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Action Plan on Adult Learning 2007 - 2010

Final report of the Adult Learning Working Group

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CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report firstly presents a review of the work and the achievements of the Adult Learning Working Group (Working Group) 2008 – 2010 which steered the implementation of the Action Plan in that period. The report then looks at adult learning in the post-2010 period and presents possible lines of action with potential to enhance policy, practice and participation in adult learning throughout Europe in the period 2011 - 2020.

Section 1: **Introduction** sets out the rationale and the overall aims of this 'Final Report'. The terms 'adult learning' and 'adult education' are defined there.

Section 2: **Context** sets out the social, economic and adult-learning related challenges which formed the immediate backdrop to the Action Plan 'process' in the period 2007-2010. The key role of adult learning in addressing these challenges is underlined. The spectrum of development of adult learning in the 31 countries participating in the Action Plan is described along the key dimensions of policy legislation, structures, governance, funding, learning context, learning content, learning outcomes including qualifications and quality assurance. Finally, developments from 2000 at European level with an impact on adult learning are presented including the areas of: lifelong learning; key competences; the European Qualifications Framework (EQF); lifelong guidance; quality assurance in VET (vocational education and training) and higher education; the Lifelong Learning Programme 2000 – 2013 with particular reference to the Grundtvig programme.

In Section 3: **The Action Plan on Adult Learning (2007 – 2010**) *It is always a good time to learn,* including its aims and priority actions are described. The priority actions were:

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

- Improve the quality of provision in the adult learning sector;

- Increase the possibilities for adults to achieve a qualification at least one level higher than before ('go one-step-up');

- Speed up the process of assessment of skills and social competences and have them validated and recognised in terms of learning outcomes;

- Improve the monitoring of the adult learning sector.

In addition, the key players, objectives, roles and responsibilities of the Working Group are set out along with its Work Programme 2008 – 2010. Membership of the Working Group included representatives of the national adult learning authorities of 31 countries, including the 27 Member States, Croatia, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, and a number of European agencies/organisations.

The section concludes with a general description of the strategies and instruments used to implement the Action Plan in the period 2007 – 2010. These included four regional meetings and a wide range of activities specific to the different priority actions including focus groups, Peer Learning Activities (PLAs), workshops and research studies.

Section 4: **Themes and Topics (2007 – 2010**) covers the European and national-level activities that took place in the period 2007 – 2010. The themes and topics addressed by the Working Group arose primarily from the five priority actions of the Action Plan. In 2010 two additional themes, namely, financing adult learning and adult learning in higher education were explored through workshops.

Each priority action was progressed through a specific combination of a focus group, research studies, Peer Learning Activities (PLAs) and workshops. Findings and recommendations from these activities are presented under each priority action. Where relevant, reference is also made to the findings of the four regional meetings that took place in late 2009 and focused on national progress on the overall implementation of the Action Plan. Finally, the findings and recommendations of the workshops on the additional themes of adult learning in higher education and financing adult learning are presented.

Section 5: **Achievements and Conclusions of the Action Plan** draws out the achievements and conclusions that emerged from the Action Plan 'process' in the period 2007 – 2010, including through the studies, the PLAs, the regional meetings, the workshops, the deliberations of the Working Group and the focus groups and, critically, developments in adult learning at national level.

Overall, significant outcomes were achieved in terms of understanding, consensus building, advances in thinking and practice in the field of adult learning, sharing of policy and practice experience between countries and organisations and the identification of good practice and agendas for future developments in relation to the priority actions and other areas. Nevertheless, specific challenges in relation to the priority actions and other areas remain post-2010.

Several overarching challenges also persist in the post-2010 period including the key challenge of keeping adult learning visibly and firmly on the European and national agenda. Adult learning has a key role to play in the renewed Framework for European Co-operation in Education and Training (*ET2020*). It is clear that the adult learning agenda needs to be revised in two directions, namely: a) deepening and enlarging the themes in keeping with the over-arching goals of *Europe 2020* and *ET2020;* b) strengthening and improving cooperation between participating countries and between the Commission and participating countries.

Thus, possible future activities in adult learning are proposed arising from the these specific and overarching challenges and against the background of the spectrum of development of adult learning in Europe and the context presented by the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training (*ET2020*) within the wider context of *Europe 2020,* the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) and the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) 2007 – 2013, especially the Grundtvig programme.

To give coherence, direction and focus to these potential activities at European and national levels an enabling framework such as a Communication on adult learning in the form of another Action Plan is mooted along with the possibility of its being linked, as in 2008, to Council Conclusions on adult learning.

The **Annexes** present a list of abbreviations used in the report; the members of the Adult Learning Working Group and the outputs of the Action Plan 2007 – 2010.

1   INTRODUCTION

Following the adoption in September 2007 of the Action Plan on adult learning *It is always a good time to learn*[1], the European Commission established the Adult Learning Working Group (Working Group) to carry out a dual role, namely, on the one hand to support and guide the Commission's work in the implementation of the Action Plan and, on the other, to ensure implementation of the Action Plan in members' respective countries.

This report describes the composition, goals, work programme, activities, achievements and conclusions of the Working Group in the period 2008 – 2010 as it accompanied the European and national processes arising from the Action Plan. In addition, the report sets out the Working Group's views on challenges, approaches and policy-implementation for adult learning throughout Europe post-2010.

The term "adult learning" is taken to mean ' all forms of learning undertaken by adults after having left initial education and training, however far this process may have gone (e.g., including tertiary education)', as set out in the 2006 Communication on adult learning *It is never too late to learn*[2]. The term "adult education" is taken to mean 'general or vocational education provided for adults after initial education and training for professional and/or personal purposes' as defined by Cedefop (2008)[3]. Thus 'adult education' may be considered the practice of teaching and educating adults. As such it may be considered a sector of education that requires policies, legislation, institutions, participants, curricula, qualifications, quality assurance and trained personnel.

1.1   Aims of the Final Report

The aim of the report is to provide a summary of the work that has been done in the framework of the Action Plan on adult learning. The report presents:

- The social, economic and adult learning-related challenges presented by the context in which the Working Group was operating in the period 2008-2010;

- The establishment, structure and aims of the Working Group in the period 2007 - 2010;

- The Working Group 'roadmap' covering initiatives and activities carried out in the period 2007 – 2010 by the member countries in collaboration with the European Commission and by the Commission itself in relation to the implementation of the five priority actions of the Action Plan;

- The Working Group's conclusions and key ideas for a new 'roadmap' for adult learning to address on-going and new social and economic challenges to 2020.

The report also relates to the Staff Working Document that the European Commission has prepared on the implementation and achievements of the Action Plan.

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[1] European Commission (2007) Action Plan on adult learning *It is always a good time to learn*. http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2006:0614:FIN:EN:PDF

[2] Ibid.

[3] Cedefop (2008) *Terminology of European education and training policy: A selection of 100 key terms.* http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/4064_en.pdf

2   CONTEXT

This section sets out the social, economic and adult-learning related challenges which formed the context for the Action Plan 'process' in the period 2007-2010. It also considers the potential of adult learning to address these challenges.

2.1   The economic and social context – the challenges to be faced

- The economic situation in Europe which provided the broader context for the bulk of the implementation period of the Action Plan (2007 – 2010) is starkly set out in the Communication from the Commission, *Europe 2020, A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (Europe 2020)*[4]. The steady gains in economic growth and job creation witnessed since 2000 have been wiped out - GDP fell by 4% in 2009, industrial production dropped back to the levels of the 1990s and 23 million people - or 10% of the active population - are now unemployed. The crisis has also made the task of securing future economic growth much more difficult Furthermore, as shown in Cedefop's forecast on skills supply and demand in Europe, there is strong evidence that by 2020 there will be more and different jobs than there were in, for example, 2006[5]. Many of these new jobs are expected to require the highest qualifications levels. In 2000, 31% of jobs needed low level or no qualifications. By 2020, this proportion is expected to fall to around 22.8%[6].

- The 31 countries (27 Member States, Croatia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway) which were members of the Working Group share a common context of unprecedented global flows of information, products, services, people, capital and ideas amidst the worldwide financial downturn which is having a greater impact on some countries than on others in the area.

- In addition, poverty and social exclusion continue to be a serious challenge in the majority of the countries which participated in the Working Group. In all countries those most at risk of social exclusion include early school leavers, unemployed individuals, persons with a disability, offenders/ex-offenders, migrants and minorities, including Roma people. New forms of illiteracy in the shape of exclusion from access to and use of, ICT in professional and daily life exacerbate this exclusion; adults who are not computer literate are deprived of essential information and facilities which are increasingly only available in digital form[7].

- Demographic ageing is accelerating in virtually all the 31 countries which were members of the Working Group. As the baby-boom generation retires, the EU's active population will start to shrink as from 2013-2014. The number of people aged over 60 is now increasing twice as fast as it did before 2007 - by about two million every year compared to one million previously. The combination of a smaller working population and a higher share of retired people will place additional strains on welfare systems.

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[4]European Commission (2010) Communication on EUROPE 2020 A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth COM(2010) 2020) http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/COMPLET%20EN%20BARROSO%20%20%20007%20-%20Europe%202020%20-%20EN%20version.pdf

[5] Cedefop (2010) *Skills supply and demand in Europe. Medium-term forecast up to 2020.* *http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/Upload/Information_resources/Bookshop/546/4086_en.pdf*

[6] Cedefop (2010) *Skills supply and demand in Europe. Medium-term forecast up to 2020.* *http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/Upload/Information_resources/Bookshop/546/4086_en.pdf*

[7] European Commission (2006) Communication on adult learning *It is never too late to learn.* http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2006:0614:FIN:EN:PDF

- Adult learning does not always have strong recognition at European and national levels in terms of visibility, policy prioritisation and resources, notwithstanding the political emphasis placed on lifelong learning at both those levels in recent years. This dichotomy between political discourse and reality is especially striking when set against the background of the major challenges confronting Europe[8].

- The Council Resolution of 15 November 2007 on new skills for new jobs, stressed the need to anticipate skill needs and raise overall skill levels, giving priority to the education and training of those with low skills and at the risk of economic and social exclusion[9]. Ensuring the acquisition of key competences by all citizens remains a challenge for all Member States[10].

2.2 The potential contribution of adult learning to economic and social development

Adult learning is considered a key response to the challenges outlined above. In this rapidly shifting scenario, all the evidence points to the need for a highly qualified labour force to achieve the EU's goal of becoming a dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy. In addition, in the current economic climate, the skills of Europe's workforce are crucial to economic recovery and will be vital in responding to whatever new economic structures emerge post-downturn. Moreover, at a time when the average working age is rising, older workers need to engage in learning to address their competence needs to meet the requirements of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. .

The 2006 Communication on adult learning highlighted the essential contribution of adult learning to employability, labour market mobility and social inclusion. The Communication pointed to the importance of investing in adult learning on the grounds that public and private benefits include: greater employability; better-quality employment; increased productivity; reduced expenditure in areas such as unemployment benefits, welfare payments and early-retirement pensions, increased social returns in terms of improved civic participation; better health; lower incidence of criminality; and greater individual well-being and fulfilment.

The Communication identified low-skilled individuals, migrants and older people as priority groups and made specific reference to the challenge of the persistently high number of early school-leavers who enter adulthood without a qualification. It underlined the importance of removing barriers to participation and emphasised the need to invest in the quality of adult learning and the development of systems that recognise learning gained outside the formal education and training sphere.

The follow-on 2007 Action Plan on adult learning identified five overarching strategic priority roles for adult learning as follows:

- To reduce labour shortages due to demographic changes by raising skill levels in the workforce generally and by upgrading low-skilled workers;

- To address the persistently high number of early school-leavers by offering a second chance to those who enter adulthood without qualifications;

- To contribute to the reduction of poverty and social exclusion among marginalised groups;

- To increase the integration of migrants in society and labour markets;

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8 European Commission (2006) Communication on adult learning *It is never too late to learn*, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2006:0614:FIN:EN:PDF.

9 *New Skills for New Jobs* – http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=568&langId=en

10 European Commission (2005) Proposal for a Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning COM (2005) 548 final, 10.11 http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/keyrec_en.pdf

- To increase participation in lifelong learning and, particularly, to address the fact that participation decreases after the mid-thirties.

Adult learning can help ensure that immigration, which has the potential to be a partial counterbalance to an ageing population and to meet skills and labour shortages in certain sectors, can take place in a way that is beneficial to both migrants and the host country. Most new migrants, even high-skilled people, have major needs in terms of language and cultural understanding[11].

But, adult learning is not just about getting, maintaining or progressing in a job. It is also about the personal, civic, social and cultural life of the individual and the community, region and state in which s/he lives. This indispensable role of adult education as an agent of social inclusion is well recognised.

The Council Conclusions 2010[12] on the social dimension of education and training further affirmed that:

- Expanding access to adult education can create new possibilities for active inclusion and enhanced social participation, especially for the low skilled, unemployed, the elderly, migrants, adults with special needs;

- Adult learning, offered in a variety of environments, involving multiple stakeholders (including public and private sectors, higher education institutions, local communities and NGOs) and covering learning for personal, civic, social and employment-related purposes, is central to reaching disadvantaged and at risk groups;

- The potential of intergenerational learning can be explored as a means of sharing knowledge and expertise, and of encouraging communication and solidarity between younger and older generations, bridging the growing digital divide and reducing social isolation.

2.3 The spectrum of development in adult learning at national level and the challenges to be faced

Compared with other sectors of education and training, adult learning in the 31 countries is more heterogeneous across all its dimensions. It takes place in the context of a great diversity of overarching policies, legislative frameworks, structures, governance arrangements and funding mechanisms. There is a wide range of priorities, aims, learning contexts, providers, organisational forms, learning content and learning outcomes.

Adult learning provision in the 31 countries participating in the Working Group exists along a spectrum of development. At one end of the spectrum, a cluster of eight or nine countries is adopting a systemic approach to formal and non-formal adult learning, whereby it is an integral autonomous sector within the overall education and training system. Strong tripartite arrangements involving public authorities, trade unions and employers sustain the formal, active involvement of the social partners in the provision of learning opportunities in the workplace. At the other end of the spectrum there is a further cluster of about eight countries where, for a range of reasons, adult learning opportunities are few. The legislative basis, policies and financial support tend to be disjointed, weak or absent and structures are fragmented. The systematic involvement of the social partners is weak or non-existent and

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[11] European Commission (2006) Communication on adult learning *It is never too late to learn*, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2006:0614:FIN:EN:PDF.

[12] Council conclusions of 11 May 2010 on the social dimension of education and training (2010/C 135/02) http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2010:135:0002:0007:EN:PDF

participation levels in all types of adult learning – in education and training institutions, in the community and in the workplace - are low[13].

Between both ends of the spectrum, adult learning in the remaining countries is located along a continuum of development on the key dimensions of policy, legislation, governance, financing, infrastructure, provision, participation, recognition of learning, quality assurance and research. The broad politico-educational drive is towards the rationalisation of provision with a thrust towards increasing the co-ordination, quantity and the quality of adult learning in education and training institutions, in the community and in the workplace[14].

Accordingly, in many countries adult learning faced a host of challenges in 2007 when the Action Plan was adopted and implemented in the period 2008 – 2010. The consultation process for the Action Plan (2006 - 2007) restated the fundamental need for public authorities, together with other stakeholders to intervene to guarantee learning opportunities to enable those at risk to achieve key competences[15]. This intervention was considered necessary to ensure that adults who left school without adequate formal qualifications and who wish to restart or continue their basic education at any time throughout their lives, are supported with adequate and innovative learning pathways and with opportunities for the acquisition of competences through work-based training offers. The need for such intervention is even greater in the context of the rapid pace of change in the workplace and in society in general.

