needs of adult learners in terms of their skills needs or skills gaps whilst the second type related to the needs of employers and/ or the wider economy.

Country reports not only highlighted a concern on a lack of data but also highlighted that the data which did exist was either poorly analysed, reported or shared. For example, in **Slovakia** although a survey was done to assess the needs of learners, the data was now five years out of date meaning the evidence was largely seen as being inaccurate. In **Romania**, the sharing of data was generally seen as the main problem where the Ministry had undertaken some data collection but had not shared this with regional bodies nor providers. In **Croatia**, the survey undertaken with adults to understand their skills needs was thought to be too small to be accurate at the local level, which was also true for **Greece**.

Finally, there was also a clear weakness across most Member States around forecasting data to predict how current demand for adult learning provision may change in the future. Despite many experts recognising that predicting skills needs in the future is challenging, they stated that there was very little if any attempt in Member States to assess the scale and type of provision that adult learners will need in the future. **Luxembourg** was a good example of this where forecasting was not part of the current Ministry's work and that they tended to focus on data that related to what the economy needed now rather than what it will need in the future.

7.2. Assessment against conceptual framework

This subsection assesses national adult learning systems in the light of the conceptual framework for effective adult learning policies that was developed by the European Commission in 2015.

The framework was based on a rigorous process of literature review and expert analysis and evolved from a thorough evidence based review of what factors have been proven to lead to an effective and strong adult learning system¹⁷⁷. This evidence base identified those specific policy actions that could be shown to be present in effective adult learning systems across Europe. These 'building blocks' for success in adult learning systems were grouped together under six broad policy objectives, or 'key success factors', as follows:

- 1) Key success factor 1: Develop learners' interest in learning
- 2) Key success factor 2: Increase employers' investment in learning
- 3) Key success factor 3: Improve equity of access for all
- 4) Key success factor 4: Deliver learning that is relevant
- 5) Key success factor 5: Deliver learning that is of high quality
- 6) Key success factor 6: Ensure coherent policy

The framework illustrates an intervention logic based on a chain of expected effects demonstrating how small individual 'building blocks' of policy link to these six key success

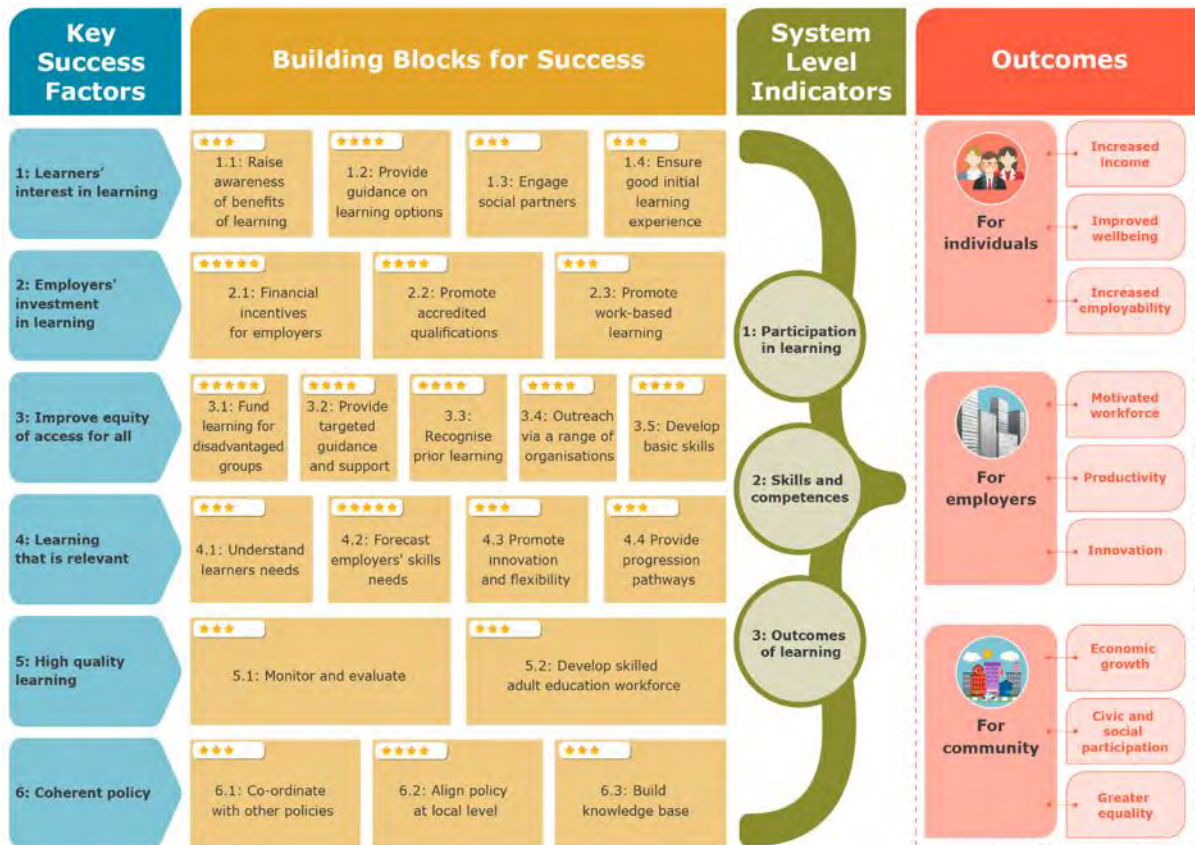
¹⁷⁷ European Commission, Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (2015). *An in-depth analysis of adult learning policies and their effectiveness in Europe*

factors and how they in turn are related to outputs and outcomes defining successful adult learning systems¹⁷⁸.

The overall conceptual framework which acts a 'lens' through which this subsection is viewed is found in Figure 7.1 below.

This subsection considers whether Member States exhibit characteristics that are recognised as positive and constructive in building successful adult learning policies through a review of the extent to which national adult learning systems can be said to incorporate the key success factors articulated in the conceptual framework.

Figure 7.1: Conceptual Framework



Please note that experts were asked to highlight whether or not the success factors were in place, rather than highlight how strong they were. Simply having a factor in place does not necessarily mean that provision is strong. For instance, if a Member State has provision that ensures access to all (key success factor 3) this does not necessarily mean that this provision is of good quality and is having the desired impact. This means that some of the points made in this sub-section around building blocks being in place may not directly link to the strengths and weaknesses set out in the previous sub-section.

¹⁷⁸ For a detailed explanation of the Conceptual Framework see page 83 https://ec.europa.eu/epale/sites/epale/files/all_in_depth_analysis_of_adult_learning_policies_and_their_effectiveness_in_europe_12.11.2015_pdf.pdf

7.2.1. Coverage of Key Success Factors

Table 7.2 below provides an overview of the responses from country experts to the survey. Experts were asked to assess the extent to which their country had the key success factors in place (KSF). The table below represents the assessment given where:

- 4- The key success factor is in place
- 3- the key success factor is generally in place
- 2- the key success factor is only partially in place
- 1- the Key success factor is not in place

Table 7.2: Coverage of Key Success Factors

	On a scale of 1-5 where 1 is low and 5 is high [an average of the columns to the right]	KSF 1	KSF 2	KSF 3	KSF 4	KSF 5	KSF 6	total
Austria	2.17	3	2	3	2	1	2	13
Belgium	3.17	3	4	4	2	4	2	19
Bulgaria	2.67	3	3	3	2	2	3	16
Croatia	1.50	2	2	2	1	1	1	9
Cyprus	2.00	2	2	2	3	1	2	12
Czech Republic	2.17	2	3	2	2	3	1	13
Denmark	3.50	4	4	3	3	4	3	21
Estonia	3.17	3	3	4	3	3	3	19
Finland	2.83	2	3	2	3	4	3	17
France	2.67	3	2	2	3	3	3	16
Germany	2.33	2	3	3	2	2	2	14
Greece	1.33	2	1	1	2	1	1	8
Hungary	1.83	1	3	2	2	1	2	11
Ireland	3.50	2	4	4	4	3	4	21
Italy	2.17	2	4	2	2	2	1	13
Latvia	2.83	2	3	3	3	4	2	17
Lithuania	3.00	3	3	3	3	3	3	18
Luxembourg	3.50	4	3	4	3	3	4	21
Malta	2.83	3	2	3	3	3	3	17
Netherlands	3.67	4	4	4	4	3	3	22
Poland	2.00	2	3	2	2	1	2	12
Portugal	2.50	4	2	2	3	2	2	15
Romania	2.17	2	2	3	2	1	3	13
Slovakia	2.33	2	2	3	2	3	2	14
Slovenia	2.67	3	3	3	2	3	2	16
Spain	2.33	2	3	2	2	3	2	14
Sweden	3.33	4	3	3	3	4	3	20
United Kingdom	3.50	4	4	4	3	3	3	21
total		75	80	78	71	71	67	

Source: Expert Questionnaire

Overall, the responses from the country experts show that:

- The success factor for a strong adult learning system that was most prevalent in Member States relates to **increasing employer's investment in learning** whilst the factor least prevalent was **ensuring a coherent policy**
- **Greece, Croatia, Hungary, Cyprus and Poland** were the Member States with the lowest level of coverage of the critical success factors seen as being important for a strong adult learning system
- **Netherlands, United Kingdom, Luxembourg, Ireland and Sweden** were those countries with the highest level of coverage of critical success factors.

