



# LEAP

# Local Adult Education

# Policy

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## Intellectual Output 2

## Trends & Dynamics in AE Local Policy Making

### Final Report



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**Contents**

- Executive Summary ..... 3
  - About the LEAP project ..... 3
  - Mapping Trends & Dynamics in AE Local Policy Making ..... 3
  - Methodology for Research Work ..... 3
  - The European Perspective..... 3
  - Trends and dynamics of policy making ..... 4
  - UNESCO Learning Cities..... 4
  - Bottom-up Perspective..... 4
  - Recommendations for the Toolkit..... 5
- Introduction - Background about the LEAP project ..... 6
- Methodology for research work ..... 7
- Section 1 The European Perspective ..... 9
- Section 2.1 Trends and dynamics of policy making..... 15
  - Relevant trends and social dynamics pertaining AE and LLL..... 15
  - How are the AE policies defined at local level? How are the AE policies implemented at local level?  
..... 17
- Section 2.2 UNESCO Learning Cities ..... 20
  - What is the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC)?..... 20
  - Why learning cities? ..... 20
  - How do learning cities support equity and inclusion? ..... 21
  - How to build a learning city?..... 22
- Section 3 A Bottom-up Perspective..... 23
  - Local views and perception of EU policies in LLL and AE: how much the local stakeholders (policy makers, but also the NGOs, users, etc.) are aware and inspired by the EU policies in LLL and AE... 24
  - Reflecting EU Strategies in Local AE Policies: how local stakeholders reflect and translate EU policies and strategies into local initiatives and policies..... 25
  - Qualitative and Quantitative Underpinnings of Local AE Policies: what measures local policy makers, while developing their policies/programmes, have or use ..... 26
- Section 4 Recommendations for Intellectual Output 3..... 28
- Conclusions and Takeaways ..... 29
- Annexes ..... 32
  - Table of Contents ..... 32

## Executive Summary

### About the LEAP project

The LEAP “Local Adult Education Policy” project’s objective is to contribute to attaining the target of 15% participation rate of adults in learning as stated in Europe 2020 Strategy. To do so, better policies on adult education need to be promoted. With LEAP (November 2020 – February 2023), we are targeting local authorities to empower them to understand and appreciate the importance of the adult education and be prepared to draft local adult education (and/or skills) policy.

The main context for the project is in the Council Resolution on renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning that highlights the need to significantly increase adult participation in formal, non-formal and informal learning. Recently, there were adopted also the Council Conclusions on the key role of lifelong learning policies in empowering societies to address the technological and green transition. The OECD Skills strategies also call for improving the adult learning policy based on long-term adult learning strategy, as well as on co-ordination across ministries, levels of government and stakeholders.

### Mapping Trends & Dynamics in AE Local Policy Making

The mapping of situation in project countries highlights the opportunities in local policy making for inclusion of adult education. The report from mapping is designed to study and analyse the local policies, especially the trends and dynamics that drive or inhibit the AE policies on local level. The results and key findings of this work are summarised in this report.

### Methodology for Research Work

The basis of the research work was the establishment of the Common Methodology. First formal desk and policy researches were conducted in 2020 giving an overall snapshot about relevant trends and social dynamics pertaining AE and LLL in the given country, then interviews were realised in 2021 with the aim to map how AE policies are defined, designed and implemented at local level as well as what are the main funding means.

### The European Perspective

In this section the report provides an overview of the current status of AE and adult learning systems in Europe. While analysing how AE policies are defined in Europe, it should be kept on mind that the EU competence in the education area is just supportive. The main responsibilities for education, including the adult education, rest with the national authorities.

Numerous actions and initiatives have been implemented at EU dimensions to foster the upskilling and capacity building opportunities of adults. One of the most important pieces of legislation is the Resolution adopted by the Council in 2011 on a Renewed Agenda for Adult Learning. The resolution clearly stems from Europe 2020, a major strategy established at the beginning of the last decade for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Throughout the last decade, the Council resolution has been complemented by several other major initiatives, namely: Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways, ET 2020, European Skills Agenda.

The picture emerging from the analysis is that AE is stagnant in numbers, highly fragmented and self-referential to local contexts. On one hand, key policy recommendations from the EU for AE and adult learning give great flexibility to stakeholders established at local level; on the other, stakeholders struggle in embedding these same recommendations in their policy framework.

Based on the findings, this section provides specific takeaways for local policy makers, emphasising, among others, the importance of increasing: public awareness on AE opportunities, investments (financial and other) in adult learning, access opportunities / removing barriers to training and education, time-and social relevancy of the training programme offer, the quality of the training and education offer, the cooperation with other education and training settings.

#### Trends and dynamics of policy making

This section gives an overview about relevant trends and social dynamics pertaining AE and LLL based on country snapshots analysing recent changes in AE policies and focuses on national and local level. In the context of this analysis, we also examined how the AE policies are defined and implemented at local level.