During the consultation process stakeholders also emphasised that compared to other areas of education, training and learning the **contribution and benefits of the adult learning sector** are not well researched, debated or published.

In addition, stakeholders underscored the following:

- The development of adult learning opportunities is not keeping pace with the needs of individuals and society. To increase participation and to encourage investment, it is crucial that the quality, relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of adult learning are clearly visible;

- The place of adult learning within a lifelong learning framework needs to be strengthened and stronger support needs to be given to adult learning as a key element in the promotion of economic development and social cohesion;

- There is a need for improved governance with a view to creating the local, regional and national structures and partnerships required for the development, co-ordination, funding and quality management of adult learning;

- There is an urgent need for a planned and systematic approach at all levels and within all elements of learning, formal and non-formal, to improve accountability and transparency and to provide adequate confidence that adult learning

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[13] Sources: a) Background reports for the regional meetings of adult learning stakeholders (October – November 2009) and a range of Peer Learning Activities and Workshops related to the Action Plan on adult learning. See www.kslll.net;   b) Keogh, H. (2009) Regional Report for the Pan-European region of Europe, North America and Israel for CONFINTEA VI. See www.unesco.org/uil/confinteavi; c) Research voor Beleid (forthcoming) *Impact of ongoing reforms in education and training on the adult learning sector,.* Passim; d) Background Report for the *Grundtvig Tenth Anniversary Conference: European Cooperation in Adult Learning – Shaping the Future.* http://ec.europa.eu/education/grundtvig/doc/10th/back.pdf

[14] Research voor Beleid (forthcoming) *Impact of ongoing reforms in education and training on the adult learning sector,*

[15] European Commission (2007) Action Plan on adult learning *It is always a good time to learn.* http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2006:0614:FIN:EN:PDF

provision would meet the requirements of all stakeholders, especially the adult learners.

- The delivery of an adult learning service that simultaneously meets the needs of the adult learner, provides high quality responses to the needs of the labour market and society and stimulates further demand is a key challenge for adult learning stakeholders in many countries.

Low participation rates in many countries militate against the potential of adult learning to address the social and economic challenges in Europe. The educational attainment levels of the adult population in the EU Member States have improved considerably since 2000 and the number of adults with low educational attainment has fallen by approximately 1.5 million per annum since 2000. Nevertheless, in the context of a 'smart' knowledge-based economy, it is significant that c. 75 million Europeans aged 25-64 (close to 30% of the working age population) still have at most lower secondary education[16]. There are stark differences in the life chances of these adults compared to adults with at least upper secondary qualifications. Their basic skills are not sufficient to cope with their personal, social, cultural and economic needs, either in terms of successful citizenship or employability.

The need to increase participation in adult learning was underlined by the 2009 results for the benchmark indicator of 12.5% participation in adult learning of any kind by adults aged 25-64 years which show that 9.3% of Europeans participated in adult learning on a four-week reference period, ranging from a low of 1.4% to a high of 31.6%. Despite a wide variation between countries in the *volume* of adult learning around this average, there is remarkable similarity across countries in the *distribution* of adult learning. In the majority of countries rates of participation increase in line with the initial highest educational level attained, with high skilled adults being, on average, five times more likely to participate than low-skilled adults. There is also a persistent age-based differential in participation with participation dropping off after the mid-thirties.

Figure 1 below shows the situation with regard to the participation of adults aged 25 – 64 in lifelong learning in European countries in the four weeks preceding the survey in 2009 compared to participation in 2005. Of the thirty-two countries included, participation in 2009 has slipped back on 2005 levels in fourteen countries and on the EU-27 average participation rate.

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[16] Commission Staff Working Document Progress towards the Lisbon Objectives in Education and Training Indicators and Benchmarks 2009. SEC (2009 1616). http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/report09/report_en.pdf

Figure 1: Participation of adults in lifelong learning in European countries, 2009
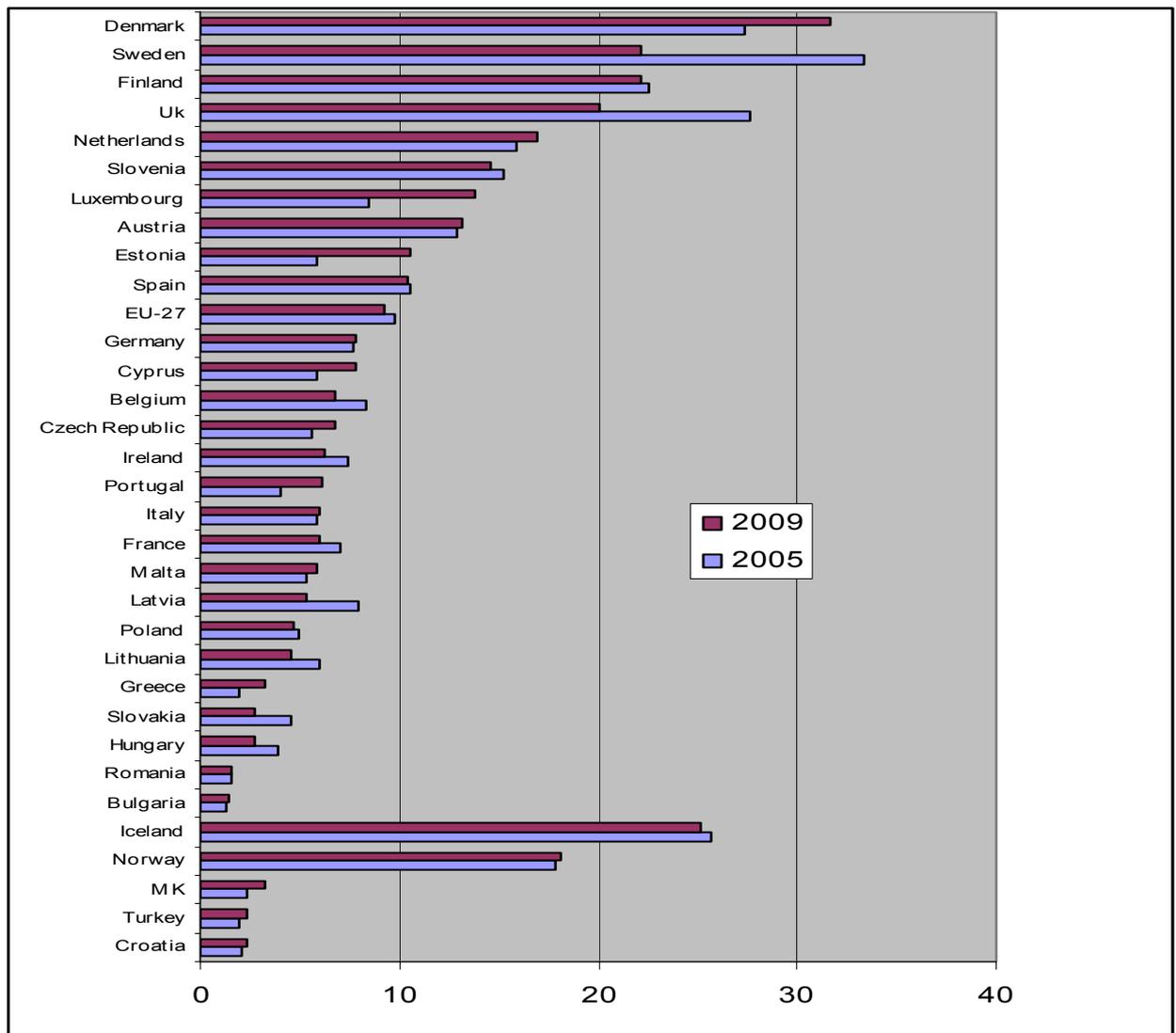
Data source: Eurostat (LFS database), May 2010. This indicator refers to persons aged 25 to 64 who stated that they received education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey.

Ultimately, an additional 4 million adults would need to participate in lifelong learning in order to achieve the participation rate of the 12.5% benchmark agreed by Member States in the framework of *Education and Training 2010.*

The 2008 Adult Education Survey indicated that more than one-third (35.7%) of the EU's population aged 25-64 participated in formal or non-formal learning in the 12 months preceding the survey[17]. Job-related non-formal learning is where the majority of adults participate and participation rates decrease with age. The survey further reveals significant country differences in participation, with participation highest in the Nordic countries and the UK.

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

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[17] Boateng, S. K. (2009) Significant country differences in adult learning. Eurostat Statistics in Focus. 44/2009. http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-SF-09-044/EN/KS-SF-09-044-EN.PDF

plant and machine operators and assemblers and elementary occupations and high-skilled workers, including skilled agricultural and fishery workers and craft and related trades workers tend to have equally poor chances of participating in structured learning in every country surveyed.

In addition to the above challenges, throughout the 2000s, the goal of building a lifelong learning society has been creating a strong demand for more coherent and flexible qualifications systems in all countries. In this context, the validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes presented and is presenting challenges on many fronts.

Speeding up the development of policies, structures and measures to ensure quality outcomes continued to be vital, including the development of competence profiles for adult learning personnel and a systematic approach to their initial and continuing professional development and the accreditation of providers. Agreed, comprehensive data systems are needed to improve the evidence base, increase the visibility of adult learning and improve policy-making and practice.

Finally, in the period 2007 – 2010 there was a clear need for the development of a research infrastructure and for robust approaches to the production and dissemination of research.

The above concrete challenges that formed the backdrop to the implementation of the Action Plan were underpinned and exacerbated by an ambiguity and ambivalence among public authorities and other stakeholders in some of the 31 counties as to what constitutes 'adult learning'. It was clear from the first country reports produced for the Commission by the members of the Working Group over 2008[18] that there was a strong focus in the reports on adult continuing vocational education and training. As a result, the Working Group considered that there was a need to seek a better balance in any future reports. In this context, it should be noted that tensions exist in many countries and, indeed, at European level in relation to adult learning policy goals. These include the following questions as to whether:

- adult learning is economic policy, social policy, cultural policy or all three. In addition, non-formal adult learning stakeholders may prefer to view adult learning as more a social movement;

- adult learning is for a living (a job) or for living (in society); the question of whether adult learning is for human resource development and employability or for human potential development and social cohesion;

- adult learning is for the knowledge economy or the knowledge society;

- adult learning is for more and better jobs or for better social cohesion;

- adult learning is a public good or a private good;

- adult learning should be subject to political control or to market control;

- there should be a focus on quantity or quality.

In an ideal situation these questions represent a non-zero sum game and adult learning addresses both sides of the equations. However, adult learning did not experience ideal conditions in many of the 31 countries at the outset of or during, the Action Plan 'process'.

In addition to these policy tensions and questions, many countries were also beset by: a shortage of policy, especially evidence-based policy; fragmented policies;

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[18] Minutes of the Working Group meeting, February 2009.

limited implementation of policies; and limited monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation to support a practice-policy feedback loop.

2.4 Developments related to adult learning at European level

Developments in adult learning at national level and the production of the Communication on adult learning (2006) and the implementation of the Action Plan itself (2007) took place against a background of a growing focus on adult learning at European level, particularly in recent years. In 2000 the European Council in Lisbon set the strategic goal for Europe to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based society in the world by 2010. A key element of the agenda proposed in Lisbon was the promotion of employability and social inclusion through investment in citizens' knowledge and competence at all stages of their lives. In the period 2000-2010 education and training have been critical to addressing the Lisbon Agenda's objectives of economic growth, competitiveness and social inclusion[19].

The Commission's 2001 Communication *Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality*[20] and the 2002 Council Resolution on lifelong learning[21] stressed the importance of lifelong learning for competitiveness and employability, but also for social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development.

The 2006 Joint Interim Report on progress under the *Education and Training 2010* work programme[22], stressed that all citizens need to acquire and update their skills throughout life and that the specific needs of those at risk of social exclusion need special attention. Adult learning was also considered to be important for the competence development of medium- and high-skilled people. The Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning[23] (2006) set out eight competences covering knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to a range of contexts which all individuals need for personal fulfilment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment.

The publication of the Communication (2006) and the follow-on Action Plan (2007) on adult learning foregrounded the issue of adult learning at European level. The two publications sought to shine a spotlight on adult learning in the Commission, the Parliament and the Council, to stimulate the Commission to give leadership and carry out and/or fund a range of activities in relation to adult learning and to insert a stronger adult learning 'perspective' into ongoing processes such as the Copenhagen process[24], the Bologna process[25], the validation of non-formal and informal learning process[26], the key competence process[27], the work on the Standing Group on

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[19] Lisbon European Council, 23 and 24 March 2000, Presidency Conclusions
http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/lis1_en.htm

[20] European Commission (2001) *Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality*

[21] Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 on lifelong learning (2002/C 163/01) http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2002:163:0001:0003:EN:PDF

[22] 2006 Joint Education Council/Commission Report on the implementation of the Education & Training 2010 work programme (February 2006);http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/nationalreport08/council_en.pdf

[23] Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on key competences for lifelong learning (2006/962/EC) http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/objectives_en.html#basic

[24] Council Conclusion of 19 December 2002 on the promotion of enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training (2003/C 13/02) http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2003:013:0002:0004:EN:PDF

[25] The Bologna Process - Towards the European Higher Education Area http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc1290_en.htm

[26] Validation of non-formal and informal learning http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc52_en.htm

Indicators and Benchmarks and the then emerging European Qualifications Framework[28] and European Credits Transfer System for VET (ECVET)[29].

The resultant May 2008 Conclusions on adult learning[30] recognised the need to raise the skills levels of a significant number of low-skilled workers with a view to enabling all citizens to adapt to technological change and future skills needs.

The European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN)[31] aims to assist EU Member States and the Commission in advancing European co-operation on lifelong guidance in both the education and the employment sectors. The purpose is to promote co-operation at Member State level on lifelong guidance and to propose appropriate structures and support mechanisms for implementing the priorities identified in the Resolutions on Lifelong Guidance (2004, 2008). The ELGPN was established by the Member States and the Commission supported the activities of the network in 2007-2010.

Intensified co-operation between European VET stakeholders has led to a range of complementary tools, the so-called common European tools for VET, which aim at shaping a European VET area in a field where legislative competence remains with the Member States. These include the 2008 *European Framework for the Transparency of Qualifications and Competences (*EQF)[32] and the 2010 *European Credits Transfer System for VET (ECVET)*.[33] Both tools have strong significance for adults and adult learning, particularly the EQF which is stimulating the development of a national qualifications framework in countries where they are not yet in place.

In 2009, the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (*ET2020*) recognised that "the major challenge is to ensure the acquisition of key competences by everyone"[34]. This has strong implications for adults and adult learning. The Joint Report on the *Education and Training 2010* work programme focused on key competences and pointed to the need for their inclusion in vocational education and training and in adult learning policy and practice.

The European quality assurance reference framework, EQAVET[35] (2010), also has significance for adult learning in that many adults learn in continuing vocational education and training. EQAVET is also important for adult learning in that it offers a model of quality assurance for consideration in non-vocational adult learning.