7.2.2. Coverage of Building Blocks

Moving beyond the six main key success factors, the table below provides further detail on the 21 building blocks - policy actions that contribute to factors for successful adult learning policy - which experts considered were in place in the countries' adult learning systems. Country experts stated whether each building block was 'in place' or 'not in place' with the results being shown in Figure 7.2 below.

Figure 7.2: Building blocks for effective adult learning policy in place/ not in place

Building Block of policy		% of experts stating block was 'in place'
Employers investment	Promote work-based learning	85
Learner's interest:	Engage social partners	81
Equity:	Fund learning for disadvantaged groups	81
Employers investment	Financial incentives for employers	78
Employers investment	Promote accredited qualifications	78
Relevance:	Forecast employers' skills needs	78
Quality:	Develop skilled adult education workforce	78
Equity:	Develop basic skills	74
Learner's interest:	Provide guidance on learning options	63
Equity:	Provide targeted guidance and support	59
Equity:	Recognise prior learning	59
Equity:	Outreach via a range of organisations	59
Relevance:	Provide progression pathways	59
Coherence:	Co-ordinate with other policies	56
Coherence:	Build knowledge base	56
Learner's interest:	Ensure good initial learning experience	52
Learner's interest:	Raise awareness of benefits of learning	48
Relevance:	Promote innovation and flexibility	48
Quality:	Monitor and evaluate	48
Coherence:	Align policy at local level	41
Relevance:	Understand learners needs	37

Source: Expert Questionnaire

The headline points from the above figure are:

- Sixteen out of the 21 building blocks were considered to be in place by over half of experts.
- The building blocks which most (over 80%) experts considered were in place were 'Promoting work-based learning; 'Engaging social partners' and 'Funding learning for disadvantaged groups'.

- Conversely, the building blocks which experts assessed to be least in place were 'Understanding learners' needs' and 'aligning policy at the local level'.
- Three of the top 5 building blocks which were considered to be most in place were linked to the key success factor associated with 'Employer investment in learning'.

7.3. Assessment against success factors and building blocks

This section provides further detail on the extent to which adult learning systems have both the success factors and building blocks in place.

7.3.1. Key success factor 1: Develop learners' interest in learning

Promoting a positive disposition towards learning is a key factor in ensuring adults join in, remain and progress in learning. Experts were asked to what extent there was sufficient policy attention to: heightening awareness of the benefits of learning; providing targeted guidance for learners about learning options; engaging social partners in the planning of, promotion of and recruitment of learners to adult learning; and providing appropriate introductory learning experiences for learners. The majority (52%) of countries had most of these building blocks in place, with a small number (5 Member States: **Denmark, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Sweden, and UK**) having all aspects covered.

Raise awareness of the benefits of learning

Over half of the experts (52%) thought that this building block was not in place. The main thrust of the issue identified in the country reports was around a lack of motivation to learn, coming as a consequence of adults not being aware of the personal and professional benefits of learning nor the impact that learning can have on issues such as career progression, salary increases and accessing better job opportunities. **Greece** was a good example of this issue, which was also found in **Cyprus, Hungary, Slovakia and Romania**. A major challenge for Greece has been to increase participation levels in adult learning by increasing the attractiveness of the programme offered. The country report stated that adult and vocational learning has a low prestige in Greek culture and that adult learning was often associated with low academic performance in the past. Adults in this country therefore often associated learning as a weakness rather than an opportunity for progression.

Another key theme linked to raising awareness of the benefits of learning was around countries specifically not promoting the positive impact of learning. Country reports did sometimes cover promoting learning opportunities (see below) but there was little evidence of Member States actively promoting the actual 'benefits' of learning in terms of better career progression, higher salaries and higher employability levels. In fact, the country reports had no specific examples of promotional campaigns, research or data that was used to show, for instance, the difference that adults who took part in learning benefitted from compared to those who did not.

Some new and developing initiatives were mentioned in country reports such as 'voucher' schemes aimed to motivate adults and remove financial barriers (**Croatia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, and the Netherlands**). In **the Netherlands**, the Policy Brief *Leven Lang Leren* includes measures to increase demand-driven funding in higher

education and VET by providing vouchers. Such an approach should increase learners' disposition towards future learning.

Other barriers emerging from the country reports were: time, culture, perceptions of poor quality of learning provision and the lack of social value of adult education. Two reports mentioned the promotion of the benefits of learning as a motivational tool (emerging practice in **Estonia** and **Italy**), another as tax incentives (**Czech Republic**). Some referred to celebratory events such as Adult Learners' / Learning / Lifelong Learning Weeks and festivals of learning such as in **Croatia, Lithuania, Slovenia, and the UK**).

Provide guidance on learning options

Participation in adult learning is often supported by targeted guidance on opportunities for learning and career progression. Effective guidance supports an improvement in the disposition towards learning of adults who do not currently participate. Guidance is most effective when targeted to address individual need.

Most country experts (63%) thought that this building block was in place, but only 30% regarded it as a strength in their Member State. A number of initiatives grouped under the broad heading of 'Guidance' (the full continuum of information, advice and guidance) were mentioned in country reports including targeting specific groups, joining up educational guidance with wider guidance and learning services (through one-stop shops such as in **Latvia**); link with support such as paid educational leave; the work of public employment services (PES). For example, in **Austria**, a network of Educational Guidance and Counselling provides guidance for learners about learning options. However, country experts also highlight the lack of integration of guidance into wider planning and strategy. Even where strong networked approaches are in place (**France, Italy, and Slovenia**), it was believed that more could be done to enhance effectiveness particularly in regard to target groups.

In **Romania**, the national lifelong learning strategy explicitly mentions targeted guidance. This is in addition to planned awareness campaigns, as well as actions focused on the identification, recognition, evaluation and accreditation of learning. The overall focus is on extending counselling services, a transversal measure proposed within all three parts of the strategy.

In **Slovakia**, policy papers have stressed the importance of providing guidance for learners about learning options. In recent years, the number of information-counselling centres has been gradually increasing both at national and regional levels. The centres are run mostly by the public sector, but some are also delivered by private sector providers. Feedback and statistics from this work are not available yet.

Engage social partners

Social partners play a significant role in increasing participation in learning. What is meant by a 'social partner' can vary across Member States. However, it usually includes employers, trades unions, professional bodies and civil society organisations. The roles of social partners can range from the recruitment of learners to the design and promotion of strategies.

The vast majority (81%) of country experts said that the engagement of social partners was in place. Most (56%) regarded it as a strength of provision in their country. It was

mentioned in a number of country reports as effective (for example in **Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Latvia, Luxembourg**), partial or developmental (**Estonia, Finland, UK**), or negatively (**Belgium, Poland**). For example, in **Belgium**, in both language communities, courses are available for those who need introductory learning experiences, such as basic skills; these courses tend to be free for the most vulnerable groups in society; however, more cooperation with social partners is believed to be needed in both communities. In **Latvia**, current policy is focused on providing targeted guidance for adults about learning options and engaging social partners in the planning, promotion, and recruitment of learners.

Overall, this aspect of policy was regarded as a relative weakness in **Croatia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, and the UK**. The link with social partners, social movements, and industrial sectors was often mentioned in a positive way; the lack of strategic engagement of social partners was seen as putting a brake on effectiveness. The targeted use of social partnerships was exemplified in other 'key success factors' such as encouraging employer engagement and investment (for example, **Germany** with particular industrial sectors).