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[27]Key competences for lifelong learning http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/education_training_youth/lifelong_learning/c11090_en.htm

[28] The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc44_en.htm

[29] The European Credit Transfer for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc50_en.htm

[30]Council Conclusions of 22 May 2008 on adult learning http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:140:0010:0013:EN:PDF

[31]The European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN http://ktl.jyu.fi/ktl/elgpn

[32] The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc44_en.htm

[33]The European Credit Transfer for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc50_en.htm

[34] Council Conclusions of 12 May 2009. Official Journal of the European Union C 119/2,

28.5.2009 http://eur-x.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:119:0002:0010:EN:PDF

[35] The European Quality Assurance Framework for Vocational Education and Training http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/home.aspx

The EU Grundtvig Programme 2007 – 2010

In the period 2007 – 2010 the Grundtvig programme for general adult learning[36], as part of the overall Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) 2007 – 2013, made a significant contribution to the development of adult learning in Europe. Indeed over the past decade since its establishment in 2000, Grundtvig has provided much needed funding for innovation and staff development in adult learning, the least well-funded education and training sector in all countries. The Grundtvig budget in 2010 was € 61.974 million, approximately 4% of the overall LLP (2007 – 2013).

During the Action Plan 'process' Grundtvig continued to increase the visibility of adult learning throughout Europe and confirm the importance of adult learning within overall lifelong learning. The launch of the Grundtvig action in the framework of the Socrates II Programme in 2000 had given adult education the same structural status as the other sectors within the programme. Since then the Grundtvig programme has kept adult learning firmly on the European and national agendas.

Grundtvig also continued to make a strong contribution to the development of adult learning practice. Grundtvig acted a test-bed for innovation in formal and non-formal adult learning at grass-roots level in the 31 participating countries, thereby contributing to improving the quality of adult learning practice - a priority action of the Action Plan.

In addition, Grundtvig continued to support innovation and the quality of provision through 'grass-roots' level cooperation, the development of teaching and learning methods and materials and the provision of in-service training courses for adult learning staff, including teachers, trainers, managers, administrators, guidance personnel, mentors and others involved in delivering or opening up learning opportunities for adults.

Grundtvig contributes to the development of the European dimension of adult learning through providing opportunities for transnational cooperation which create a culture of European cooperation in a sector lacking in a previous tradition in this regard. The participation of partner institutions/organisations and personnel in Grundtvig partnerships and projects has done much to strengthen the European adult learning community. Furthermore, in the period 2007 – 2010 Grundtvig mobility grants enabled some 2,000 adult education staff to participate annually in an in-service training course or a less formal kind of training activity, such as a study visit, job shadowing, work experience or attending a conference or seminar in another European country.

Grundtvig also continued to make a strong contribution to the fight against social exclusion by supporting the development of innovative ways of enhancing learning opportunities for marginalised adults. Almost two-thirds of Grundtvig projects and partnerships have included/include a social inclusion dimension.

To date Grundtvig has also had also a practical outcome in relation to European policy development and implementation. Indeed, it is widely acknowledged that the very existence of Grundtvig paved the way for the 2006 Communication and the Action Plan. Grundtvig has also provided direct policy support to many of the activities relating to implementation of the Action Plan. For example, in 2010 € 1.115 million - 2% of the overall Grundtvig budget for the year - was spent on such direct policy support.

Activities supported in the overall period 2007 – 2010 included: the four regional meetings in 2007 and in 2009; the three Peer Learning Activities (PLAs) and the Workshop on basic skills (2007 – 2010); the PLAs on validation of non-formal and informal learning and on improving monitoring of the adult learning sector (both in

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[36] See Background Report for the *Grundtvig Tenth Anniversary Conference: European Cooperation in Adult Learning – Shaping the Future*. http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc86_en.htm

2009); the Workshop on quality in adult learning; financing adult learning; adult learning in higher education (all 3 in 2010). In addition, a range of studies on the Action Plan's priority actions 1, 2, 3 and 5 were funded. The final conference to mark the end of the Action Plan process and the beginning of the post-2010 adult learning process will also be funded by Grundtvig. Furthermore, the Grundtvig thematic priorities address key policy messages embedded in the Action Plan

The significance of the above European-level developments for the Action Plan and adult learning in general will be drawn out throughout the remainder of the report, especially in the section dealing with the period ahead to 2020.

3 THE ACTION PLAN ON ADULT LEARNING (2007 – 2010)

This section describes the priorities of the 2007 Action Plan on adult learning; the establishment, composition and work programme of the Adult Learning Working Group (Working Group); and the activities that took place during the Action Plan 'process' 2007 - 2010.

3.1 The Action Plan priorities

The Action Plan on adult learning focused on adults who are disadvantaged especially those with low literacy levels and inadequate work skills and/or skills for successful integration into society. Depending on the Member State, these included early school-leavers, migrants, older people, women, persons with a disability and/or ethnic minorities, including Roma people. The Action Plan aims to strengthen the adult learning sector which is a complex sector with a wide variety of providers reaching all kinds of target groups.

The Action Plan aims to implement the key messages of the 2006 Communication on adult learning *It is never too late to learn* and defines five concrete priority actions which Member States should seek to implement in order to increase participation in adult learning and develop efficient systems that reach all adults and involve all relevant stakeholders. The priorities are:

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

- Improve the quality of provision in the adult learning sector;

- Increase the possibilities for adults to achieve a qualification at least one level higher than before ('go one-step-up');

- Speed up the process of assessment of skills and social competences and have them validated and recognised in terms of learning outcomes;

- Improve the monitoring of the adult learning sector.

3.2 Key Players

In early 2008 the Adult Learning Working Group was established for a three-year period pursuant to the 2006 Communication[37] and the 2007 Action Plan. The intention was that the Working Group would provide the Commission with policy advice and assistance in relation to the implementation of and follow-up to, the Action Plan in the period 2008 - 2010. The activities of the Working Group were, therefore, to be guided by the actions set out in the Action Plan itself, taking into account the Resolution of

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[37] European Commission (2006) Communication on adult learning *It is never too late to learn*. COM(2006) 614 final. http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2006:0614:FIN:EN:PDF

the European Parliament of 16 January 2008 and the Conclusions of the Council of May 2008 which reinforced the Action Plan.

Membership of the Working Group (see ANNEX 1) included representatives of the national adult learning authorities of 31 countries, including the 27 Member States, Croatia, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, and a number of European agencies/organisations.

3.3 The Objectives of the Adult Learning Working Group

Members of the Working Group were expected notably to:

- Propose, support and develop further actions conducive to achieving the objectives of the Action Plan;

- Make proposals for optimising interaction between the objectives of the Action Plan and funding opportunities within European programmes, especially the Grundtvig programme;

- Give regular updates on policy developments in their respective countries;

- Identify and present examples of good practice, but also unsuccessful practices in their country in relation to the key actions in the Action Plan;

- Propose and support the organisation of a programme of Peer Learning Activities on the Action Plan and other themes to include transnational study visits and short duration staff exchanges, including involving the relevant stakeholders in learning networks at regional level.

It was intended that the work and results of the Working Group would contribute to the *Education and Training 2010* work programme and would, where appropriate, be communicated to relevant bodies, including the Education Committee, the Directors General for Vocational Training (DGVT), the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training (ACVT) and the Education and Training 2010 Coordination Group (ETCG).

3.4 The work programme of the Adult Learning Working Group 2008 – 2010

The Action Plan contained a programme of activities for its implementation over the period 2007 – 2010. Based on this programme of activities, the Working Group developed a three-year work programme in collaboration with the Commission to guide and steer its work in relation to the implementation of the Action Plan.

During its first meeting the members of the Working Group focused on sharing information on adult learning in their respective countries. Thus the Working Group became an instrument and a platform for sharing information at a political level and for sharing good practice through Peer Learning Activities, regional meetings and workshops. From the outset[38] the Working Group was conscious that:

- The membership of the group should represent a broad cross-section of adult learning for the development of social, cultural, (non-) vocational competences and personal fulfilment;

- Benefits would derive from establishing synergies between the mandate of the Working Group and the work of the Member States on the priorities of the Action Plan;

- Agreement on a set of key definitions was crucial to support further studies and monitoring of the sector;

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[38] Minutes of the first Adult Learning Working Group meeting, February 2008.

- There was a need for comprehensive reporting by the 31 countries on the condition of adult learning in each country.

The 'roadmap' of the Working Group focused on a range of activities for the implementation of the priority actions of the Action Plan, including Europe-wide surveys and studies, peer learning activities (PLAs) and regional meetings. The Working Group took an active role in the preparation of the PLAs, the regional meetings and the workshops by hosting the events; suggesting themes and overall objectives; shaping the event programme; participating in events; nominating national governmental, non-governmental and social partner participants to participate; commenting on the Final Report for each activity and disseminating and building on the findings of the various activities.

The Working Group also undertook to supply the European Commission before each meeting with an update on on-going adult learning policy and practice developments in their respective countries. They proposed a number of revisions of the questionnaire used by the European Commission to gather information such information for 2008. It was recommended that in order to improve the report in 2009 the Commission should be clear about the purpose of the report; link data to benchmarks; base the questionnaire on sound definitions; connect with other reports to avoid overlaps and involve stakeholders.

At the Working Group meetings the European Commission provided updates on: European-level developments with potential to impact directly or indirectly on adult learning (for example, ECVET; the Adult Education Survey; the European Network on Lifelong learning Guidance, the Grundtvig programme and EQF). The Working Group also heard presentations from the authors of the various studies commissioned in relation to the implementation of the Action Plan and from their own members on examples of good practice in various countries.

3.5 The role of the European agencies and associations participating in the Working Group

European agencies and associations also participated, namely, Business Europe, CEDEFOP, EAEA (European Association for the Education of Adults), ETF (European Training Foundation), ETUC (European Trade Union Confederation), EUCEN (The European Association for University Lifelong Learning), Eurydice and UEAPME (European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises).

These agencies/associations played an active role in the Working Group both during the meetings and through participation in the various activities organised under the Action Plan process 2008 – 2010. The Working Group demonstrated how various sectors, including governments, NGOs, universities, trade unions and business organisations can work together sharing knowledge and practical experience in the field of adult learning.

Some European institutions intensified their work in the field of adult learning in the period 2007 - 2010. For example, Cedefop[39], the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, analysed adult learning trends and policy developments at national and supranational levels to support the implementation of the Action Plan on adult learning. In its study *Learning while working: success stories of workplace learning in Europe*, Cedefop drew on its previous work carried out on key topics for adult learning (e.g. changing competence requirements, older workers' learning needs, lifelong guidance). The study reveals in particular how workplace learning can contribute to adults' skills development and raises recognition of its opportunities. A second forthcoming Cedefop study will focus on the acquisition of

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[39] www.cedefop.europa.eu/

key competences at the workplace. The study will reveal the potential of workplace learning for the acquisition of key competences and provide best-practice examples.

Cedefop also regularly organises workshops and conferences related to the broad field of adult learning, thus providing a forum for researchers and other experts to gather latest insights and best practices. The international workshop *Supporting longer working lives: guidance and counselling for ageing workers* (September 2010) which embraced educational, psychological, occupational, sociological, human resources and socio-economic perspectives serves as an example[40].

EUCEN's[41] mission is to support European universities to become lifelong learning organisations. This implies a fundamental transformation of their current learning provision and programmes and of their pedagogical, administrative and financial organisation. EUCEN is also committed to examining and reflecting on (from both national and sectoral perspectives) the European Commission's propositions in this field in order to take forward Europe's strategic positioning in adult learning and the contributions this makes to civil society.

Thus, EUCEN considered the Action Plan to be a very important policy development at European level and was a regular participant in the Working Group, with members also being involved in the focus groups and the workshop. EUCEN's overall aim in participating in the Working Group was to support the position that adult learning/lifelong learning play a vital role in improving the lives and well-being (social as well as economic) of European citizens and that universities have an important role to play in this evolving agenda. EUCEN members' experience in cross-sectoral working, together with its active and deep knowledge regarding a number of the priorities of the Action Plan (e.g. validation of non-formal and informal learning; older learners and quality assurance in lifelong learning) enabled it to make a particularly rich contribution to the Working Group and to identify and share models of good practice and detailed research from within its membership base[42].

The Eurydice network[43] provided substantial support to the Action Plan process 2007 - 2010. Firstly, the network contributed to the understanding of systems of adult education and training in Europe, in particular through its descriptive database Eurybase that covers the education systems of 31 European countries and includes a specific section on adult education and training.

Secondly, on the basis of the information available in the Eurybase database the network undertook the production of a report directly related to the Action Plan, namely on the objective of providing adults with opportunities to obtain a qualification at least one level higher than what they already hold. The report[44] focuses on the "one step up" opportunities provided through the formal education system. It includes a comparative overview of the second-chance provision which enables mature students to complete compulsory or upper secondary education, and it also looks at measures and policies enhancing the participation of adult returners in higher education.

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[40] Based on note supplied to author by CEDEFOP.

[41] EUCEN, the European University Continuing Education Network and the largest European multidisciplinary association in University lifelong learning, is an international non-governmental, non-profit making organisation and has 212 members from 40 countries. www.eucen.eu/

[42] Based on note supplied to author by EUCEN,

[43] The Eurydice network is an institutional network of 35 national units, established in 31 countries taking part in the action programme in the field of lifelong learning, and a European unit based in the EU Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) in Brussels which coordinates the network. http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/

[44] Eurydice (forthcoming) *Adults in Formal Education: Policies and Practice in Europe*. Brussels: author.

Finally, the Eurydice network has been closely following the evolution of the higher education sector in Europe and has been involved in reporting on the Bologna process. All its recent studies in the field of higher education include, among other issues, topics closely related to the Action Plan, for example, themes such as lifelong learning in the higher education sector; the flexibilisation of higher education provision; validation of non-formal and informal learning and developments relating to national qualifications frameworks (NQFs)[45].

The EAEA represented the voice of European adult education NGOs on the Working Group and some of the associated focus groups. In doing so EAEA endeavoured to ensure that the contribution and concerns of adult education organisations, particularly those in the non-formal sector, were afforded recognition and that the role that adult education can play in improving well-being and life chances, particularly for disadvantaged groups, was not overlooked.

For the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA)[46] the Action Plan was one of the most important policy developments in adult learning at European level. The EAEA was involved in the consultation process leading to the 2006 Communication on adult learning and suggested a number of actions for inclusion in it. EAEA was also the leader of the study on adult education trends and issues[47] which contributed to that debate.

In 2008, with the support of the European Commission, EAEA organised a conference on the implementation of the Action Plan which provided an opportunity for its members to learn about the Action Plan; showcase examples of good and interesting practice relating to the key priority actions of the Action Plan; and make recommendations for further developments. Attention was paid to how work at the grassroots can inform the development of policy and how policy can reflect the concerns of adult educators and learners for the creation of additional adult learning opportunities. Overall, the event demonstrated how the Commission and civil society can work together to share experience and expertise in the field of adult learning[48].

3.6   Action Plan activities

In the period 2008-2010 the Working Group collaborated with the Commission on a range of activities to advance the Action Plan process, including focus groups, regional meetings; peer learning activities (PLAs); workshops and research studies.   The findings of the regional meetings, the PLAs, the workshop and the studies are presented under the relevant priority actions in the next section of the report.

3.6.1   *Focus Groups*

In the initial stages, work on the five Action Plan priority areas was also supported by five focus groups invited by the Commission to give advice and guidance at strategic points in the development of the Action Plan follow-up activities. Each group which comprised 4-5 experts on the respective themes from outside the Commission and 2-3 representatives from Directorates General of the Commission other than Education and Culture concentrated on one of the five Action Plan priority actions. In 2008-2009 the focus groups made recommendations on specifications for research relevant to

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[45] Based on note supplied to author by EURYDICE.

[46] EAEA is a transnational, not-for-profit association that links and represents European organisations directly involved in adult learning. EAEA currently has 127 members in 43 countries, representing adult learning not only in the European Union, but also in the countries of the Council of Europe. Our members range from local learning centres to large national associations. EAEA acts as an advocate for adult learning and for NGOs in this field; advocates for the development of policy on adult education and learning at European level; accompanies policy developments at European level; disseminates the results of policy developments; raises the visibility of non-formal adult education. www.eaea.org

[47] European Association for the Education of Adults (2006) *Adult education trends and issues.* Brussels: author. http://ec.europa.eu/education/pdf/doc268_en.pdf

[48] Based on note supplied to author by EAEA.

the specific priority actions and supported the Commission in drafting proposals for research studies

3.6.2 Regional meetings

The Working Group considered that regional meetings would be a useful means of bringing countries together in regional clusters to strengthen cooperation between the relevant stakeholders, to discuss progress on the implementation of the Action Plan at national level, to share good practice and to disseminate the mid-term results of the Action Plan. The meetings were also used for a wider consultation on future actions that would be needed to ensure that adult learning became an essential element of lifelong learning strategies. Thus four regional meetings were planned for October-November 2009[49].

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

- Strengthen intra-country, inter-country and regional co-operation on adult learning;

- Strengthen the links between the Lifelong Learning Programme, especially Grundtvig, and adult learning policy at European and national levels;

- Build confidence and possibilities to establish networks and partnerships;

- Review developments to date on the implementation of the Action Plan;

- Arrive at conclusions about the current situation of adult learning in the regions;

- Identify possible means of co-operation between adult learning actors and institutions in different countries in the regions;

- Develop recommendations for future actions in the field of adult learning.

The four regional meetings took place as follows:

- In Germany in October 2009, with eight Western European countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom);

- In Norway in October 2009, with eight Nordic and Baltic countries (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden);

- In Spain in October 2009, with seven Southern European countries (Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain and Turkey);

- In Slovenia in November 2009, with nine Central and Eastern European countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia).

Participants in the meetings comprised a similar range of stakeholders across all four meetings, but the balance of participants was reflective of the different governance approaches in different countries, for example, the role and importance of dialogue with the social partners. Participants included combinations of the representatives of: national ministries of education and, in a few cases, labour; national education agencies; qualifications and validation agencies; local education authorities; public adult education providers; popular universities; national non-governmental associations and organisations involved in adult learning; research institutes; trainers

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[49] See www.kslll.net for Final Report on the Regional Meetings.

of trainers/teachers; higher education bodies; a Business School; national ESF agencies; Grundtvig national agencies; employers/enterprises, national and European; trade unions; the EAEA (European Association for the Education of Adults) and Eurydice.

Of the four regional meetings, the countries represented at the meeting in Germany could probably be said to have the greatest diversity in terms of national/regional/local priorities, issues of concern and stages of development. However, even here there were areas of common interest and development such as the existence of national qualifications frameworks in a number of the countries. Similarly, validation of non-formal and informal learning has made advances in a number of the cluster countries. Providing opportunities for the achievement of basic competences and 'one-step up' was identified as a concern in the majority of the region.

It was clear from the outset that participants in the meeting in Norway had experience of working together on common issues and concerns in the region. A strong theme running through the meeting for the majority of the Nordic countries was how to motivate those who have dropped out to return to learning and, in particular, motivating the attainment of key competences. A key theme in the Baltic countries was the role of the European Social Fund (ESF) in maintaining adult learning services and the challenge of ensuring that structures and services were maintained in the post-ESF period.

The composition of the meeting in Spain was effective in that participating countries face similar challenges in terms of developing national, regional and local structures and systems for adult learning. Areas of common interest and concern included: gaining familiarity with the Action Plan; using the meeting to make contact with national co-stakeholders present at the meeting; inter-ministerial co-operation; putting in place an overall system of lifelong learning, including adult learning; putting in place systems/programmes to enable individuals to 'go one step-up' in terms of education and qualification levels; information and guidance; the role of adult learning in addressing current social issues; progressing the development of a national qualifications framework. However, there are also many country-specific differences in terms of stages of development and particular issues that require tailor-made responses. Overall, while there was quite a strong emphasis on learning for vocational purposes in many of the discussions during the meeting, the case for popular education was strongly pressed at the meeting in Spain in the context of the need to find a balance between general and vocational adult learning.

The composition of participants in the meeting in Slovenia again proved to be effective in that the participating countries face similar challenges and, to a large extent, share education cultures and traditions that resemble one another. There was only limited representation of the social partners and the non-formal sector.

While the stage of the development in relation to the priority areas of the Action Plan varied from country to country, areas of common concern and development included: the challenge of maintaining/increasing funding and moving from a project-based to a programme approach to the provision of adult education and training; the challenge of increasing participation in adult education and training through raising public awareness and increasing motivation; raising qualifications levels, including for specific groups such as older learners, migrants and socially vulnerable adults; the key role of guidance in supporting learners' access, learning and progression; the importance of language learning and mobility; the issue of quality at practitioner, provider and systems levels; the role of adult learning in addressing current social and economic issues; the need to plan for the post-ESF period so as to ensure the maintenance and on-going development of structures and systems for adult learning.

3.6.3 Peer learning activities

The peer learning activities (PLAs) adopted a thematic approach according to the priority actions of the Action Plan and some additional issues. Three PLAs took place under Priority Action 3 of the Action Plan, namely, "increase the possibilities for adults to achieve a qualification at least one level higher than before ('go one step-up')", especially low-skilled and low-qualified adults and those with difficulties achieving a full qualification. The first PLA in the series dealing with basic skills took place in Dublin in January 2008, the second in London in April 2009; the third in Oslo in March 2010.

A fourth related PLA, on Priority Action 4 of the Action Plan, namely, "speed up the process of assessment of skills and social competences and have them validated and recognised in terms of learning outcomes" which took place in Prague in June 2009 focused mainly on low-skilled and low-qualified individuals for whom the validation and/or the acquisition of basic skills is a critical issue[50].

Priority Action 5 of the Action Plan focuses on improving the monitoring of the adult learning sector and to this end a PLA took place in Slovakia in March 2009.

3.6.4 Workshops

A workshop on Priority Action 2 of the Action Plan namely, **'to improve quality in the adult learning sector'** which took place in June 2010 addressed the issue of quality in adult learning and explored the potential for cooperation with existing quality initiatives in VET and higher education. Further workshops were organised in 2010 on the themes of **financing adult learning** and **adult learning in higher education**. In June 2010 a workshop in Brussels continued the focus on **basic skills**[51].

3.6.5 Research studies

A range of research studies was proposed in the Action Plan to address the gaps already identified in terms of the information and knowledge on adult learning available at national and European levels.

Accordingly, in 2008 the European Commission launched a number of these studies on which the Working Group and the focus groups provided guidance and overarching conceptual advice:

- For the study on analysing trends, developments and reform processes in the Member States as they affected adult learning;

- On the study to develop standards for adult learning staff, based on the outcomes of the study on *Adult learning professions in Europe*[52];

- on 'going one-step up' study for the development and analysis of an inventory of approaches that enable low-skilled and low-qualified adults to 'go one step up' in their qualifications[53];

- On assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning for disadvantaged groups identified good practices in relation to the recognition of the competences of low-skilled and low-qualified adults in the context of the national qualification frameworks and EQF and helped organise a PLA in

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[50] See http://www.kslll.net/PeerLearningActivities/Default.cfm for full reports on the four PLAs.

[51] See www.kslll.net for Final Reports on the workshops.

[52] Research voor Beleid (2008) *ALPINE – Adult Learning Professions in Europe, A study of the current situation, trends and issues.* http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/adultprofreport_en.pdf

[53] Enabling *the low-skilled to take their qualifications "One Step Up", learning. Final Report, Key Factor Analysis* and *Final Recommendations* http://ec.europa.eu/education/moreinformation/moreinformation139_en.htm.

cooperation with the members of the Learning Outcomes Group, a sub-group of the EQF Advisory Group;

- On the monitoring of the adult learning sector contributed to the development of a study to produce a glossary of agreed definitions and an agreed set of five core data to be used for monitoring.

4 THEMES AND TOPICS 2007 – 2010

In the period 2007 – 2010 the themes and topics addressed by the Working Group arose primarily from the five priority actions of the Action Plan on adult learning. In 2010 two additional themes, namely, financing adult learning and adult learning in higher education were explored through workshops.

4.1 Priority Action 1 - Analysing the effect of reforms in all sectors of education and training on adult learning

Priority Action 1 of the Action Plan called for an analysis of "the effects of reforms in all sectors of education and training on adult learning", for example the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the national qualifications frameworks. The development of national frameworks is considered the key instrument for implementing EQF. Most of the evolving NQFs bridge the different educational sectors, reinforce lifelong learning strategies and thus provide a mapping of all qualifications that exist at national level.

Countries are at different stages of developing and implementing NQFs. Some countries are designing NQFs. Other countries are consulting stakeholders and testing their NQFs or have formally adopted their frameworks. Yet others have been working on NQFs for the last decade and implemented their frameworks. NQFs in Ireland, Malta and the United Kingdom are already referenced to the EQF. These developments have wide significance for the adult learning sector.

Summary of studies on the impact of reforms

Two studies were commissioned by the European Commission as part of the 'roadmap' of the Working Group in relation to Priority Action 1 of the Action Plan. The first was the 2008 study to develop a model to measure the impact of reforms[54]. The second was the actual analysis of the impact of reforms in 31 countries carried out in 2009 and 2010[55].

The first study *Assessment of the impact of ongoing reforms in education and training on adult learning* explored the methodological aspects of assessing impacts of education and training as well as related reforms on adult learning; developed guidelines for conducting such impact assessments and exemplified their application through two case studies: *The establishment of labour market training and a counselling system in Lithuania* (1992-1997) and *The Adult Education Initiative in Sweden (1997-2002).*

While the econometrical analysis attempted by the authors was hampered by lack of adequate data, nevertheless, the case study method proved useful in identifying and analysing the impacts of reform. In the case of Sweden the fact that data collection for monitoring and evaluation of reform was integrated into the reform process

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[54] Public Policy and Management Institute (2010) *Assessment of the impact of ongoing reforms in education and training on adult learning*. Final Report. – http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/2010/reforms.pdf

[55] Research voor Beleid (2010) *Impact of ongoing reforms in education and training on the adult learning sector*. Final Report.

created a wealth of information, which could be used in assessing the ultimate impacts of the reform and serve as a good practice example for national reforms. In Lithuania where the reformers were preoccupied with kick-starting a vital element of any modern welfare state – labour market training and a counselling system - resources were scarce and only very basic data were collected during and after the reform.

Findings of the first study

The report provides the results of an attempt to conduct a quantitative analysis on which characteristics embedded in policies explain performance in terms of participation of adults in learning, educational attainment and several other dimensions. While the results of analysis are subject to a number of important limitations, they nevertheless suggest some interesting conclusions and once more underline the complexity of factors influencing adult learning and the challenges that lie ahead for future inquiries in this field.

The following policy variables of the education system which influence adult learning in the countries studied were identified: stratification (i.e. numbers and types of transitions available to the next schooling level); vocational specificity; flexibility in provision of learning services; school autonomy and spending on education. The reforms on these policy characteristics would be likely to have important influences on adult learning. Statistical analysis revealed that adult participation in formal and non-formal education and training is best explained by models involving labour market policies and even more so by models involving a large set of both education, labour market and health policies and context variables.

There are two success factors which are particularly important for reforms, namely: a) strong and active political leadership and explicit national targets; b) sufficient public funding which increases 'ownership' of the results among relevant stakeholders. Other success factors seem to depend on the country development level.

The study showed that although the EU institutions provided a wealth of guidance on how to assess the impacts of EU financing instruments, guidance on how to assess public policy and management reforms, which often go above or beyond financing interventions, has been lacking. Ideally, impact assessment plans have to be integrated into reform programmes. Absence of prior planning leads to a second or third best quality of evidence which is not as useful and compelling as it could be.

If better use is to be made of the Open Method of Coordination, more such impact assessment of initiatives needs to be carried out so that peer learning and exchange are based on practices the quality of which has been proven and evaluated. EU-level efforts are unable to produce the sufficiently detailed and reliable evidence which is needed. They cannot generate reliable evidence on which national reform measures work best, what problems they are able to solve and under what circumstances. And even more importantly - no matter how sophisticated EU-level monitoring and evaluation becomes, in the foreseeable future it will only be able to capture very basic policy design characteristics and their outcomes at Member State level. Only an in-depth policy analysis at that level could provide for country-to-country experience-sharing based on hard evidence.

Assessments of impacts of education and training reforms on adult learning are scarce. More regular impact assessments of national reforms and their results shared with other interested Member States would enable much faster policy learning. Furthermore, the monitoring and evaluation of EU structural funds should give due attention to assessing the impacts of the education and training reforms they funded and especially the impacts of these reforms on adult learning.

In the Working Group, the representatives of Sweden and Lithuania considered the case studies useful in themselves. For Lithuania the analysis of their reform was timely as the system is about to be reformed again. Members of the Working Group were of the opinion that future studies of this nature should reflect more future work and the needs of the Working Group and have related workshops for the dissemination of findings.

The second study, *Reforms and progress in adult learning, Phase II*, which followed on from the above study was also presented in outline at the Working Group meeting of June 2010. The aim of the study carried out 2009-2010 was to provide a thorough analysis of ongoing developments, reforms and modernisation in the adult learning sector in the 31 countries, three years after the adoption of the Action Plan. The study also considered further possible action beyond 2010 in accordance with *ET2020* and in the context of *Europe 2020.* The specific focus of the study was the question of the articulation between the demand for and supply of, adult learning and the ways in which policies seek to improve this articulation.

Findings of the second study

In general terms the second study found that comparative data on policy and governance in education and training are scarce and therefore opportunities for EU-level comparative analysis are limited. Furthermore, the impact of reforms is not often studied and if it is studied, a variety of methodological approaches is deployed and the quality of delivery differs. In addition, it is scarcely possible to identify the impact of reforms by using national statistics on adult leaning participation, since the initiative often captures a small part of all activities within the adult learning sector. Moreover, many strategies use a large variety of instruments that are not directly aimed at increasing participation, such as initiatives in the field of quality improvement, resulting in problems for researchers in defining comparable results and impact indicators. Finally, the situation varies greatly from country to country; thus timing and the nature of reforms vary to a great extent. Therefore the lessons learned and results cannot be easily extrapolated to other contexts, and should therefore be carefully studied in terms of transferability.

The study identified many barriers to participation at country level, ranging from institutional, situational and dispositional barriers. Information gathered at country level indicates that at a policy level countries mostly refer to institutional and situational barriers, often considered as two sides of the same coin. The dispositional barriers and opportunities are mentioned to a lesser extent, but are not considered to be of less importance.

A wide range of contextual factors for stimulating the adult learning sector exist at country level, including historical, political and economic factors. The implementation of strategies for adult learning is dependent to a large degree on the availability of effective structures and financial resources. With regard to the financial framework of public, private and individual investments in adult learning, in general, and with few exceptions, the financial situation is precarious across Europe and the ongoing economic crisis has worsened the situation. The European Social Fund is considered a very important pillar on which adult learning infrastructures depend, especially in the new Member States. The same is true of the Lifelong Learning Programme (including the Grundtvig programme). In most countries, the costs of education and training are to a large degree borne either by employers and/or by individual learners.