Ensure a good initial learning experience

A significant determinant of remaining in learning is previous participation. Negative initial learning experiences can dissuade adults from further participation. Most effective practice happens where learning is tailored to address the needs of particular groups of adults.

Most country experts (52%) thought their country had this building block in place, but only 33% regarded it as a strength. The reports mentioned various festivals of learning (awareness-raising activity) which provide tasters or initial learning experience; in others, such as **Latvia** there was a strong emphasis on targeted approaches and guidance. In most cases, there was a link between having the following building blocks in place: Raise awareness of benefits of learning; Provide guidance on learning options; Ensure good initial learner experience. This shows the link between good initial experiences and developing learners' interest in learning. In **Italy**, initial learning is part of 'formative orientation' services. With the spread of e-learning platforms, introductory activity is done online. 'Formative orientation' is short-term training designed to attract learners onto further programmes. Some country reports mentioned recognition, validation and accreditation type approaches (for example in **Romania**) that build on prior learning and experience of adults that are linked to promotional / awareness-raising activity.

7.3.2. Increasing employers investment in learning

Employers play a vital role in promoting a learning culture and participation in learning. They are important partners in the design, co-funding and delivery of learning. Work-related reasons are among the most important reasons why adults access further learning; the relevance of the learning to the job role or further career advancement is also important.

The majority (60%) of countries had most building blocks in place to raise awareness of the benefits of learning. These experts therefore considered there was sufficient policy attention to providing funding to assist employers to upskill and retrain their workforce, promoting the use of externally accredited qualifications by employers, and promoting the provision of work-based learning (the three building blocks linked to increasing employers'

investment in learning). A small number (**Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, and the UK**) were seen to have all these building blocks in place.

Financial incentives for employers

Employers' participation in learning and their acquisition of skills competences is increased where direct or indirect financial incentives are in place. The form that this takes differs between Member States and includes direct funding to employers, or fiscal measures such as through the taxation system.

The vast majority (78%) of countries had this building block in place, with just a small number of country experts stating there was nothing in place (**Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, and Slovakia**). A range of incentives to employers were mentioned in a positive way, such as paid educational leave, tax relief / incentives, co-investment between employer and employee, employer levies and employer subsidies. Six reports drew attention to lack of financial incentives and also a lack of focus on SMEs in particular (where costs are relatively high).

The **Malta** National Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 encourages employers' involvement in the provision of learning, a position backed by incentives for adults and older workers to participate in learning. However, Malta recognises that there are challenges to getting employers to fund the development of their workforce and as a consequence since 2014 ESF has been used to enable firms to provide training as well as assisting ageing workers with vocational-reorientation. Financial support from the ESF is needed as the size of Maltese firms (mainly SMEs) tends to discourage investment by employers. The relative high costs involved in training small numbers of employees was seen as a barrier in **Malta** but also in **Slovakia, Croatia and Greece**. SMEs also fear beneficiaries of training will move job as they become more skilled. This means that in countries like Malta, the onus for organised education and training lies with the state and its institutions rather than employers.

Promote accredited qualifications

Using externally accredited and nationally recognised qualifications are effective ways of increasing participation in learning among adults. Such learning programmes have a positive impact on productivity and wages for adults in employment.

The vast majority (78%) of countries had this building block in place, with just a small number of exceptions (**Austria, Croatia, Finland, Greece, Luxembourg, and Slovakia**). In general, qualification reforms were seen as an important aspect of effective policy (in particular in **Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Greece, Slovakia and the UK**), although countries were clearly at different starting points. In the **Czech Republic**, employers directly participate in building the National System of Occupations and the National Register of Qualifications; the relevant Ministries cooperate with employer representatives through sector councils. The network of 19 sector councils is maintained by the Chamber of Commerce and the Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic. A similar approach is being taken in the **UK**, where recent policy reviews in England have focussed on employer-led qualifications and progression routes.

Slovakia was an interesting example of a continued move towards accreditation in adult learning. The joint definition of standards for Adult Learning (made in cooperation between

the Ministry of Education in Slovakia and employers) is important in order to fit qualifications to the labour market needs. The cooperation between Volkswagen and the Slovak Technical University is a good example of this. Some craft occupations have elaborated qualifications and certified employers can validate these qualifications. However, currently this only applies to 29 occupations published in the Information System for Further Education run by the Ministry of Education. In 2015 a new Act on VET in Slovakia came into force. It introduced the system of dual education. The Act supports a smooth transition of students from education to the labour market and increases adults' employability. The Ministry of Education motivates employers to enter the process of vocational education and training in two ways: firstly, by making the vocational training compliant with employers' requirements and needs; and secondly, by providing tax incentives to employers. Although take-up to date has been lower than expected, the situation may improve through the national project, Dual Education, which aims to increase the attractiveness and quality of VET. It runs from 2016 to 2020, with an allocation of €33 million (total of EU and state budget sources).

Promote work-based learning

Formal work-based training programmes are effective in increasing productivity and improving workers' skills. Employers' involvement in design increases the likelihood of application of skills in the workplace. Linking funding with co-design with employers is also effective.

The vast majority (85%) of countries had this building block in place, with just a small number of exceptions (**Croatia, Czech Republic, Greece, and Luxembourg**). One area of concern was the lack of employer engagement around basic / digital skills and with lower-skilled workers. There was a concern that policy was not sufficiently attuned to changes in the labour market. There was also concern that apprenticeships a) might dominate the skills market, and b) are not a route that appeals to adults.

In **Latvia**, policy actions have focused on providing funding to assist employers to up-skill and retrain their workforce, promoting the use of externally accredited qualifications by employers and promoting the provision of work-based learning. Research cited in **Lithuania** highlights the importance of a coherent policy on work-based learning¹⁷⁹. In **Lithuania** between 50% and 70% of companies provide training for employees. However, there are huge differences between sectors and size of company. Research indicates that the main obstacles that prevent the development of non-formal adult education in private companies, are: lack of funding; increasing unemployment and lack of employer and/or employee motivation; absence of mechanisms for validation of non-formal and informal learning; and, the absence of a unified training system (private and public sectors)¹⁸⁰. Possible employers' investment for employee reskilling are not supported by 2014-2020 ESF Investments Action Programme in **Lithuania**. In **Luxembourg**, companies continue to be supported to develop training plans that include work-based learning. However, as yet there is no evaluation of the scale of the impact linked to the investment made. In

¹⁷⁹ Vaitkutė L., Bužinskas G. (2015). *Profesinis suaugusiųjų mokymas (Vocational education of Adults)/ Suaugusiųjų švietimas Lietuvoje: dabartis ir perspektyvos (Adult Education in Lithuania: Present and Prospects)*. Ugdymo plėtotės centras. Vilnius (p. 64-82).

¹⁸⁰ Butvilienė J. (2014). *Neformalusis suaugusiųjų švietimas Lietuvoje: valstybinis ir privatus mokymo sektoriai (Non formal Adult Education in Lithuania: State and Private Teaching Sectors)* Doktoro disertacija Socialiniai mokslai, sociologija (05 S) http://vddb.library.lt/fedora/get/LT-eLABa-0001:E.02~2014~D_20140430_132543-01009/DS.005.0.01.ETD

Estonia, a recent initiative has heightened attention on the development and implementation of work-based learning. The aim is to involve 300 companies with 6,900 students in work-based learning by 2019. The initiative involves the Estonian Employers' Confederation, who has promoted the mainstreaming of work-based learning among employers, sharing information and experience.

7.3.3. Improve equality of access for all

Ensuring learners from disadvantaged and under-represented groups are able to access and benefit from learning is a common policy goal. Policy actions underpinning this success factor are often focussed on improving participation for those adults least likely to participate. Country experts were asked to assess the extent to which there was sufficient policy attention to funding learning for disadvantaged and difficult-to-engage groups, including the inactive and unemployed; providing targeted guidance and support services and promote programmes to learners in under-represented groups; using intermediary organisations in outreach to difficult-to-engage groups; improving and embedding basic skills development in adult learning programmes, including literacy, numeracy and digital skills for the low-skilled/low-qualified individuals.

The majority (63%) of countries had most building blocks in place, with a small number (six member states: **Belgium, Estonia, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherland, and UK**) having all aspects covered. A number of reports (for example, **Denmark** and **Germany**) highlight the policy dilemma of having both universal and targeted approaches. The Danish system of adult education provides good opportunities for adults in work and for adults seeking to improve their general qualifications to a higher level, for instance in order to commence a higher education. Adult education (especially vocational) is also available to the unemployed, but how much and under what conditions depends on labour market legislation and the rules for receiving benefits. These rules have often changed, but the general trend in recent years is to move the unemployed quickly into either temporary employment (with public economic support) or vocational courses. The recent policy of targeting adult student support at lower levels of adult education shows the dilemma involved: on the one hand, it probably improves equity of access, on the other hand it probably contributes to limiting adult learning educational activity at higher educational levels.