The study presents a wide variety of mobilisation instruments deployed by countries to increase the participation of adults in learning or to mobilise specific target groups into adult learning including: information and guidance; flexible learning opportunities; quality assurance and management; outreach to specific target groups and community-based learning environments; transparency of provision, quality of provision, possibilities for validation of prior learning, financial instruments including educational vouchers and educational leave.

A set of overarching recommendations (with several sub-recommendations) for the development of the adult learning sector is proposed to the European Commission and national authorities as follows:

- Increase attention to adult learning within all educational sectors (vocational education and training, higher education, primary and secondary education)
- Identify and communicate more clearly the extrinsic values of adult learning and present this as an argument for stronger political support and for increasing funding for adult learning policies and practices
- Assure the development of an (adult) learning culture in countries and develop effective mobilisation strategies
- Keep adult learning on both national and European policy agenda, create a legal basis for further cooperation and use the Lifelong Learning Programme and the ESF to further develop the adult learning sector
- Improve the working methods for adult learning within the OMC[56].

4.2 Priority Action 2 - Improving the quality of provision in the adult learning sector

Priority Action 2 of the Action Plan focused on improving "the quality of provision in the adult learning sector". To this end, a competence profile for adult learning professionals[57] was developed in 2009 and workshop on quality in adult learning was organised in 2010.

In the background reports for the regional meetings in October and November 2009[58] the 31 countries represented on the Working Group reported the following range of developments in relation to quality in adult learning in their respective countries:

- Ensuring the quality of adult learning staff through:

  - development of definitions, legislation & regulations

  - provision of undergraduate courses for adult learning personnel

  - development of competence profiles

  - provision of continuing professional development

  - improving the attractiveness of working in the sector;

- Quality assurance systems and processes - in development or well-advanced

- Quality assessment by national agency/centres of expertise;

- Accreditation of providers.

The report on national developments in adult learning will expand on the above developments for 2010.

The Action Plan considered adult learning professionals to be the key determinants of quality in adult learning provision and, accordingly, a study on key competences for adult learning staff was launched as a follow-on to the ALPINE (Adult Learning Professions in Europe) study[59]. The resultant competence profile is an overarching profile of competences with layers of contexts that embrace adult learning in all its

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[56] Open Method of Co-ordination

[57] Research voor Beleid (2008) *ALPINE – Adult Learning Professions in Europe, A study of the current situation, trends and issues.* http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/adultprofreport_en.pdf

[58] See www.kslll.net for the Final Report on the Regional Meetings 2009.

[59] Research voor Beleid (2008) *ALPINE – Adult Learning Professions in Europe, A study of the current situation, trends and issues.* http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/adultprofreport_en.pdf

forms and settings. Since roles in the sector are extremely diverse, the competences are based on six key activities – teaching; management; guidance and counselling; programme planning; media; administrative support – rather than being located in specific roles, jobs or individuals.

The competence profile was well-received at the regional meetings (October – November 2009). But it was also suggested that a competence profile that will be adapted on Member State level should be taken into account competence profiles that already exist. So the competence profile that has been developed could be a base to work on a common and agreed competence profile.

Findings of the workshop on quality in adult learning

In June 2010 the workshop on quality in adult l earning explored the potential for cooperation between existing EU-level and country-level developments in relation to quality in vocational education and training (VET), in higher education (HE) and in adult learning.

Divergence of opinion among participants was most in evidence in the discussions on possible structures for quality assurance in adult learning. On the one hand, it was considered that EQAVET (for VET) and the ESGs (European Standards and Guidelines for HE[60]) provide a good basis for the development of a quality assurance framework for lifelong learning, including adult learning. This would involve moving beyond a sectoral model of quality assurance to an inclusive, integrated learner-focused model of quality assurance for all learning to facilitate the smooth mobility of individuals between levels and sectors.

On the other hand, there was the opinion that the quality assurance of adult learning should be considered a domain in its own right and that while EQAVET and quality in HE should be connected and linked with this effort they should not dominate or incorporate it.

A third opinion considered that there should be common objectives for a European framework for quality in lifelong learning which would cover transversal quality issues and some common objectives as well as specific objectives for each sector.

All participants agreed that dialogue between key stakeholders at European and national levels, including the social partners, practitioners and learners, is vital to achieving a quality assurance system that is a mix of bottom-up and top-down approaches..

It would be important to develop indicators that demonstrate what is happening in adult education in local, social, regional and national contexts and that support integration across education and training sectors and measures. Indicators might cover: the education profile of the population; participation in lifelong learning; participation of vulnerable groups; the relationship of the adult learning system to local/regional/national environments; the share of accredited providers; the continuing professional development of adult learning personnel; progression to employment/self-employment; citizenship outcomes. Consideration should be given to an indicator for the participation in lifelong learning of low-skilled and low-qualified adults who have not achieved Level 3 EQF qualifications. In addition, since not everybody participates in adult education to find employment, there needs to be an indicator to reflect other outcomes.

Participants were of the view that a key role for the European Commission would be to build on the workshop outcomes by taking forward the work on quality assurance in

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[60] European Standards and Guidelines http://www.eqar.eu/application/requirements/european-standards-and-guidelines.html

adult learning at European level. The funding and reach of the Grundtvig programme would have a role to play in this regard.

Overall, the findings of the workshop set out a clear agenda in relation to quality assurance in adult learning for the post-2010 period.

4.3   Priority Action 3 – Increase the possibilities for adults to achieve a qualification at least one level higher than before ('go one step-up')

Priority Action 3 of the Action Plan sought to "increase the possibilities for adults to achieve a qualification at least one level higher than before ('go one step-up')". This priority focuses especially on the lower qualified and those with difficulties achieving a full qualification. The May 2008 Council Conclusions on adult learning recognised the need to raise the skills levels of a significant number of low-skilled workers with a view to enabling all citizens to adapt to technological change and future skills needs[61].

In the background reports for the regional meetings (October and November 2009) the 31 countries of the Working Group reported the following range of developments to promote 'one step-up' for low-skilled and low-qualified individuals:

- Legislation on key competences;

- Information campaigns/ guidance services;

- Funding and programmes of key competences;

- Flexible and/or individualised pathways;

- Key competences for migrant/bilingual adults;

A good deal of work on Priority Action 3 took place in the period 2008 – 2010, including a series of PLAs (Dublin 2008; London 2009; Prague 2009; Oslo 2010), a workshop (Brussels 2010), a study and the production of the *Basic Skills: Policy and Practice Guidelines* based on the findings of the PLAs, the workshop and the study. These activities have put adult basic skills firmly on the EU agenda and enabled national and European-level stakeholders to advance their thinking, understanding and competence in relation to adult basic skills policy and provision.

The discussions on the PLAs were wide-ranging and recommendations to policy-makers from the Dublin (D), Prague (P), London (L) and Oslo (O) PLAs related to the need to:

- Clarify terminology and concepts (D; L);

- Generate reliable base-line information (D; L; P);

- Explore the role of a statutory right to primary and secondary education for adults in increasing participation in adult learning (O);

- Integrate literacy policies into lifelong learning policies (D);

- Develop/implement a national action plan for literacy and/or basic skills (D; L; O);

- Involve all stakeholders in planning/co-financing adult basic skills provision (D; L);

- Raise participation rates (D) and explore the role of national/regional targets (L);

- Generate a 'data service' culture of gathering quantitative and qualitative data;

- Launch and support parallel research programmes as part of basic skills initiatives to inform developments (L; P; O) and to demonstrate the wider benefits of basic skills acquisition for the economy and society (D; L);

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[61]   Council   Conclusions   of   22   May   2008   on   adult   learning   http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:140:0010:0013:EN:PDF

Recommendations to providers and practitioners from the Dublin (D), Prague (P), London (L) and Oslo (O) PLAs related to the need to:

- Engage in active outreach to attract low-skilled individuals (D; L; P; O);

- Integrate guidance into all stages of the individual's learning journey (D; L; P; O);

- Include an option for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in basic skills provision (P);

- Ensure skilled staff to teach basic skills (D; L; P; O);

- Develop learner-centred learning programmes (D; L; O) and adopt an integrated approach to teaching basic skills within a key competences framework;

- Address numeracy and mathematics learning specifically (O);

- Embed basic skills/core competences in vocational courses to improve 'persistence' (L; O);

- Provide adults with the option of gaining appropriate qualifications (D; L);

- Establish a quality assurance system for basic skills provision (L; P; O).

The analytical report *Enabling the low-skilled to take their qualifications 'one step-up'* presented an analysis of detailed empirical data on 64 good practices from 33 European countries along with the case studies of 14 of the identified practices which were presented in the *European Inventory of good outreach practices*[62]. The report makes the point that the challenge of low-skilled individuals exists to varying degrees in all countries and the inventory of approaches demonstrates that effective solutions exist in the majority of countries, but frequently with a limited scope and for specific target groups only[63].

On the basis of an analysis of these effective solutions, recommendations were made to key stakeholders in relation to five key factors for successful basic skills provision, namely: the political/institutional framework; integrative strategies approach; structural and organisational components; didactical design; evaluation and monitoring.

The recommendations emphasise the need to: get a more accurate profile of low-skilled individuals in Europe by region and locality, using the Open Method of Co-ordination. The report also recommends that the challenge of upskilling the low qualified should be a theme running through many areas of the Commission's work.

When the report was presented to the workshop on Basic Skills in Brussels (June 2010) it was recommended that its many policy and practice findings and recommendations be translated into a set of concrete guidelines. In the post-2010 period the distribution and application of the resultant guidelines as appropriate to the situation in the individual Member States will be a challenge. This activity could gain critical support from the European Basic Skills Network headed up by Norway.

Unlike the previous activities on Priority Action 3 which mainly concentrated on the exchange of good practices in the non-vocational sector, the June 2010 workshop on basic skills focused on how employers might enable low-skilled individuals to take their qualifications "one step-up" at the workplace, as well as how to bridge the vocational and the non-vocational sectors to address this challenge.

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[62] *Enabling the low-skilled to take their qualifications "One Step Up", Final Report, Key Factor Analysis and Final Recommendations.* Annex 2: Inventory of Good Outreach Practices. http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/moreinformation139_en.htm.

[63] *Enabling the low-skilled to take their qualifications "One Step Up", Final Report, Key Factor Analysis and Final Recommendations.* p. 7 http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-nformation/moreinformation139_en.htm.

4.4   Priority Action 4 - Speed up the process of assessment of skills and social competences and have them validated and recognised in terms of learning outcomes

Priority Action 4 of the Action Plan sought to "speed up the process of assessment of skills and social competences and have them validated and recognised in terms of learning outcomes".

Validation is on the agenda for the coming years in the majority of the 31 countries in the Working Grout. The shift to learning outcomes and the implementation of NQFs is supporting these developments. Validation is seen as a way to make institutions and systems more flexible by broadening the skills and competences that qualifications systems recognise. It is also seen as a way to help groups with particular needs, such as low-qualified individuals, migrants and early school leavers[64].

A PLA on validation which took place in Prague in June 2009 showed that countries are at different stages in the development of policies and practices for validation. The PLA revealed[65] that many of the 31 countries participating in the Action Plan process still need national/regional/local consensus on validation principles; objectives; resources; target groups; status, standards and quality assurance. There is a need for better quantitative and qualitative information on the entire validation process in the majority of countries.

Participants in the PLA concluded that:

- Partnerships of stakeholders at all levels and sectors are a key requirement for the development of an effective validation system and the involvement of the social partners is critical;

- The importance of active approaches to engage potential participants, especially low-skilled individuals, in the validation process cannot be over-stated;

- Guidance and support services must be integral to any validation system;

- In order to achieve broad acceptance of validation as a *bona fide* pathway to qualifications, it is important to engage the interest and participation of all sections of the population;

- Ongoing, systematic monitoring and measuring of validation, including cost/benefit analyses, are essential.

The *Inventory of Validation Policy and Practice in Europe[66]* was updated in 2010 and the *European Guidelines on Validation[67]* is being updated in 2010-2011. These two instruments will be closely linked to each other.

Validation as a process is at a cross-roads in some countries. In the post-2010 period policies, systems and practices need to be consolidated so that:

- Arrangements for validation are mainstreamed in the sense that they become fully integrated parts of national qualifications systems or frameworks;

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[64] *Cedefop (2010) A bridge to the future European policy for vocational education and training 2002-10* http://cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/3058_en.pdf

[65] See www.kslll.net for the Final Report on the PLA .

[66] Cedefop (2010) European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning (not available on line yet).

[67] Cedefop (2009) European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning. http://www2.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/information_resources/europeaninventory/

- Validation reaches a critical mass and sustainable, cost-effective validation systems are put in place;

- Validation arrangements are subject to systematic quality assurance;

- Validation personnel are up-skilled to ensure quality systems of validation;

- Cost efficient methods of validation in enterprises and sectors are developed.

The European Commission carried out a public consultation on validation (November 2010 – January 2011) with a view to informing the Recommendation on validation that it is preparing for adoption in 2011.

4.5 Priority Action 5 - Improve the monitoring of the adult learning sector

Challenges to the monitoring of the adult learning sector abound including: the diversity of the sector; the different potential sources of data; the fact that data collected supply mainly basic information only; the absence of national data chains; the weak analysis/use of national/regional data; the need to harmonise terminology[68]. At European level data on adult learning are limited. While the recent Adult Education Survey[69] offers a comprehensive picture the reference period varies from country to country and the intention is that the study will be carried only every 5 years.

Priority Action 5 of the Action Plan sought to "improve the monitoring of the adult learning sector". The Action Plan pointed to the urgent need for a common language to support communication and address the lack of comparable data in the sector.

A PLA on monitoring took place in Bratislava in March 2009. Because countries are at quite different stages in terms of the development of national monitoring systems and strategies for adult learning, the extent to which the conclusions arrived at and set out below referred to individual countries depended on the extent of the development of their systems, strategies and practices for adult learning monitoring.

Participants in the PLA concluded that failure to demonstrate the benefits of adult learning is a major weakness in the sector. There is a critical need for agreement on adult learning terminology as terminology is not fixed even *within* countries. The development of a specific resourced national action plan for the adult learning monitoring is vital. There is a critical need for data to underpin policy and practice in adult learning.

Participants believed that there is a need to address the fact that existing/emerging instruments all survey/will survey different elements/aspects of adult learning with different ages, reference periods and respondents.

They called on the European Commission to support the generation of a sense of urgency in Member States to address the challenges of monitoring and to develop guidelines to support monitoring at all levels. They also considered that there should be a thematic focus on adult learning monitoring within the Grundtvig programme.

Study on European adult learning terminology and data

The results of the study *European Terminology in Adult Learning for a common language, a common understanding and monitoring of the sector*[70] were presented to the Working Group meeting in June 2010. The study had five objectives:

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[68] See Final Report on the PLA on monitoring, Bratislava, March 2009 at www.kslll.net.

[69] http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-SF-09-044/EN/KS-SF-09-044-EN.PDF

[70] National Research and Development Centre (2010) *Final Report for: Study on* European *Terminology in Adult Learning for a common language, a common understanding and monitoring of the sector*. http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/2010/adultreport_en.pdf

- To identify the main fields of analysis in the adult learning sector and propose a minimum set of analyses needed for each country to make comparisons at European level;

- To establish a European glossary of agreed terminologies used in the adult learning sector Europe-wide; a methodology for the glossary's actualisation and dissemination, including plans for updating the glossary on a regular basis;

- To explore the feasibility of developing, on the basis of agreed definitions and terminology, a set of core data for monitoring the adult learning sector;

- To propose this set of core data for analysing/monitoring the adult learning sector and link it to Council Conclusions on Indicators and Benchmarks of May 2007;

- To propose a coherent new set of indicators and benchmarks to complete the existing 2005 indicators and benchmarks.

The study which explored adult learning data and terminology in the 27 EU Member States, EFTA/EEA countries (Norway, Liechtenstein), and the four candidate countries (Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland and Turkey) revealed that while some counties collect few or no data beyond those required at European level others have sophisticated administrative and survey data systems. Because adult learning differs from country to country on many dimensions the number of fields in which comparable data might be achieved is limited. Nonetheless, existing data sources provide examples of good practice and illustrate how progress towards achieving the objective of comparable data might be made. Data on the inputs and, to a lesser extent, the processes of adult learning – particularly participation in formal learning and training at work – were found to be the most sufficient at both the European and country levels. In general, data relating to the outcomes of adult learning were considered insufficient for monitoring purposes.

The study found that data on adult learning could be classified into six dimensions in which measuring and monitoring might take place. Within these six dimensions, 24 main fields of analysis, and 17 subfields of analysis, were identified.

The study pointed out that in a number of fields in adult learning, sufficient baseline data have not yet been gathered and in these fields the lack of clarity in definitions and terminology is particularly apparent. Thus, it was recommended that a survey of national/regional data sources for adult learning, based on that developed for this study, should be repeated on a regular (biennial) basis, with the results used to map the developing data landscape.

The study recommended that four fields of analysis in adult learning should be prioritised in the collection of core data: a) adult skills; b) participation in adult learning; c) professional development of teachers; d) financing of adult learning

The authors were of the opinion that the EU is not yet at the stage where it is possible to propose a coherent set of indicators, based on comparable data, which can cover the whole of the adult learning system. For fields of adult learning outside the core areas for data collection listed above, it was aimed to identify fields in which countries could prioritise the collection of comparable data to enable indicators to be developed in the mid- to long-term and also to indicate areas which are not a priority or where substantial work would be required to develop indicators in the future.

Based on existing glossaries on education and training in Europe (e.g. Cedefop's terminology of European education and training policy[71]), two glossaries of key adult learning terminology[72] were also produced by the study.

With regard to the recommended core data for the sector, the Working Group at its meeting of June 2010 noted that quality did not feature apart from quality of staff. Concerns included: the need to avoid 're-inventing the wheel' when it comes to instruments; the overload involved in gathering data at national level; the challenge of encouraging providers to use data; the number of new data suggested and their cost implications. The Commission considered that it should communicate the results to the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks and Eurostat and to take discussions forward with them.

4.6   Other activities under the Action Plan process

4.6.1   *Adult learning in higher education*
The Action Plan on adult learning emphasised that a wide range of interconnected measures is needed to overcome the multi-dimensional barriers to participation and that these include widening access to higher education in order to facilitate a "one level higher" qualification.

Accordingly, a workshop on higher education (HE) and adult learning which took place in Brussels in September 2010 covered a range of topics related to the general context, the role of higher education institutions (HEIs) on the provision of adult learning and in preparing adult educators, as well as the wider relationship between universities, adult learning and enterprises.

The diversity and richness of the sector was underlined. There is a marked diversity of students (full-time, part-time, with and without previous experience of HE, different care responsibilities, different degrees of professional experience); providers (elite institutions, teaching universities, distance learning universities); and provision (continuing professional development, bespoke training, 'regular' courses).

The volume of adult learning in HE varies by country, as does – more specifically - the proportion of adult learners in 'regular' HE programmes. What is clear is that adult learners are a 'significant minority' in HE, and one that is expanding. Moreover, many of those adults who enter HE do so as 'one step-up' in their education, highlighting the importance of the role of HEIs in upskilling adults. In some countries the proportion of adults over 30 years of age of the total of new entrants into HE surpasses 15%, yet the political visibility of such contribution by adults to HE is not always sufficiently recognised. In general in well-established universities adult education has only a supplementary role, whereas for younger institutions adult learning is more important.

It was suggested that meeting the needs of adult learners entails, amongst other aspects, further flexibilisation of the HEI offer; increased use of modularisation; validation of non-formal and informal learning for admissions and exemptions; further work on guidance and counselling; deeper cooperation with industry, and a change in HEIs' view of their role to seeing adults as 'core clients'.

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[71] Cedefop (2008): *Terminology of European education and training policy. A selection of 100 key terms.* http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/4064_en.pdf

[72]   Brooks, G & Burton, M. (2010) *European adult learning glossary, Level 1*. National Research and Development Centre, Institute of Education, University of London. http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/2010/adultglossary1_en.pdf; National Research and Development Centre (2010) *European adult learning glossary, Level 2*. Institute of Education, University of London http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/2010/adultglossary2_en.pdf

Workshop participants identified a number of priority areas for further work/ policy action including the need to/for:

- better mapping of the volume of participation of adults in non-regular HE courses (e.g. in relation to professional development). Until this volume is quantified, it will not be possible to quantify the contribution of adult education to HEIs' funding;

- better knowledge regarding the returns of adult participation in HE;

- decide whether provision for adults would be better placed in specific institutes for lifelong learning within universities, or 'mainstreamed' with the 'regular' offer;

- disseminate 'good practice' in the provision of HE to adults;

- clarify the range of support systems that enable adult participation in HE;

- the adoption of more standard systems of validation in HEIs;

- upskill HE staff to teach adults.

- the provision of HE programmes for adult educators, accompanied by greater regulatory requirements for entry into that profession.

4.6.2   *Financing adult learning*

The Action Plan on adult learning emphasised that a wide range of interconnected measures is needed to overcome the multi-dimensional barriers to participation including putting in place demand-driven financial mechanisms (such as individual learning accounts, tax measures and loans provided either publicly or through a public guarantee mechanism) to address financial constraints and to motivate learning on a full-time or part-time basis; encouraging individuals to invest in their own learning, both for reasons of personal fulfillment and employability.

It was in this context that a workshop on financing adult learning took[73] was organised in Brussels in October 2010 with approximately 40 participants. Schemes for financing adult learning are heterogeneous in Europe. Vouchers and Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs) are the most frequent approaches but they are limited in scope in terms of money and reach. Loans are mainly used for VET and HE.

The first results of the German (federal) voucher system introduced in late 2008 indicate that very little use was made of the system in Year 1 but use increased strongly in Year 2 on foot of a doubling of the maximum support available and an increased income threshold for eligibility for support. However, results do not suggest that major target groups were reached proportionately. In addition, the cost of administration is considered to be too high.

The question of the extent to which loans and particularly micro-credit approaches could be used to fund adult learning and possibly combined with saving account models was discussed. Some argue that loans are appropriate to ensure people's preparedness and responsibility for their own education; others argue that it is difficult to apply them to basic education. This suggests distinguishing between target groups and "levels" of adult education. The same may apply to other funding instruments, which again may point to the need on differentiated analyses, covering also intended effects and complementary policy measures, such as, for example, labour market and/or competition policies

Experience suggests that saving accounts are not promising, though building an 'asset basis' to finance adult learning may be an important corner stone of future funding approaches.

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[73]   For Final Report see www.kslll.net

All the different tools of financing adult learning are complementary and the Workshop came to the conclusion that it would be difficult to identify the "best" or the most effective one. Efficient coordination of the instruments as well as better targeting are the most crucial challenges for the future. Moreover, national strategic frameworks are needed for efficient use of European Funds and their use should be better monitored at European level through the creation of efficient data bases.

The issue of the division of financing responsibilities between the state, the institutions and other stakeholders, including employers, was discussed. The interests of different stakeholders diverge strongly and different countries apply different approaches. While some countries are more employment-oriented and demand-driven others have a well-established supply-driven approach. The role of government varies accordingly. Some stakeholders demand permanent structures, supported by appropriate and stable financing mechanisms but others suggest a more incentivising role for government, where suppliers are obliged to respond to market needs. However, both sides of the debate suggest a stronger focus on low-income and other disadvantaged groups.

On the pros and cons of demand-side and supply-side mechanisms, it was considered that the devolution of supply could be initiated through demand-led financing instruments. The issue of ensuring quality and value for money was raised n this regard.

The availability of adult learning data, especially non-vocational adult learning, is limited. This is also true of overviews of financing structures at systems level, again particularly for non-vocational adult learning. Overviews to date tend to focus on single instruments and refer by and large to vocational adult learning. Returns to adult learning are under-researched and the returns to adult education should be reviewed taking into account the different target groups. A central statement was, that "the benefits accrue, but evidence is anecdotal only". The same applies to the benefits of information, advice and guidance (IAG). An inventory of good practice which includes information on the framework conditions of the instruments could help in this regard.

The Workshop made a number of recommendations for future action on the financing of adult learning. It was considered that better use needs to be made of existing funding and the social partners should be involved at all levels in relation to financing adult learning from planning to implementation and evaluation. Moreover, there should be a shift in focus from the employer's perspective to that of the employee and better targeting arrangements should be found to reach disadvantaged groups. In this regard, the role involvement of local communities and additional supports such as guidance, subsidised/free transport, childcare and learning materials seem to be crucial. Research is required to evaluate the effectiveness of the wide range of approaches to financing adult learning and to provide direction and guidelines on the most effective ways to ensure equitable access for all adults, especially the most disadvantaged financially, socially and educationally.

5 ACHIEVEMENTS AND CONCLUSIONS OF THE ACTION PLAN

In December 2010 the Action Plan on adult learning (2007-2010) came to the end of its lifecycle. A range of achievements and conclusions emerged from the Action Plan 'process' in the period 2007 – 2010, including through the studies, the PLAs, the regional meetings, the workshops, the deliberations of the Working Group and the focus groups and, critically, developments in adult learning at national level.

5.1   The achievements of the Action Plan

The achievements of the cooperation initiated under the Action Plan 2007 – 2010 in relation to the priority actions of the Action Plan and other thematic areas addressed through the Action Plan 'process' are set out below.

5.1.1   General achievements at European and national levels

The activities of the Working Group in the period 2008-2010 addressed a wide range of adult learning issues at European and national levels. The activities served to foreground adult learning policy and practice at both levels. The deliberations of the Working Group, the research studies and the sharing of experiences facilitated by the regional meetings, the PLAs and the workshops achieved significant outcomes in terms of consensus building, advances in thinking and practice in the field of adult learning, and sharing of policy and practice experience between countries.

Strong leadership and support from the European Commission have generated critical incentives for successful implementation of the Action Plan in participating countries. Impact at national level depended on the stage of development of adult learning in the country. A number of countries indicated specific impacts of the Action Plan. It was also considered that the Action Plan and the Working Group had highlighted the essential contribution of adult learning to employability and mobility in a modern labour market and to social inclusion. Adult Learning gained the recognition it deserved mainly in terms of visibility, policy prioritisation and resources and the country in question began to be more pro-active on the adult learning agenda which led to a decision to participate in the PIAAC[74] survey. As a result of the Action Plan countries in general recognised that they can no longer afford to be without an efficient adult learning system. In one country the Action Plan and work of the Working Group the education ministry had support the Lifelong Learning and Lifelong Guidance Strategy which was the first document of its kind in the country. An impact of this strategy was that the development of key competences by adults was facilitated.

The Action Plan was considered / or has a different impact on National Strategies for adult learning: Some indicated 'the driving force' behind the development of the recent National Plan for adult learning or considered the Action Plan as a driver to 'backdrop' to adult learning developments or as a reference framework to develop national strategies for adult learning.

5.1.2   Achievements in relation to the priority actions

Achievements under the priority actions comprised advances in thinking and understanding on the specific issues as a result of the studies undertaken and extensive sharing of experience through PLAs and workshops. Such activities also contributed to identifying good practice and agendas for future developments in relation to the priority actions and other areas. Achievements also lay in developments in relation to priority action themes at national level.

Under **Priority Action 1** the first study[75] commissioned showed the vital importance of building in monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment at the planning stage of an initiative/measure so as to generate data to feed into evidence-based policy-making and increase the visibility of adult education and training initiatives. Only an

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[74] OECD (2010) Programme for the international assessment of adult competences.
http://www.oecd.org/document/35/0,3343,en_2649_39263238_40277475_1_1_1_1,00.html

[75] Public Policy and Management Institute (2010) *Assessment of the impact of ongoing reforms in education and training on adult learning*. Final Report.   –   http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/2010/reforms.pdf

in-depth policy analysis at that level can provide for country-to-country experience-sharing based on hard evidence.

The second study commissioned identified how the key dimensions of an overall adult education and training system contribute to increasing the quantity and quality of adult learning. The study found that a major challenge is the maximisation of achievement on these dimensions so as to close the gap between countries in terms of participation in adult learning and the quality of the outcomes of learning.

The development of EQF and the related national qualifications frameworks and systems is having an impact on adult learning in participating countries, including basic skills provision in a small number of countries. Most of the evolving NQFs bridge the different educational sectors, reinforce lifelong learning strategies and thus provide a mapping of all qualifications that exist at national level. Countries are at different stages of developing and implementing NQFs. Some are at the design stage; others are consulting stakeholders and testing their NQFs; others have formally adopted their frameworks; a small group which have been working on NQFs for the last decade, have implemented their frameworks and at least two frameworks are .already referenced to the EQF. These developments have wide positive significance for the adult learning sector.

Under **Priority Action 2** the study on adult learning professionals in Europe[76] presented a picture of the professional development (initial and continuing) of adult learning staff, the terms and conditions of their employment; their roles and their status across Europe. The initial and continuing professional development of adult learning personnel is on the agenda in the majority of participating countries and many are putting in place systems and practices to address the issue. In this regard, the competence profile produced in the follow-up study offers stakeholders a broad framework to develop and use as their contexts require and/or demand.

Grundtvig activities have made a strong contribution to the quality of adult learning in participating countries. Grundtvig has made a strong contribution to the quality of provision through 'grass-roots' level cooperation, the development of teaching and learning methods and materials and the provision of in-service training courses for adult learning personnel**.** The Grundtvig mobility grants enable some 2,000 adult education staff to participate annually in an in-service training course or a less formal kind of training activity, such as a study visit, job shadowing, work experience or attending a conference or seminar in another European country. In addition to improving the quality of adult learning through multilateral collaboration and in-service training courses, at least 23 Grundtvig learning partnerships/multilateral projects have focused directly on quality assurance at practitioner and provider levels in adult learning[77].

The workshop on quality in adult learning in June 2010 provided a key first step towards the development of an overarching framework for quality in adult learning in Europe. The workshop pointed to the need for collaboration with the VET and higher education sectors which have already spent over ten years working on the development of quality approaches in their sectors. At national level, a number of countries are already endeavouring to assure the quality of providers through accreditation approaches.

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[76] Research voor Beleid (2008) *ALPINE – Adult Learning Professions in Europe, A study of the current situation, trends and issues.* http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/adultprofreport_en.pdf

[77] Background Report for the *Grundtvig Tenth Anniversary Conference: European Cooperation in Adult Learning – Shaping the Future.* See http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc86_en.htm

Under **Priority Action 3** the four related PLAs, the study, the workshop, the resultant policy and practice guidelines and the network of European stakeholders all provided a strong foundation and impetus for the development of basic skills, key competences and 'one step-up' policy and practice for the decade ahead. Through these activities countries have increased their understanding of basic skills as a result of policy and practice exchanges and many have begun to develop responses to the needs of low-skilled individuals. A range of noteworthy measures is contributing to the development of policy and provision for basic skills for low-skilled individuals in participating countries.