Fund learning for disadvantaged groups

Funding learning increases participation from under-represented groups, whether funding comes from Member States, regional authorities, or European funds such as ESF. To this end, funding is often focussed on those most in need of support. A simple example of this is in **Poland** where adult education and skills is focused on disadvantaged, difficult-to-engage and socially excluded groups (for example, economically inactive and unemployed individuals, elderly people, low qualified adults, ethnic minorities, mothers returning to work after maternity leave).

The vast majority (85%) of countries had this building block in place, with just a small number of Member States saying that it isn't in place (**Cyprus, Czech Republic, Greece, and Lithuania**). These reports mentioned early school leavers, unemployed, low-qualified adults, the over 65s, those with disabilities and finally migrants. This meant there was not a common set of target groups referred to in this section.

The country reports also showed that people could be further disadvantaged by where they live (regional disparities), and whether they are on benefits (which may restrict their access to learning). For example, in **Latvia**, policy actions focus on funding learning for disadvantaged and difficult-to-engage groups including the inactive and unemployed.

In the **Czech Republic**, one current initiative is the *Fund for Further Education*, which is aimed at improving equity of access for all. The *Fund* supports the *PROKOP* project (Improving competences to increase employability), which engages participants from specific target groups such as the long-term unemployed.

Provide targeted guidance and support

In addition to general educational guidance, learners from under-represented groups often need specialist guidance and support (for example, to address mental health difficulties). Such approaches are effective in increasing and maintaining participation in learning, as well as ensuring progression to further learning or work.

Just over half of countries (59%) had this building block in place and only 22% regarded it as a strength. In the country reports, **targeted guidance and support** was mentioned a number of times (5) in terms of it being available or not, or in a modified way. For example, regional guidance centres as part of the youth guarantee in **Finland** showed the importance of integrating this approach with other initiatives. In **Latvia**, there are targeted guidance, support services and promotion of programmes to learners in under-represented groups.

In **Bulgaria**, there are many historical inequities in terms of participation and progression in learning. As some of these are linked to geographical areas, access to non-formal adult education has been enabled throughout Bulgaria via 3,500 cultural centres (*Čitálišta*), with approximately 2,500 of them in rural areas which offer a wide range of targeted non-formal education activities.

Recognise prior learning

Recognising prior learning plays an important role in recruiting learners (especially from underrepresented groups); it also plays an important role in matching learners' needs to available learning and training.

Just over half of country reports (59%) had this building block in place and only 33% of experts regarded it as a strength and **recognition of prior learning (RPL)** initiatives are mentioned in nine country reports. In **France**, schemes to recognise prior learning and the validation of learning outcomes is overseen by an inter-ministerial committee, which is also responsible for the promotion and coordination of data collection improved by the 2014 Law. Some of the issues with recognising prior learning are highlighted in the report from **Hungary**, where legislation (2001 and 2013):

'entitles learners to having their prior learning assessed and recognized in training programmes, however, in practice, it is still very rare. For training providers, it makes organizing courses more complicated, participants are afraid of losing some of their benefits, and the methodology of assessment has not been well developed until recently'.

There is a similar situation in **Italy**, where the 'recognition of prior learning is not yet implemented despite investments and general rules approved with Law no. 92 of 2012 and then with Decree No.13 of 2013 and subsequent Government Acts.'

The New Opportunities Programme in **Portugal** included widespread information directed at the general Portuguese population (by the use of ICT, mass media). A large network of adult education centres, the New Opportunities Centres, was established across the whole country (although this scheme is now finished). These centres were open during the day and in the evening, in order to assist people that could not attend provision during working hours. Centres hired adult educators to provide guidance and counselling. The recognition of prior learning that valued life experiences and knowledge obtained through life, was also considered important to improve equality of access.

The recognition of prior learning is also referred to in country reports from **Cyprus, Estonia, Malta, Poland, Romania, and Sweden**.

Outreach via a range of organisations

Intermediary organisations are important in reaching out to and recruiting underrepresented groups. Just over half of countries (59%) had this building block in place, but just 37% regarded it as a strength. In the country reports, **outreach** was mentioned more in this section on targeting (gender, ethnicity, age, disability) in general rather than specific approaches to targeting such as outreach. The importance of outreach was referred to in a number of reports (**Austria, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia**), often in terms of the importance of localised approaches and the use of intermediary agencies.

For example, in **Slovakia** their monitoring reports (2012-2015) on the implementation of the *Slovak Strategy for the Integration of Roma until 2020* mention how much funding was used for activities attracting people to the jobs market. Slovakia uses several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to work as intermediary outreach agencies working with difficult-to-engage groups. These NGOs act as information channels through which details of courses to Roma adults are directed. The NGOs work within the communities and areas where the Roma are found and often act as the main route into these target groups for a variety of public agencies beyond the adult education field. The NGOs do not deliver the education and training but ensure awareness of the support people can receive is increased. Outreach work via the internet was not thought to be effective thinking about where some of the hardest to reach groups (particularly Roma) are concerned.

Develop basic skills

Basic skills in this context refers to literacy and numeracy, which are both effective in supporting adults to progress into further learning. Embedded approaches are seen as particularly effective, especially with those who would not normally participate in learning.

Although all country reports had a strong focus on adult basic skills, only three-quarters of experts (75%) considered that their country had this building block in place. Those country experts that considered this building block not in place were **Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, and Slovakia**. In some reports, it was not always clear if the definition of 'basic skills' included digital skills. PIAAC (2012) was often referred to, in

some cases to non-formal and / or contextualised approaches. Many instances highlighted geographical inequities of access, which were seen as problematic and difficult to address.

In **France** illiteracy was designated by the Government as a “Grand National Cause” with hundreds of initiatives across the country and four priorities agreed until 2018 (such as reducing illiteracy rate to 5%). Experts forecast a decrease in illiteracy rates to 5.4% by 2025 (meeting the UN Sustainable Development Goal on a substantial proportion of adults achieving literacy and numeracy by 2030).

Latest PISA figures in France show progress in illiteracy rates among French pupils above that of the OECD average; but efforts need to be doubled while 1 out of 10 young people is still considered illiterate, and half of them are not at school. A wide range of basic skills trainings are offered by providers.

Other French basic skills programmes include for instance the “First pages” initiative by the Ministry of Culture developed to encouraging young children and their families to reading through local actions (animations, library loans). Family Educational Actions are aimed at reinforcing parents’ basic skills to help them support their children through their educational pathways (awareness raising, counselling). Regarding basic digital skills, central and regional authorities have initiated a number of actions such as national certification, public digital spaces, or specific training.

The French public employment services in 2015 developed a partnership with Open Classrooms - one of the MOOC leaders in the French market – to provide training to job seekers, however only online courses on basic numeracy skills are proposed for free so far.

7.3.4. Deliver learning that is relevant

Learning needs to be relevant for employers and individuals so that it meets the needs and demands of the labour market. Where learning takes place is a key contextual factor. The focus in this key success factor is on the supply of learning rather than the demand side covered in earlier sections.

Experts were asked to what extent there was sufficient policy attention to understanding and identifying the needs and motivations of learners; identifying current and future skills needs of employers (through skills forecasting) and aligning provision with these; promoting innovation and flexibility in the delivery of learning; and providing progression pathways for learners across the national qualifications framework. In terms of learning relevance, a minority (48%) of countries had most building blocks in place, with just two Member States (**Ireland** and **Netherlands**) having all aspects covered.

Understand learners’ needs

The needs and motivations of learners are important factors in the decision to participate in learning, especially if learning is job-related. Designing learning opportunities to respond to learners’ needs makes the prospect of participation in learning more attractive. Where learning opportunities correspond to learners’ needs, they are more likely to participate in learning. Involving representatives of learners in planning and design of provision is a useful method of understanding learners’ needs and designing learning opportunities appropriately.