The study in particular underscored the challenges that need to be addressed if adequate responses are to be developed for the 75 million adults aged 25 – 64 who have at most lower secondary education. The guidelines on policy and practice provide overarching guidance in this regard and the inventory of good practice and the case studies provide many good examples of effective policy and practice.

The independent European Basic Skills Network created in June 2010 following initial contacts within Working Group and led by VOX, Norway has strong potential to continue the cooperation on basic skills begun within the Working Group under this Priority Action and to contribute to the development of European and national basic skills policies and practice.

Under **Priority Action 4** the PLA focused on the validation of the non-formal and informal learning of low-skilled and low-qualified individuals and pointed to some of the challenges to be addressed in the majority of countries to ensure that validation becomes a systematic part of the responses to the education and training needs of such individuals. These findings will be strengthened by the consultation on validation carried out by the Commission December 2010 – February 2011.

Under **Priority Action 5** the PLA and the studies laid a foundation for future work at all levels to develop effective data collection and data usage policies and practices for adult learning across Europe and provided a clear direction for what needs to be done to build on developments to date in relation to terminology and data collection.

The agreed glossaries of adult learning terminology developed under this priority action will be a useful contribution in this regard as will the work done on core data collection. Data on the inputs and, to a lesser extent, the processes of adult learning – particularly participation in formal learning and training at work – were found to be the most sufficient at both the European and country levels. In addition, existing data sources were identified as providing examples of good practice and illustrating how progress towards achieving the objective of comparable data might be made.

5.1.3　Achievements on other themes

The Workshop on adult learning in higher education (HE) provided HE and adult learning stakeholders with a European forum to discuss the topic. The Workshop also identified key dimensions of the challenge of providing initial and continuing professional development for adult learning personnel

The Workshop on financing adult learning identified major gaps in data in relation to the effectiveness of various approaches to financing adult learning. In addition, analysis of the distribution of resources or of the cost/benefits of adult learning is lacking at European level and in almost all participating countries. The financing of adult learning is one of the critical issues, especially in the economic crisis, and the Workshop pointed to the research and other agenda that need to be addressed in relation to this key topic.

5.2　On-going challenges post-2010

Given the short period involved in the Action Plan 'process', a mere three years, and the background spectrum of development of adult learning in the 31 participating

countries, inevitably the key themes of the priority actions and those of the 2006 Communication on which they were based are only beginning to be addressed in many countries. The Working Group recognised that the majority of the good initiatives undertaken under the Action Plan were still in their infancy at the end of 2010 and that it would take longer than three years to show real results. At the same time, national and European participants in the regional meetings (2009) on the implementation of the Action Plan were of the opinion that while three years was a very short period for an Action Plan, the adult learning process needs to be refreshed every three years or so to keep the agenda fresh and active.

Several overarching challenges remain. The key challenge of keeping adult learning visibly and firmly on the European and national agenda will continue in the post-2010 period. There is a need for a clear vision of what would constitute an effective, efficient and quality adult learning 'sector'.

Another challenge, identified by the Working Group, will be the maintenance of a balance between vocational, general and liberal adult learning – growth is needed but so is active citizenship and social inclusion. In many countries, the relationship between general adult education and continuing vocational training - the balance between so-called 'liberal' and 'labour' education and training - is tenuous or indeed, in some countries, non-existent in the sense that all the focus is on vocational training.

The studies under **Priority Action 1** of the Action Plan identified that a wide range of interconnected measures is needed to overcome the multi-dimensional barriers to participation in adult learning including: high quality information and guidance; bringing learning closer to learners in their communities and workplaces; enabling flexible access to validation of non-formal and informal learning; widening adult access to higher education; encouraging individuals to invest in their own learning, both for reasons of personal fulfilment and employability.

There is an obvious need for ongoing initiatives to create a political process for adult learning accompanied by the development of projects and other concrete measures at European and national levels. In general terms it is clear from the regional meetings, the PLAs and the workshops that many countries have a need for an overarching policy framework to cover the entire field of adult learning. Policy implementation remains a big challenge[78]. Governance of adult learning needs attention in many countries and all stakeholders need to be fully involved at all levels and stages of governance. As employers are providers of a large portion of training to adults through work-based learning, greater employer involvement in local and regional planning is required in many countries. In addition stakeholder co-financing measures need urgent attention to ensure equitable access to adult learning for all adults, with a particular but by no means exclusive focus on those with the lowest education and skills levels. Access for adults throughout life is still not a reality, and participation rates in many countries remain low[79]. In fact, the latest figures show a slight decline in average EU participation in adult learning on the 12.5% benchmark from 9.5% in 2008 to 9.3% in 2009[80].

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[78] 2010 Joint Progress Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the Education & Training 2010 work programme, "Key competences for a changing world" (January 2010) http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/10/st05/st05394.en10.pdf

[79] 2010 Joint Progress Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the Education & Training 2010 work programme, "Key competences for a changing world" (January 2010) http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/10/st05/st05394.en10.pdf

[80] Eurostat (LFS database), May 2010. http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/eurostat/home

The 2009 regional meetings and the Working Group meetings (2008 – 2010) revealed that the economic crisis was having an impact on participation in adult learning in the 31 countries[81]. In some countries more participants are joining courses, mainly vocationally-oriented, and supply is frequently lagging behind demand. Financing is a big issue. Some measures are being taken for unemployed or those at risk of becoming unemployed, including using reduced working time for learning; in other countries there is a serious cut in the budgets for adult learning. Private investment is declining. Without the prospect of a job, learning is seen by some adults as a waste of time.

The overall findings of the studies and the workshop under **Priority Action 2** of the Action Plan set out a clear agenda in relation to quality assurance in adult learning for the post-2010 period. Indeed, in the post-2010 period to 2020 the issue of quality in the overall education and training sector will continue to be a major theme as illustrated by the Council Conclusion of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (*ET2020*)'[82].

The competence profile for adult learning professionals developed under Priority Action 2 was well-received at the regional meetings (2009) and one meeting recommended that the profile be translated into Member State languages and tested by eligible institutions and other stakeholders in the participating countries with the support of the Grundtvig programme. The quality of the providers of adult learning, including non-formal adult learning, needs to be addressed in many countries. The Workshop on quality in adult learning identified the issue of collaboration/cooperation with quality initiatives in VET and HE; the question of an overarching framework for quality in lifelong learning and the involvement of all quality stakeholders as critical quality themes for the post-2010 period.

In the post-2010 period arising from activities under **Priority Action 3** of the Action Plan, the distribution and application of the guidelines on basic skills policy and practice as appropriate to the situation in the individual participating countries will be a challenge. The independent European Basic Skills Network headed up by Norway could have a key role to play in this regard. There is a real urgency about this challenge as Europe seeks to address the upskilling needs of ca. 75 million Europeans aged 25-64 (close to 30% of the working age population) who have at most lower secondary education[83]. There is a clear need for coherent mobilisation strategies to reach low-skilled adults and marginalised adults and it is essential that their life, leisure and work environments are transformed into places of learning through a range of flexible approaches accompanied by guidance[84]. To date activities in the countries are only reaching small numbers of targeted individuals[85] .

The guidelines on policy and practice[86] produced under Priority Action 3 identify the wide range of developments in relation to basic skills provision (literacy, numeracy and ICTs) required in this regard, including: integrated evidence-based policy-making;

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[81] See www.kslll.net for Final Report on the Regional Meetings

[82] http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:119:0002:0010:EN:PDF

[83] Commission Staff Working Document Progress towards the Lisbon Objectives in Education and Training Indicators and Benchmarks 2009. SEC (2009 1616).
http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/report09/report_en.pdf

[84] University of Florence (2010) *Enabling the low-skilled to take their qualifications "One Step Up", Final Report, Key Factor Analysis and Final Recommendations.* http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/moreinformation139_en.htm

[85] University of Florence (2010) *Enabling the low-skilled to take their qualifications "One Step Up", Final Report, Key Factor Analysis and Final Recommendations.* http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/moreinformation139_en.htm;   Joint Progress Report 2010, *Key Competences for a Changing World* http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/10/st05/st05394.en10.pdf

[86] Basic skills provision for adults: policy and practice guidelines, July 2010 (see http://www.kslll.net)

data collection; guidance provision; appropriate teaching and learning approaches; validation of non-formal and informal learning; opportunities to achieve qualifications on a national qualifications framework; quality assurance. The importance of non-formal and informal learning in the case of adult participation is supported by empirical evident from the Adult Education Survey[87].

In addition, the results of the OECD's PIAAC[88] survey, beginning in 2011, will provide useful baseline information for participating countries on the level and distribution of adult skills in a coherent and consistent way across countries. The focus on the key cognitive and workplace skills that are required for successful participation in the economy and society of the 21st century should prove useful in enabling countries to address the challenge of upskilling low-skilled individuals.

It is worth noting that at global level, the 2009 *Belém Framework for Action[89]*, adopted at UNESCO's sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI), identified literacy as the foundation skill on which to build others; and calls for clear goals and milestones, financing and technical support to create sustainable programmes to eradicate illiteracy.

Arising from the findings of the PLA under **Priority Action 4** of the Action Plan it is clear that progress needs to be made in the post-2010 period in relation to validation systems so as to provide cost-effective, quality-assured validation opportunities for a wide range of adults. In addition, the sometimes formidable challenges – technical, cultural and political – encountered by efforts to establish a validation system will need to be addressed. The proposed Council Recommendation on validation (2011) will provide a strong stimulus in this direction. The greater involvement of the Grundtvig programme to 2013 and the future Lifelong Learning Programme (2014 – 2020) in the development of validation policies and practices for low-skilled and low-qualified individuals will be essential in the next decade.

The study carried out under **Priority Action 5** of the Action Plan indicates that in a number of fields in adult learning, sufficient baseline data have not yet been gathered and in these fields the lack of clarity in definitions and terminology is particularly apparent. Data and data loops to inform evidence-based policy-making and practice are lacking in many countries. Thus, it was recommended that a survey of national/regional data sources for adult learning, based on that developed for this study should be repeated on a regular (biennial) basis, with the results used to map the developing data landscape. In this regard the findings of the PLA and the studies provided a clear direction for the steps that need to be taken to build on developments to date in relation to terminology and data collection.

In general, data relating to the outcomes of adult learning were considered insufficient for monitoring purposes. The authors were of the opinion that the EU is not yet at the stage where it is possible to propose a coherent set of indicators, based on comparable data, which can cover the whole of adult learning. For fields of adult learning outside the core areas for data collection, it was aimed to identify fields in which countries could prioritise the collection of comparable data to enable indicators to be developed in the mid- to long-term and also to indicate areas which are not a priority or where substantial work would be required to develop indicators in the future.

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[87]Adult   Education   Survey
http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/microdata/adult_education_survey

[88] http://www.oecd.org/document/7/0,3343,en_2649_201185_44378247_1_1_1_1,00.html

[89] UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2009) *Harnessing the power and potential of adult learning and education   for   a   viable   future*.   *Belém   Framework   for*   Action
http://www.unesco.org/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/INSTITUTES/UIL/confintea/pdf/working_documents/Bel%C3%A9m%20Framework_Final.pdf

Participants in the Workshop on **Adult learning in higher education** discussed a number of priority areas for further work/ policy action including the need to; map adults' participation in HE; research the returns of adult participation in HE; disseminate 'good practice' in the provision of HE to adults; move from systems of validation of non-formal and informal learning regulated by HEIs to more standard systems; upskill HE staff to teach adults. In this regard, it is significant that governments and universities have committed themselves in the context of the EU modernisation agenda[90] for higher education and the Bologna process to open up universities to non-traditional learners, such as adults already on the labour market.

It was clear from the Workshop on **Financing adult learning** that data availability on financing structures at systems level, particularly with regard to non-vocational adult learning, is very limited. Research is required to evaluate the effectiveness of the wide range of approaches to financing adult learning and to provide direction and guidelines on the most effective ways to ensure equitable access for all adults, especially the most disadvantaged financially, socially and educationally. The Workshop identified a range of areas where research is necessary including: how to fund basic skills and second chance provision; the efficacy of various financing approaches; motivation to use or not use specific instruments; the potential impact of demographic change on the financing of adult learning; financing basic skills learning; analysis of the cost/benefits of adult learning. The Workshop suggested that, in addition to existing Cedefop studies, an inventory of good practice would be useful and should include an investigation of the framework conditions of the instruments that ensure the highest impact.

In addition, the Workshop considered that better use needs to be made of existing financing and that the social partners need to be involved at all levels in relation to financing adult learning from planning to implementation and evaluation. Moreover, there should be a shift in focus from the employer's perspective to that of the employee. In order to attract disadvantaged learners, the involvement of local communities and additional supports such as guidance, subsidised/free transport, childcare and learning materials seem to be crucial.

Finally, the Working Group looked at its own processes and came to the conclusion that there was a need to: achieve more balanced participation of all countries in the work of the Working Group. In addition, the Working Group believed that there was a need to look more strategically at what commissioned studies were meant to achieve in a context where adult learning is a sector that is developing and needs research support but does not have structures or the same basis as other sectors. Activities (e.g. studies, PLAs, workshops) need to be designed in a way that supports the development of evidence-based policy on adult learning at national and European levels and is linked to and informs, practice. The Working Group was of the opinion that study outcomes should be discussed, analysed and disseminated through PLAs. More exchange should occur between commissioned studies and between them and existing research as well as with other studies/groups at European level.

5.3   Possible approaches to advancing the adult learning agenda post-2010

Possible future activities in adult learning arise from the challenges identified by the activities under each priority action of the Action Plan and other activities set against the background of the spectrum of development of adult learning in Europe and the context and strategies set out under the Strategic Framework for European

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[90] Commission Communication: Delivering on the modernisation agenda for universities: education, research and innovation, May 2006, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2006:0208:FIN:EN:PDF

Cooperation in Education and Training (*ET2020*)[91] within the wider context of *Europe 2020*[92].

5.3.1   *Context*

Six driving forces will shape Europe's economies and societies and, as a consequence the demands on adult learning, over the next decade[93]. First, the legacy of the economic crisis and its impact on the labour market, job prospects and public and private finances will continue to impact on Europe. Second, a clear labour market trend towards more skill-intensive jobs will demand new skills on the part of workers. Third, international competition from fast-developing nations outside the EU will intensify and demand creativity and entrepreneurship. Fourth, climate change has brought the development of a low-carbon economy to the heart of all future strategies for development.   Fifth, demographic trends pointing to an older European workforce and population in general are now a reality. Sixth, the growing pluralism of European society is threatening to undermine social inclusion in all countries and challenging individuals to learn how to live and work in multicultural communities.

The EU's response to these trends, the *Europe 2020* strategy[94], relies heavily on education and training systems to promote a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Indeed, education and training are key dimensions of the implementation of many of the strategy's seven flagship initiatives.

The *Youth on the Move* Flagship initiative calls for a modernisation and enhancement of the entire lifelong learning systems to promote excellence and equity. The Flagship Initiative *An Agenda for New Skills and Jobs* seeks to modernise labour markets and empower people by developing their skills throughout the lifecycle through lifelong learning and flexible learning pathways between different education and training sectors and levels. The Flagship Initiative, the *European platform against poverty*, seeks to ensure social cohesion such that the benefits of growth and jobs are widely shared and people experiencing poverty and social exclusion are enabled to live in dignity and take an active part in society.