Just 10 country experts considered they had this building block in place: **Estonia, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, and UK.**) Almost three-quarters of countries (74%) regarded understanding learners' needs as either a 'weakness' or 'neither a strength nor weakness.' In the country reports, there was less of a focus on individuals than employers, and when there was, there was strong labour market bias—individuals who 'need' to get into work—perceived need by policy-makers. This meant the focus was on unemployed adults and vulnerable groups. Very little or only partial needs analysis was mentioned in country reports. However, a number of reports highlighted findings from OECD surveys (such as PIAAC and PISA): **Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Romania, Slovakia, and UK.**)

For example, in **Hungary**, there is little focus on individual learners' needs and motivation in the present policy, provisions and actions. Assessment and understanding of individual learning needs, assessment and validation of existing skills, offering tailored learning opportunities, are not a highlighted part of the provision.

This is due to training provision based on programme logic (due to funding dominated by EU resources), where predefined resource input, activity and portfolio of learning as well delivery outputs, contractual delivery obligations and performance in order to get access to payment, prevent donors and providers interested in creating flexible provision.

There is lack of capacity and methodological knowledge in the system to identify future skills need, professional forums to discuss those. Employers are not equipped with proper competences and knowledge to express training needs, there is a need to translate employer challenges into learning goals, local, regional and national level too.

Forecast employers' skills needs

This building block focuses on ensuring that provision is responsive to employers' current and future needs. Aligning provision with the requirements of local employers results in higher participation and better outcomes for learners and employers.

Over three-quarters (78%) of countries had this building block in place showing that employer needs analysis was better developed than that for individuals. As mentioned earlier in this section, an increase in surveys of employers was highlighted in several country reports and seen as a key strength of adult learning systems in the EU28. This perhaps reflects the priority that Member States are giving to addressing latent demand for skills, skills mismatches, gaps and shortages. In **Spain, Lithuania, Poland and Bulgaria** reports drew attention to a lack of strategic capacity to analyse need at sectoral or regional level or both. A number of reports stressed the importance of SMEs in terms of percentage of the business sector (and supply chains) in **France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Malta, and UK.** 'Employer need' is often equated with the needs of larger enterprises—who have their own **resources** in terms of training, Human Resource functions, and lobbying / engaging government. In Greece, there was a strong emphasis on a 'tripartite social dialogue' between the state, employers, and social partners. The OP KED programme in **Poland** emphasises the importance of longer-term needs analysis to look at future skills needs in an attempt to measure the potential gap between qualifications and labour market demand (for skills).

In the **Czech Republic**, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs implemented the Prediction of Qualification Demand project (PŘEKVAP, 2015) in order to create a comprehensive system to predict national demand for qualifications. The project goal is to develop by 2020 a sustainable and reliable system for labour market monitoring and forecasting to connect national and regional levels. The system will collect and process available statistical data as well as qualitative information on the regional and national developments, important changes and technology trends. The outcomes of the system are expected to inform education providers, the public employment service (responsible for retraining), regional authorities (responsible for initial VET), employers, and central bodies (Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Education) via a comprehensive website.

Promote innovation and flexibility

Encouraging flexibility in how learning is delivered is important in helping adults overcome barriers to learning. Personalised programmes of study have been identified as being important incentives to attract adults into learning. Flexibility of delivery is an important factor in making learning attractive to learners, especially in relation to the use of technology and distance learning. Encouraging innovation in the delivery of learning supports the development of more flexible forms of delivery

Just under half (48%) of countries had this building block in place, but only 22% assessed it as a strength. In terms of innovation and flexibility, there was some limited mention of contextualised curricula in the country reports which showed where certain programmes were changing as the needs of employers changed but there was generally a surprising lack of examples of innovative and flexible provision found in the reports. There were short extracts from the country reports that showed levels of innovation (for example, a skills forecasting model in **Denmark** and a user/ learner panel in **Germany** which acts as a sounding board for curriculum development which is needs based) but generally experts did not highlight provision which they considered was particularly innovative or showed high levels of flexibility.

Provide progression pathways

Qualifications frameworks can be important in facilitating retention of learners. The existence of progression pathways across higher and further education as a part of a qualifications framework play a role in attracting learners into learning and also encourage investment in learning from employers.

Progression pathways are an important aspect of European policy but was mentioned relatively few times (**Denmark, France, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Portugal, UK**) and sometimes as an emerging development (**Poland, Romania**). Just over half (59%) of experts considered that the building block was in place, and only 41% of the experts assessed it as a strength. One common concern highlighted in the country reports was a lack of a clear pathway for both those who have left school at 16 or 18 and also a lack of a pathway for those working in SMEs where employer skills investment was more limited.

7.3.5. *Deliver learning that is of high quality*

The delivery of high quality adult learning is important in ensuring positive outcomes for learners and employers. Experts were asked to what extent there was sufficient policy attention to establishing a quality control framework for the monitoring and evaluation of adult learning programmes, and developing a skilled adult education workforce through initial teacher training and continuous professional development. The majority (53%) of experts considered that countries had most building blocks in place, with a small number (five Member States: **Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Latvia, and Sweden**) having all aspects covered.

Monitoring and evaluation of policy

Quality assurance schemes have some positive impact on the quality of adult learning. The introduction of such quality control frameworks had an indirect effect on participation. Within this context, monitoring and evaluation was a key aspect of many country reports. The main focus highlighted in reports was on quality assurance (QA) rather than quality improvement strategies. There was a lot of focus on QA systems and to which level responsibility for quality was delegated. The apparent lack of systematic approaches in many countries was quite surprising, and therefore merits further analysis at EU level. Just under half (48%) of countries had this building block in place and only 37% regarded it as a strength. The reasons stated were a lack of status for adult education/learning; an inability to translate policy into practice; marketised approaches that believe quality is based on customer satisfaction; and a lack of investment by government on quality assurance / inspection processes. Some reports highlighted the tensions between quality and equality, quality and responsiveness, and QA and Quality Control.

Develop a skilled adult education workforce

Broadly speaking, there are two aspects to developing a skilled adult education workforce: qualifications and continuing professional development. Over three-quarters of countries (78%) had this building block in place although less than half (44%) regarded it as a strength. The critical area of workforce development had a number of key aspects in the country reports: initial teacher training (ITT); continuing professional development (CPD); and dual professionalism (for those teachers with a vocational skill). Taken as a whole, the country reports indicated variable practice across Europe in an area where it could be possible to encourage consistency through the more effective use of Erasmus+ funding. Reports stressed the importance of embedding teacher training and CPD in the quality system for adult education in-country. However, in more marketised systems, high degrees of institutional autonomy were in tension with common approaches to CPD and regulation of the adult learning workforce. For example, **England in the UK** has seen a degree of regulation of adult education workforce in recent years. The onus is on providers to ensure quality and having appropriate staffing to deliver it. Quality is measured by the outcomes for learners rather than regulating the input (of educators).

In **Hungary**, the new Adult Training Act of 2013 stipulates that vocational teachers working with adults instructing programmes that fall under its jurisdiction must hold a relevant teaching qualification or at least a relevant higher education degree (ISCED 760). Otherwise, there are no requirements towards the initial education of those taking part in non-formal adult training. Typically, teachers from public school system are involved in the delivery of adult training programmes. There is a master's degree programme in andragogy, which can be undertaken as a second teaching qualification, but no other type

of initial education is offered. In-service training for adult trainers is not mandatory, and there is not many offers on the market providing access to high quality, practice-oriented training for adult educators to develop their generic or specific professional competences.

Belgium, Denmark, Spain, Germany and Portugal country reports highlight a weakness in the skills development of the adult education workforce. All of these reports stated that the need to have a skilled workforce who deliver adult learning provision is often overlooked by Governments. These countries highlight the importance of ensuring that educators, who participate in adult education and training on a regular basis, possess the practical skills and qualifications necessary for successfully delivering adult learning programmes. All of these country reports acknowledge that this is not widely known and acknowledged by decision makers at present. There should be a strong focus on the professionalization of adult learning workforce in the coming developmental programme, especially for those working with low skilled adults and basic skills.

7.3.6. Ensure coherent policy

Collaboration and coordination of adult learning policies are important factors in their successful implementation at national or subnational level. A lifelong learning strategy on its own is not enough to increase participation, but participation is enabled by co-ordination and collaboration between different institutions and stakeholders.

Experts were asked to what extent there was sufficient policy attention to co-ordinating adult learning (or lifelong learning) policy with other national policies for improving knowledge, skills and competences of adults; establishing mechanisms for policy alignment at local and regional levels; and building a knowledge base concerning what works in adult learning. The building blocks for this key success factor include co-ordination with other policies, alignment of policy at the local level and building a knowledge base. A minority of countries had most building blocks in place, with just two Member States (**Ireland and Luxembourg**) having all aspects covered (explored below).

Coordinate with other policies

Coordinating adult learning strategies and policy actions at national level assists in the better alignment of adult learning with other government economic and social policies. Most experts (56%) considered that their country had this building block in place, but only eight regarded it as a strength: **Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg, and Malta**. Few country reports assessed their Member State as having a coordinated / coherent approach; where countries did have this in place there was a visible national commitment enshrined in an act or strategy or responsible body. Four countries had decided to devolve coordination from the Member State level to regions (**Netherlands and UK**) or within federal approaches (**Germany and Spain**). Such approaches are designed to enable coordination at the right level of economic and social planning. Reference was made to possible issues with the delegation of coordination to local areas, which can favour urban over rural areas and is dependent on the skills of local coordinators.

Align policy at the local level

Aligning policies and institutions who fund and provide adult learning at a local level can increase participation, as well as improve the overall quality of the provision. This is particularly relevant for larger countries, where sub-national alignment is important to

ensure effective implementation. Local alignment of policies and stakeholders is not just effective in increasing participation but also in terms of improving outcomes for learners.

Just eleven countries had this building block in place, and of this just four regarded local alignment a strength: **Austria, Bulgaria, Ireland, and Luxembourg**. There was some limited reference to the concept of alignment in the reports, but processes were often at an early stage of development. For example, policy in **Ireland** is moving towards a more strategic outcomes-based funding and planning model, will drive local areas to transform how they plan provision, and associated services. This will take into account local/regional/national economic and social trends. The devolution or federalisation of skills planning in countries like **Germany** and **the UK** is designed in some respects to align policy-making at the spatial level across a number of policy areas including health, employment, adult skills, and business support.

Build the knowledge base

A systematic approach to monitoring and review of policy actions is crucial in determining whether a policy is effective in achieving its desired outcomes and impacts. There are a number of aspects to this including the systematic collection of data, and case studies, the synthesis of qualitative reports, thematic reviews and comparative reports.

Although over half of countries (56%) had this building block in place, just seven countries regarded it as a strength: **Austria, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Poland, and UK**. Data issues were a particular area of concern, in terms of both collection and use. In **Romania**, there are plans for an integrated management system for data collection, with periodic evaluation and monitoring, together with a role in quality assurance. It is hoped that such data will illuminate the real causes of Romania's low participation rate, and how these can be addressed. Data collection and use was also mentioned as an area of focus in **Croatia, Finland, Germany, Slovakia, Slovenia, and UK**.

For example, in **Slovenia**, all publicly financed learning programmes for adults are monitored and evaluated to ensure quality. Each provider of publicly financed educational programme is obliged to report with detailed data about participants and costs. This data is elaborated and analysed at the national level.

In **Estonia**, the skills forecast system covers three main dimensions:

- National forecast of demographic trends, employment changes, and projecting the supply of labour in 8-year perspective. The forecast is updated annually.
- Sectoral skills forecasts, covering more in-depth knowledge of changes in skills profiles and skills needs in individual sectors in the next 10-year perspective. In 2016, 5 sectors were analysed, 6 sectors in 2017 and further 6 planned for 2018.
- Short-term barometer for forecasting labour force need in the next 12-month perspective by detailed occupations. It also the only forecast mechanism offering a regional perspective (Unemployment Insurance Fund).

The sectoral skills forecasts fill an important gap in the knowledge on the skills required at the workplace in different occupations. In order to deliver this estimate, sectoral reports use a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods using statistical data combined with information collected from personal interviews with sectoral experts and from group discussions. Each sector is analysed every six years. In the intervening years,

the relevant sectoral expert panels keep an eye on the implementation of the recommendations made on the basis of the conclusions of the survey.

Implementation of the results of the reports are analysed, highlighting the challenges of implementation and collecting opinions from stakeholders.

7.3.7. Summary of Assessment of Adult Learning Systems in the EU

This section highlights the strengths and weaknesses of adult learning systems in the EU28 according to the views of experts and the content of the 28 country reports. The main strengths of adult learning systems based on this evidence related to collaborative working, targeting and ensuring more demand-led provision. The main weaknesses related to a complex provider landscape, insufficient funding and the poor use of data. It is interesting to note that the same strengths and weaknesses were found across different types of countries with different types of adult learning systems and there were no clear pattern in terms of geography. For instance, the same weakness appeared in countries with well-developed adult learning and also in those that are seen as being less developed. This suggests that the views of experts are relative but also that there is no 'perfect' system to strive for.

The provider side of the adult learning system was a reoccurring topic that cut across both the strengths and weaknesses as well as the assessment against the contextual framework. The provider landscape was seen to be large, often complex in nature and there was a clear issue around providers acting in a way which many experts considered was un-strategic and often uncoordinated. This is not to say that provision was poor quality but rather than an open market to adult learning was a challenge when it came to coordination.

Data and the use of data was another common issue that cut across both strengths and weaknesses of adult learning. Some countries have started to use data (linked to learning and employer needs) in recent years whilst an equal set of countries highlighted this as a critical weakness.

Sixteen out of the 21 building blocks highlighted in the conceptual framework were considered to be in place by over half of experts. Although this general view seems positive, there was a clear difference across the EU28 with some countries having very few building blocks that the framework sees as important for a strong adult learning system. It was interesting to note that most country experts considered that the adult learning systems had particularly progressed in the last five years. The levels of collaborative working, targeting, data usage and even funding (in terms of efficiency) had all improved in the last five years.

8. CONCLUSION

This section of the report draws together the various strands of analysis and reflects on where future intervention and reform in adult learning might be focused. This report has reviewed the evidence provided in 28 reports on adult learning in the EU28 Member States prepared by country experts in the field, and the results of a questionnaire administered with these same country experts. It has drawn on a range of data sources and additional literature where relevant.

The report has been framed around a number of overarching research questions which we return to in turn below, in concluding the report.

8.1. What are the differences and similarities in adult learning policy frameworks across the EU28?

The country reports offer a new and unique contribution to the evidence base for adult learning, particularly with respect to how adult learning is legislated. We can deduce from them that adult learning is an area which has an established relatively strong legislative and policy basis across Member States. National policy frameworks for adult learning comprise of different elements, with 'policy' used as an umbrella term for legislative mechanisms including acts, laws, and strategies. Adult learning is covered by one or more (usually a combination of) adult learning laws, general education laws, VET/ CVET laws, higher education laws, labour laws and some other legal provisions (e.g. relating to validation). National examples of all of these have been included in this report. The examples readily demonstrate that policy frameworks vary in their degree of focus and specificity between countries.

A number of observations can be made on the basis of the country reports and questionnaire in relation to the differences and similarities in adult learning policy frameworks. All Member States can be seen to have some sort of legal basis for adult learning in place and the majority offer coverage for adult learning across a number of different types of national education and employment laws. Coverage of adult learning via general education laws is reported in half of Member States, and in a number of cases specific adult education laws are also in place. Adult learning can have legislative coverage via general education laws, either those which cover the whole education sector, or just general education (primary and secondary education). Whilst the Nordic countries have discrete laws in place which encompass all adult learning provision, most Member States have adopted laws at different points that cover some elements of adult learning e.g. a type of provision or a specific focus such as the recognition of prior learning. It is common that at the national level, the legal basis for adult learning comprises a number of different laws, enacted at different points in time. Whilst this has implications in terms of the degree to which different laws are aligned with each other, it is a characteristic feature of most Member States where adult learning is not a distinct and primary policy focus in itself, but rather cuts across a number of more established and distinct policy areas. Where adult learning is part of laws which relate to a number of different themes, there is potential for adult learning considerations to be mainstreamed across policy areas. However, where a particular law has a primary focus on adult learning provisions, there is perhaps more potential for adult learning to be regarded as an important pursuit in itself rather than representing an optional extra or 'tag-on' in the context of a broader education law.

Coverage of adult learning within national strategies can be seen to be variable – in terms of the type of strategy offering coverage, and the extent and quality of coverage. Adult learning is addressed in lifelong learning strategies in nearly half of Member States although coverage varies from tokenistic reference to comprehensive coverage. The optimal strategy in this context might be either solely focused on adult learning or part of a wider strategy but ensures that adult learning has a comprehensive focus, whilst being aligned with the wider policy framework.