In addition, in the context of *Europe 2020* the 2010 Employment Guidelines[95] seek to promote effective incentives for lifelong learning of those within and outside employment, "ensuring every adult the chance to retrain or to move one step up in their qualification".

5.3.2   *Thematic areas for cooperation and challenges post-2010*

Building on the achievements of the Action Plan 2007-2010, the challenges remaining to be addressed in adult learning, the *Europe 2020* strategy and the *ET2020* framework this section proposes themes for the development of adult learning in the decade to 2020. It is clear that the adult learning agenda needs to be

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[91] Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020') (2009/C 119/02). http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/adult/com558_en.pdf

[92] European Commission (2010) Communication on EUROPE 2020, 'A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive   growth   COM(2010)   2020' http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/COMPLET%20EN%20BARROSO%20%20%20007%20-%20Europe%202020%20-%20EN%20version.pdf

[93] Cedefop (2010) A bridge to the future European policy for vocational education and training 2002-10 http://cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/3058_en.pdf

[94] European Commission (2010) Communication on EUROPE 2020. 'A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth COM(2010) 2020'

[95] Council decision of 21 October 2010 on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2010:308:0046:0051:EN:PDF

revised in two directions, namely: a) deepening and enlarging the themes in keeping with the over-arching goals of *Europe 2020* and *ET2020;* b) strengthening and improving cooperation between participating countries and between the Commission and participating countries.

General challenges

General challenges in the post-2010 period include:

- Keeping adult learning visibly and firmly on the European agenda as a central element of lifelong learning and in this spirit creating a bridge to other educational sectors, especially to the vocational training and school systems.

- Maintaining a balance between vocational, general and liberal adult learning and ensuring that the role and importance of adult learning not leading directly to employment and the key role of civil society in this regard are recognised and promoted in participating countries.

- Ensuring mutual coherence, cooperation and enrichment between adult learning and other major European agendas such as the Copenhagen process for VET (including the instruments such as EQF, ECVET, validation, guidance and EQAVET) and the Bologna process for higher education within the *ET2020* framework. In this regard, the planned communication from the Commission (2011) on the implementation of lifelong learning strategies and competence development should highlight the complementarities between the Copenhagen/Bruges process and adult learning as part of a global lifelong learning approach.

Specific topics within the context of ET2020

Adult learning has a key role to play in the renewed Framework for European Co-operation in Education and Training (*ET2020*)[96], adopted by the Council Conclusions of May 2009. The four broad strategic objectives for the decade ahead are:

- Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality;

- Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training;

- Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship;

- Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.

In addition, with a view to increasing the participation of adults in lifelong learning, particularly that of the low-skilled, the Council Conclusions revised upwards the existing benchmark of average participation in lifelong learning by adults from 12.5% to 15% (by 2020).

In the context of the above strategic objectives, it is evident that taking forward the adult learning themes identified by the Action Plan priority actions, studies, PLAs, thematic workshops and the discussions of the Working Group 2008 – 2010 will make a significant contribution to their realisation.

In addition and to the same end, members of the Working Group suggest additional specific topics for consideration post-2010 including: early school-leaving; guidance; demographic change; the ageing population; migrants; sustainable employability; combining the individual's perspective with the needs of the labour market; effective

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[96] Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020') (2009/C 119/02)

http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:119:0002:0010:en:PDF

transfer of good policy practice; generating sufficient funding to intensify research and analyse results, especially the impact of measures associated with agreed priority areas.

The next section indicates how all these topics might be converted into concrete actions that will contribute to the *ET2020* strategic objectives.

In the context of the strategic objective on lifelong learning and mobility a wide range of developments will be required in many countries including:

- a systematic development of policy making, policy implementation and policy monitoring and evaluation to form a feedback loop of evidence for policy-making; development of governance structures for the integrated involvement of stakeholders at all levels; development of efficient, effective and inclusive stakeholder co-financing mechanisms for adult learning; measures to increase participation of all adults in adult learning with the goal of achieving the revised benchmark of 15% participation in countries where participation is significantly lower; advancing development of national qualifications frameworks, the validation of non-formal and informal learning and supporting guidance systems; monitoring and evaluation of the adult learning sector; research on a wide range of adult learning issues to improve the knowledge base on adult learning at European, national, regional and local levels.

In the context of the strategic objective of improving the quality and efficiency of education and training the following actions are proposed for adult learning:

- learning from and building on ten years of work by the VET and HE sectors to develop quality assurance systems and to improve the governance and leadership of adult learning at all levels; exploration of the feasibility and implications of an overarching lifelong learning quality framework; ensuring high quality teaching and learning through the provision adequate initial and continuing professional development for teachers and trainers at country/regional/local levels; exploration of the role of a competence framework in this regard.

In the context of the strategic objective of promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship the following actions are proposed:

- promotion of robust and well-resourced 'one step-up' initiatives to address the competence needs of the 80 million low-skilled Europeans; maintenance of a strong focus in adult learning, especially non-formal learning, on adults, who may experience educational, social and economic disadvantage, especially early school-leavers, individuals with a disability, rurally isolated individuals, older adults, migrants, offenders/ex-offenders, ethnic minorities, Roma people; provision of access for all adults to the skills and competencies that people need for the growth of social awareness, proactive engagement in community, active citizenship, general resilience and well-being; enhanced collaboration with the Grundtvig programme which has supported/supports a very wide range of activities that explicitly address this strategic objective.

In the context of the strategic objective of enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, the following actions are proposed:

- development of individuals' creativity and innovation skills in non-formal learning opportunities for cultural engagement and expression through art, literature, music, dance, cinema, crafts and gallery and museum collections; a focus on the development of innovative teaching and learning methodologies which foster creativity and innovation.

5.3.3 Possible working methods post-2010

To enable work on the actions proposed above a range of mechanisms will be necessary to ensure strong commitment at European and national levels. Thus, cooperation in the area of adult learning should be intensified within the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). Building on its application and achievements in relation to the Action Plan 2007 – 2010, the OMC will: provide a platform to strengthen and improve cooperation and the sharing and evaluation of adult learning policy and practice between countries

The OMC will also help countries to create an integrated approach which builds on the existing European instruments and principles to ensure that adult learning is more consistently and closely dovetailed with the various European policy areas including: key competences; validation of informal and non-formal learning; the European Lifelong Learning Guidance Policy Network, the Copenhagen 'process'; the Bologna 'process'; EQF, ECVET and EQAVET. Such links with other processes might be supported by a transversal group with a focus on adult learning and also include links to policy areas such as employment; social inclusion; migration; equality; climate; health and citizenship.

Within the OMC the typical instruments of Peer Learning Activities (PLAs), workshops, study visits, conferences, thematic working groups, cluster groups, expert groups and regional meetings organised in cooperation between the DG/EAC, the Member States, NGOs and the social partners should be extended to include joint activities with working groups from different areas, joint/cooperative PLAs, coordination of results; sharing of working documents etc. Countries might choose to work together with a focus on particular priorities.

To give coherence, direction and focus to commitment and potential activities at European and national levels an enabling framework will be necessary. The framework should also provide strong support for the Member States in their policy prioritisation and the allocation of resources to adult learning policies and systems.

In the post-2010 period strong commitment to and leadership of, the adult learning agenda will be required from the European Commission as the European policy driver and resource holder. A Communication on adult learning in the form of another Action Plan would be a concrete expression of such commitment and leadership and, as in 2008, it could be linked to Council Conclusions on adult learning. Senior officials from participating countries, meeting in Copenhagen in September 2010, underlined the importance of preserving the idea of an Action Plan as a tool which provides a useful framework of reference on adult learning for all countries and sums up both the shared vision and the concrete objectives for policies in this field[97].

Council Conclusions adopting such an Action Plan would constitute a strong framework to underline and support Member State commitment to taking the adult learning agenda forward post-2010. The Action Plan could then be integrated into ET2020 priorities at a later date. Approaches to increasing commitment at national level could also include: supporting national action plans; involving Directors-General of adult learning more closely in the agenda; establishing regional clusters of countries to address specific regional issues and concerns.

In addition to the above working methods, a framework for effective communication between policy developments at national and European levels and the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) 2007 – 2013, especially the Grundtvig programme, will be essential. The LLP and its successor (2014 – 2020) should have a strong role in

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[97] Document prepared for the Adult Learning Working Group Meeting, October 2010, on the informal meeting of Directors-General of adult education, Copenhagen, 22 September 2010.

the implementation of policy, accompanied by a strong feedback loop between the LLP and policy to support evidence-based policy-making.

Finally, and beyond any funding that might accrue from the LLP, including the Grundtvig programme, a renewed "Action Plan" would need to secure a dedicated budget to fund exchange, policy development and policy implementation, including integrated policy actions across all the dimensions of adult learning, vocational and non-vocational.

5.4 The immediate future – the final conference

A final conference on the Action Plan is scheduled to take place in Budapest in March 2011. A key function of the final conference will be to validate the conclusions of the Working Group on the 2007-2010 period and their key ideas for progressing the adult learning agenda in the post-2010 period.

The conference which will be attended by a large cross-section of adult learning stakeholders from around Europe will have two goals. First, it will assess the results and achievements of Action Plan process 2007 – 2010 and stimulate the dissemination of the results at national, regional and local levels. Second, it will give impetus to work in the field of adult learning to 2020. The event will help to define the role of adult learning in the *ET2020* strategy and in the context of the overarching *Europe 2020.* The orientations decided upon will also help shape the successor (2014 – 2020) to the *Lifelong Learning Programme 2007 – 2013.*

ANNEX 1

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACVT Advisory Committee on Vocational Training
ALPINE Adult learning professions in Europe
CEDEFOP European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CONFINTEA VI Sixth International Conference on Adult Education
D Dublin
DGVT Directors General for Vocational Training
EAEA European Association for the Education of Adults
EACEA Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency
ECVET European Credit Transfer System for Vocational Education and Training
EEA European Economic Area
EFTA European Free Trade Area
ELGPN European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network
EQAVET European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training
EQF European Qualifications Framework
ESF European Social Fund
ESGs European Standards and Guidelines (for higher education)
ET2020 Education and Training 2020
ETCG Education and Training Coordination Group
ETF European Training Foundation
ETUC European Trade Union Confederation
EU European Union
EUCEN European Association for University Lifelong Learning
Europe 2020 EU's growth strategy for the decade to 2020
GDP Gross Domestic Product
HE Higher education
HEI Higher education institution
IAG Information, advice and guidance
ICT Information and communication technologies
ILA Individual learning account
IVET Initial vocational education and training
L London
LCS Labour cost survey
LFS Labour force survey
LLL Lifelong learning
LLP Lifelong Learning Programme
NGO Non-governmental organisation
NQF National Qualifications Framework
O Oslo
OECD Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OMC Open Method of Coordination
P Prague
PIAAC Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competences
PLA Peer Learning Activity
UEAPME European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
VET Vocational Education and Training
VOX Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning

ANNEX 2

MEMBERS OF THE ADULT LEARNING WORKING GROUP 2008 – 2010

EU - MEMBER STATES

AUSTRIA

Mr. Christian KLOYBER; Ms. Patrizia JANKOVIC

BELGIUM

Ms Debby PEETERS

BULGARIA

Ms Elena DAMYANOVA

CYPRUS

Mr. Elpidoforos NEOCLEOUS; Ms Nicoletta IOANNOU, Ms Elsa NEOPHYTOU

CZECH REPUBLIC

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Ms. Mai KOLNES

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MALTA

Mr Victor GALEA

NETHERLANDS

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Ms Renate HAAS-BECK

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Ms. Gry H. ULVERUD; Ms Anne SKOMEDAL

NON-GOVERNMENTAL-ORGANISATION / SOCIALPARTNERS / OTHER

INSTITUTIONS AND STAKEHOLDERS

BUSINESS EUROPE

Mr Heikki SUOMALAINEN

CEDEFOP – European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

Ms Alexandra DEHMEL

European Association for the Education of Adults EAEA

Ms Sue WADDINGTON; Ms Gina EBNER

European Association of craft, small and medium-sized enterprises (UEAPME)

Ms Liliane VOLOZINSKIS; Ms Helen HOFFMANN

European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)

Ms Tatiana BABRAUSKIENE

European Training Foundation (ETF)

Ms Evelyn VIERTEL

European University Continuing Education Network (EUCEN)

Mr Michel FEUTRIE, Ms Alison HUGHES

EURYDICE

Ms Daniela KOCANOVA

ANNEX 3

OUTPUTS OF THE ACTION PLAN 2007 – 2010 UNDER THE WORKING GROUP

Studies and inventories

- ALPINE study, *Adult Learning Professions in Europe: A study of the current situation, trends and issues* (2008)

- Study – *Assessing the impact of ongoing reforms in education and training on adult learning* (2009)

- Study on *Key competences for adult learning professionals* (2009), including a Competence Profile for adult learning professionals; discussion of the profile at four regional meetings

- *Adults in Formal Education: Policies and Practice in Europe*, Eurydice, (2011)

- *Lifelong Learning Strategies: Critical factors and good practice in implementation*, 2010.

- European Inventory of good outreach practices, with case studies; accompanying analytical report, *Enabling the low skilled to take their qualifications "one step up"*, 2010

- An update of the *European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning*, providing extensive examples of good practice and analysis of service to disadvantaged groups(early 2011)

- Study on *European Terminology in Adult Learning for a common language and common understanding and monitoring of the sector*, 2010

- Glossary of essential terms (being validated); a larger glossary of technical terms, 2010

- Cedefop (forthcoming): *Learning while working: success stories of workplace learning in Europe* and Competence *Framework for VET Professions: Handbook for practitioners*, published by Cedefop and the Finnish National Board of Education (2009).

Policy papers

- *European Guidelines on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (2009)

- Joint Interim Report 2010 includes a section reporting on the development of lifelong learning strategies and key competences for adults

- Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning (2011).

Peer Learning Activities

- Peer Learning Activity on adult literacy, Dublin, 14 – 16 January 2008 http://www.kslll.net/Documents/PLA_Adult%20literacy_Jan.%2008_%20Final%20report.pdf

- PLA on monitoring the adult learning sector, Bratislava, 22-25 March 2009 http://www.kslll.net/Documents/PLA_One%20Step%20Up%20report_April%2009.pdf

- Peer Learning Activity on 'one step-up', London, 20 - 22 April 2009 http://www.kslll.net/Documents/PLA_One%20Step%20Up%20report_April%2009.pdf

- Peer Learning Activity on validation for the low skilled, Prague, 21 - 24 June 2009 http://www.kslll.net/Documents/PLA-%20valiidation%20of%20non-formal%20and%20informal%20learning_June%2009.pdf

- Peer Learning Activity on basic skills, Oslo 22-24 March 2010
  http://kslll.net/Documents/PLA_Basic%20skills_March%2010.pdf

Regional Meetings

- Regional meeting, Germany, October 2009

- Regional meeting, Norway, October 2009

- Regional meeting, Spain, October 2009

- Regional meeting, Slovenia, November 2009

- Final Report
  http://www.kslll.net/Documents/Final%20report%20of%20Regional%20Meetings%20Oct_Nov%202009.pdf

Workshops and conference

- Workshop on basic skills, Brussels, 17-18 June 2010
  http://www.kslll.net/Documents/Final%20%20report%20quality_Oct.%202010.pdf

- Workshop on the role of higher education for development of the adult learning component of lifelong learning, Brussels, 27-28 September 2010

- Planned Final Conference on the Action Plan, Budapest, March 2011.

Networks

- An independent European Basic Skills Network (2010). http://www.basicskills.eu/