Whilst a number of Member States have adult learning coverage as part of specific skill strategies (5 countries) or reform strategies, such as in the area of VET or Higher Education (4 countries) this is not a particularly common approach when it comes to defining provision for adult learning. More prominent is a focus on adult learning in strategies focussing on developing economic competitiveness, or skills strategies aiming to address skills shortages. Whilst this suggests that adult learning is indeed recognised as a key to increasing economic productivity and growth, it is not so clear that adult learning is promoted as a right and opportunity for citizens, reflecting goals of inclusion and social development.

There is no model of policy framework that appears to be more successful or popular, and as the report explores, governance (responsibility), regulation (policy making) and provision (delivery of learning activities) in adult learning are not consistent between Member States. This variation reflects the overall structure of governance in the particular country (decentralised or centralised), as well as the horizontal distribution of responsibilities across a potentially wide number of stakeholders. The policy framework in place in decentralised systems offers a variation on policy framework arrangements since regulation may be enacted at different spatial levels (in some cases with varying levels of status, as per the example of federal versus state policy in **Germany**). This offers a model for tailoring local policy.

What can be seen on the basis of the country expert reports and questionnaire is that policy frameworks for adult learning tend to be characterised more by fragmentation than by alignment. Whilst there is no common measure of alignment, the experts considered the degree to which adult learning policy and provision is coordinated. Fragmentation, or a lack of coordination is mainly due to the vertical and horizontal division of responsibilities in adult learning governance, and the number of stakeholders involved in the sector (especially in terms of the 'delivery' of learning). This reflects, in the main, that adult learning is not a discrete policy area which sits neatly within the remit of a particular responsible institution (a certain Ministry for example) or a specific policy area (for instance related to education, employment as well as other core policy portfolio areas). It does not seem that various elements of a national policy framework for adult learning are particularly linked, coordinated, cross-referenced, and integrated. An ideal scenario here could be that an overarching law establishes an overall direction for adult learning, which is then set out in greater detail within an Act, with a strategy potentially explaining the types of intervention that will be put in place to bring about an agreed goal.

8.2. What national targets exist on adult learning?

The evidence from the country reports and questionnaire shows that all countries have targets in place which relate to adult learning. Many Member States have translated EU benchmarks into national targets, drawing on the EU Labour Force Survey's 'participation in lifelong learning' indicator as key means of measuring progress in adult learning. In this

respect, whilst national contexts vary, there is a level of congruence between adult learning targets. Many countries additionally have targets in place which relate to more specific policy interventions. What can be seen across Member States is that whilst targets for participation are generally in place, there is less emphasis on the establishment of targets relating to results (e.g. the qualifications achieved as a result of learning) or the ultimate impact achieved (for instance an increased level of labour market participation). This begs the question as to whether Member States might be supported to adopt more useful indicators to measure progress in adult learning, to encompass activities (participation) as well as outputs (the results achieved), outcomes (the effects generated) and the impacts (over the longer term). Whilst a range of national targets exists, the country report evidence does suggest that there may be some scope to widen the scope of indicators and targets through which adult learning might be measured.

The evidence does suggest that there may be limited strategic consideration as to how national targets related to the EU2020 benchmark are developed, and indeed how particular approaches (specific actions and interventions) will support countries in working toward, and achieving their targets. In other words, what country experts have reported on to a lesser degree is how national targets will be reached. There are a number of cases where national targets have been set at an ambitious level, but which seem out of reach when current trends in adult learning participation are considered.

In summary, the evidence allows us to deduce that national targets are indeed in place in the area of adult learning, which is a positive step, not least in demonstrating national commitment and ambition in relation to progress in adult learning. It is apparent that the set of national targets and indicators may be expanded to better capture progress in terms of results and impacts in relation to adult learning. On the basis of the evidence reviewed, there also appears to be a disconnect between the targets put in place, and the mechanisms or approaches through which these will be achieved. Interestingly, the country reports did highlight a clear link between targets and particular interventions linked to specific programmes such as those funded with Cohesion Funds. These programmes are likely to be underpinned by a clear intervention logic, linking inputs (resource), activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts. This suggests that there may be scope to explore how Member States might be supported through mutual learning and information exchange around how policy frameworks and targets at the national level might be informed by intervention logic. In this way, on the basis of the evidence reviewed, it is suggested that a more strategic link might be established between targets, interventions and impacts, such that provision can be designed in the context of achieving a particular target, or that targets can be set at a realistic level, reflecting the resource, types of interventions planned and the desired end impacts. This approach to planning appropriate interventions through the development of a systematic logic for intervention will be revisited later in this concluding section.

8.3. What national frameworks exist to finance adult learning?

The country reports offer information on how adult learning is financed at the national level. They reviewed the levels of public investment and the instruments in place for funding adult learning.

There are clear limitations to the evidence that the country experts could present in their reports. In particular, budget lines for adult learning are not usually reported as a single investment area; rather there are aspects of adult learning funding within wider budgetary

allocations, which also focus on linked or wider investment priorities. As such, it is not easy to determine from national information within the public domain what specific public investment there is in adult learning overall. For example, 16 country experts reported that funding for adult learning is only partially traceable, or not traceable. Public investment can be more difficult to trace where funding is allocated at a regional or local level. This presents a challenge around the degree to which national frameworks can be compared – as country experts were only able to report some of the picture when it comes to funding for adult learning. Whilst from the questionnaire the transparency in financial information doesn't emerge as a particular challenge 'in principle', the expert's own endeavours in finding investment information suggest that there are indeed issues around data availability and consistency. Overall, a lack of data availability but also fragmentation (i.e. a lack of coordination and alignment) in the sector mean that there are barriers to direct comparison and analysis of investment. Future assignments may want to review how direct comparisons in national level reporting might be facilitated. This section also reviews the data that exists around levels of public investment as a proportion of adult learning funding. The picture of public investment as a proportion of adult learning investment is quite variable, with employers being more prominent investors in adult learning (accounting for 50% or more of investment in a number of countries) than the public sector.

Adult learning is funded from a range of sources including the public sector, employers and the private sector, individuals, and NGO's. Public sector funding for adult learning by amount of investment varies, whilst there is some consistency in the proportion of GDP invested in adult learning at a national level. In nearly half of Member States, experts reported that funding for adult learning had increased since 2010, whilst in a quarter of Member States it was reported as having decreased over this period. In some cases there is a positive correlation between increasing investment and adult learning participation rates, but this is not a universal trend. Although there is a positive report around increasing levels of investment overall, which engenders confidence, there are concerns about the volume of public investment in adult learning since more than half of experts consider that public funding for adult learning is insufficient and not sufficiently targeted to move toward expected goals. One aspect which may present an interesting avenue for future research is the degree to which the targeting of national funding toward a particular learner group is an appropriate approach where there are barriers to increased investment.

Finance instruments and mechanisms for adult funding, such as tax incentives for employers or training vouchers for employees, were reviewed by experts who reported a high level of uptake of such opportunities overall and a wide variety in the type or model of instruments employed. The number of instruments was particularly high in Germany and Italy, countries with a decentralised system and where instruments are employed at a regional level reflecting sub-national responsibilities. Elsewhere the uptake is relatively low in most countries, particularly in Northern and Central and Eastern Europe. Whilst some countries employ fewer instruments applying to most adults, such as Sweden and Finland, most countries in Central and Eastern European countries employ instruments which cover particular target groups.

The experts' assessment of the sufficiency of public funding is obviously somewhat subjective, but also the availability and transparency of data limits quantification and comparison between countries. In the light of this, also given that existing research in this area is limited and now outdated, future research into how consistent national data on adult learning investment might be extracted and compared, would make a valuable contribution to the evidence base.

8.4. To what extent do national interventions include the building blocks of the conceptual framework and what does this tell us about their effectiveness?

This report has drawn on the conceptual framework for adult learning which through research identified 21 building blocks as important for effective adult learning systems, across a range of success factors. Country experts reported on the degree to which the building blocks of the conceptual framework were in place as part of national interventions. A mixed picture emerged: some countries had very few building blocks in place, whilst 16 of the 21 building blocks were reported as being in place by over half of experts.

Although the country reports show a number of positive strengths of adult learning systems, the assessment of these systems against the conceptual framework show that many countries have a way to go before each individual building block is strong and can be seen as a success. Although the blocks do exist (e.g. provision may be targeted) this does not mean that their systems are strong or that the provision is effective in encouraging more adults to engage in high quality learning. In addition, although the general view seems positive, there was a clear difference across the EU28 with some countries having in place only a few building blocks that the framework sees as important for a strong adult learning system.

Most country experts considered that the adult learning systems in their Member State had particularly progressed in the last five years, specifically around the levels of partnership working amongst stakeholders, the targeting of provision, the use of data to inform and develop provision, and increased funding allocations. Most country reports did indicate a noticeable 'step change' in adult learning systems in terms of how it is planned, delivered and funded.

8.5. What are the core strengths and weaknesses of the national adult learning 'systems' across the EU28?

The strengths and weaknesses of adult learning systems in the EU28 were reviewed on the basis of the views of experts and the content of the 28 country reports. The guidance offered to country experts in preparing their reports did help to ensure consistency of assessment between experts, although there will inevitably be some degree of subjectivity associated with the assessments offered by the country experts on the strengths and weaknesses. This held in mind, the evidence from the country experts suggests some emergent themes and patterns in the strengths and weaknesses of national adult learning systems as expressed by experts.

Cited strengths included the degree to which agencies and institutions worked together across the areas of governance, regulation and provision as part of a multi-agency model. The degree to which policy and provision is targeted to particular groups was also regarded as a key strength within adult learning systems, as well as the way in which interventions and provision are designed around the demand for particular skills within the labour market.

On the other hand, the main areas emerging as weaknesses were the complexity of the provider landscape (in terms of the number of actors and their respective roles and remits), insufficient funding and limitations around the use of data to inform the development of policy and provision.

The evidence did not point to any apparent pattern of strengths and weaknesses in terms of the geography or type of governance system.

The evidence from the country experts suggests that the complex provider landscape (by virtue of the diversity and large number of providers) is potentially undermining the effectiveness of adult learning systems. The evidence here suggests that provision could be improved in terms of strategic coordination and alignment. This finding links to the evidence that policy frameworks for adult learning tends to be fragmented, rather than aligned. This also reflects the number of actors and stakeholders involved in adult learning (with a vertical and horizontal division of responsibilities). Here, there is perhaps the opportunity for mutual learning and information exchange to support Member States in reviewing how best to operate and deliver adult learning within a complex provider landscape. In this respect, opportunities around information sharing, clarifying and communicating stakeholder remits, or better developing a strategic approach to delivering provision might be considered, amongst other options. Reform in this sense might focus on information sharing and communication in the first instance.

The evidence also suggests that there is scope to improve the link between employer and learner needs and the design and delivery of adult learning provision. The potential for data generation, management and analysis to feed into this process could be harnessed to a greater degree. Where provision is more closely linked with need, there is a greater likelihood that it would be relevant and effective, also representing value for money as an investment. Where there has been progress in this area in recent years, a number of country experts reported the use of data as a strength, whilst an equal number of experts expressed that data is not well used in the design and review of provision, such that it represents a weakness that needs addressing.

8.6. What does the above tell us about the current state and future reforms needed in adult education?

On the basis of the analysis of the evidence presented by the country reports and questionnaire, there are several themes that emerge as potential areas in which future reforms and research might usefully focus. These aspects are highlighted:

8.6.1. Develop strategic and intervention logic thinking to underpin improvements in adult learning

There appears scope to greater improve the national strategic thinking which guides adult learning, which would have positive impacts in terms of improving the alignment of policy frameworks. The country reports identify that adult learning is sometimes delivered in an uncoordinated manner, which does not draw upon a strategically considered approach. On one hand, this challenge reflects the great number of stakeholders involved in the field, an inherent characteristic in the sector, which will be addressed separately below. On the other hand, it may be that the lack of strategic coordination identified also links to the finding that targets are often not set in a strategic context, with regard for how they might be achieved through a set of appropriate and possibly targeted interventions. This is less the case for programmes funded via Cohesion funding which tend to be linked to a considered theory of change and intervention logic which identify the outputs, outcomes and results that can be measured. Thus it appears that adult learning provision across Member States could be enhanced in terms of the way that provision is designed with particular aims, outputs, outcomes, results and impacts in mind. Planning interventions in this way, around considered logic for achieving an agreed end result could potentially help to diminish the

gap between targets and adult learning participation rates, the latter which do not appear to be universally increasing.

The suggestion for future reform in this context is that the European Commission might look to how the practice of logic intervention planning for adult learning programmes might be encouraged amongst Member States. This might be through the collation and dissemination of some examples, case studies or guidance of how such approaches might help Member States build their strategic thinking around adult learning. It might also look to foster cooperation and mutual learning between Member States to develop practice in this area. Of course, bearing in mind the principle of subsidiarity, it is not assumed that Member States would develop the same strategy, merely that adult learning in all Member States might be improved where approaches are considered and aligned on a more strategic basis.

8.6.2. Communication and clarification on the provider landscape

The evidence from the experts suggests that the complexity of the adult learning policy framework and provider landscape undermines the success of adult learning systems. This complexity is an inherent feature of the adult learning sector and we do not, on the basis of this research suggest that Member States seek to simplify their adult learning systems through streamlining the number of actors involved. Whilst this may be an option for the future, it is suggested at this point that consideration be given to how clarification and enhanced understanding about the relative role of particular stakeholders might be fostered. For example, national stakeholders and the general public might benefit from a communication campaign which outlines how adult learning works in their country, and how responsibilities and remits are divided by institution and stakeholder.

8.6.3. Extending research into adult learning finance

As acknowledged above, the availability and transparency of data relating to adult learning investment limits quantification and comparison between countries. Existing research on funding volumes for adult learning is limited and now becoming outdated. On this basis, future research into how consistent national data on adult learning investment might be extracted and compared would make a valuable contribution to the evidence base. A separate but useful endeavour might be the compilation and dissemination of a short guide outlining how different financial instruments have been used in different Member States, and how they might be transferred into other contexts. There would also be potential value in reflecting on this topic as part of a mutual or peer learning exercise, as a forum for sharing and learning from different national experiences and perspectives.

8.6.1. Extending research into evaluating adult learning provision

While beyond the scope of this report, we nevertheless note the importance of evaluating the effectiveness, efficiency and relevance of adult learning provision in Europe. While ensuring that relevant adult learning policy and financing frameworks are in place, it is equally important to assess whether they produce the intended outcomes and whether they match existing needs at the EU, national and local levels. Assessing what works and in what conditions is particularly important in light of the need to provide adult learning opportunities that empower individuals with the skills and competencies needed in rapidly changing labour markets.

8.6.2. *Sharing report findings with relevant adult learning fora*

It is suggested that the report findings, in particular around the weaknesses identified by country experts in relation to the apparent lack of strategic coordination amongst providers and the scope to better use data to inform the design of provision are shared with relevant fora in the area of adult learning. The ET2020 Working Group for Adult Learning has its mandate already established but the findings of this report could usefully inform its work. The report could also be shared with the Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe (EPALE) in order that its findings can inform the further development of the platform (for example in work that builds upon the Adult Learning Policy Analysis Tool)¹⁸¹, and be shared with relevant stakeholders.

8.7. **Concluding remarks**

This new contribution to the evidence base on adult learning is of value, in the context of a policy area which is increasingly regarded as important, in economic and social terms at local, national and European level. Adult learning benefits individuals, employers and ultimately societies, particularly in rapidly changing economic conditions. Despite the recognition it has received in EU and national policies over the years, still only a limited number of adults access learning opportunities in most Member States.

Indeed the country level reports indicate that there is an overarching ambition to increase levels of participation in adult learning through defining national targets, often reflecting EU ambitions and targets in this area. Actual rates of participation in adult learning appear not to be keeping pace with ambition, however. The evidence presented as part of the expert reports suggests that there may in some cases be a disconnect between the development of targets and consideration of the specific means through which they might be achieved, but also that policy frameworks are compromised by fragmentation and a lack of strategic thinking. In this context, it would seem that a greater degree of strategic planning could ensure that provision is designed with a particular theory of change scoped out. To aid this, it is important to have a clear sense of the financial resource allocated for particular interventions. At present, information around financial investment in adult learning is missing from the evidence base, such that national comparisons cannot be systematically made. The above suggestions consider how future development, reform or research might focus on the increased use of data to inform provision, the improvement of strategic oversight and theory of change approaches in adult learning, filling the gaps in understanding around financial frameworks, and various areas in which Member States might benefit from mutual learning and sharing of practice.

¹⁸¹ Adult Learning Policy Analysis Tool <https://ec.europa.eu/epale/en/policy-tool>

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