Comparing the experiences of five European countries (ES, HU, IT, RO, SK), it can be said that AE and LLL is not sufficiently defined and recognised as a stand-alone policy, the term adult education is not widely used or understood. Often there is a lack of political consensus about the fundamental building blocks of the educational system. AE is a lost or rather to say forgotten child separated from public education, higher education and VET. The procedures are mainly over regulated, but at the same time AE policies are not linked necessarily to other policies (social, economic, integration).

#### UNESCO Learning Cities

The project also embraces the UNESCO's concept and network of Learning Cities. A learning city promotes lifelong learning for all. It is a city that effectively mobilizes its resources in every sector to promote inclusive learning from basic to higher education, revitalizes learning in families and communities, facilitates learning for and in the workplace, extends the use of modern learning technologies, enhances quality and excellence in learning, and fosters a culture of learning throughout life. In doing so, the city enhances individual empowerment and social inclusion, economic development and cultural prosperity, and sustainable development. In the framework of the project, we present the case of the city of Pécs as a good practice, which was the first Hungarian city to win the honorary title in 2017.

#### Bottom-up Perspective

In the frame of the Common Methodology interviews were also conducted. While not statistically and scientifically representative, the interviews provide interesting insights and perspectives on the dynamics of AE, policy making at local levels directly engaging the participants in the system of policy making for AE at local level. We examined the main groups of questions below.

#### *How is LLL and AE local policy making shaped and formulated*

Learning needs of adults are constantly changing and adapting to the existing economic and social context. One of the main focuses in AE and LLL policy making is to give everyone the opportunity to improve their skills, to succeed in the job market, and to maintain constructive relationships in society. Nevertheless, the term adult education is not widely used or understood. Some changes in attitude of decision makers can be experienced in AE policies, but on the other hand unfortunately there is a lower demand for training from potential beneficiaries. The focus should be on inspiring proactive groups of local responsible citizens to create progressive community initiatives in accordance with new topics and forms of AE and LLL emerged due to the changing global trends.

### *Local views and perception of EU policies in LLL and AE, reflection of EU Strategies in Local AE Policies*

The European Agenda is the central initiative of EU policies in the field of adult education, besides which the interviewees mentioned three other elements to promote adult learning in the new budgetary period of the EU in between 2021 and 2027: the Europe 2020 strategy, the new Skills Agenda and the potential formation of a new European Agenda on Adult Learning. Unfortunately, these EU documents are not considered by the local stakeholders as leading instruments shaping the future directions, only the funding possibilities are mentioned. Local policy makers and AE practitioners indicated that EU and national policies are too complex for their realities, it is difficult to understand the principle of subsidiarity which starts from the EU cohesion policy. In order to promote EU policies more effectively, cooperation between cities and regions, as well as between different sectors, must be strengthened, and more emphasis must be placed on high-quality training programs that meet the needs.

### *Qualitative and Quantitative Underpinnings of Local AE Policies*

When developing any policy or initiative, quantitative and qualitative elements are also considered. The most common quantitative indicators which were mentioned: an analysis of expenditure funds, number of trainings, library equipment, programs introduced, consultation hours, number of participants, number of trainees and trainers, number of equipment, number of course hours, number of course materials, number of programs provided, number of persons certified. As for the qualitative elements, methods were much more diverse. This is completely understandable since this is a much more abstract concepts including categories like improved social inclusion, enhanced citizenship which are very hard to measure.

### **Recommendations for the Toolkit**

Based on the research and findings of this report, the next stage in the project is to compile the Toolkit for policy-makers, including a training module. The Toolkit shall contain resources such as examples and cases, guidelines, good practices and glossary to enhance the understanding, adoption and integration of EU priorities, strategies and programmes as well as national strategies based thereof in the field of Policy Making for AE. This part of the report formulates recommendations in this context, emphasizing among others the importance of better understanding of EU policies, awareness of local authorities, collection and presentation of concrete, practical good examples, e.g. the Learning Cities UNESCO initiative, and some specific topics like green, digital and civic competences.

## Introduction - Background about the LEAP project

The low participation rates of adults in learning activities are seen across a number of EU countries. In many cases it applies that increasing participation requires a policy framework that is well coordinated. In order to encourage adults to participate in learning and education over their life course, the importance of adult learning, as well as a clear definition of what it is, needs to be acknowledged across all levels of government and society.

The main context for the project is in the Council Resolution on Renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning (2011) that highlights the need to significantly increase adult participation in formal, non-formal and informal learning whether to acquire work skills, for active citizenship, or for personal development and fulfilment, and calls to promote the role of social partners and civil society, as well as optimise the involvement of central, regional and local authorities.

Another important source says: “Adult learning is a complex policy field, whose responsibility is often divided across several ministries and agencies at several levels of policy making (municipal, regional, national). This shared responsibility often results in fragmentation and inefficiency” (Education and Training 2020, ET2020). From that emerges the need to: “establish mechanisms for policy alignment at local and regional levels; and build knowledge base concerning what works in adult learning”, and “develop regional, local and sectoral networks as mechanisms for policy alignment” (In-Depth Analysis of AL Policies and Their Effectiveness in EU, DG EMPL).

The objective of the project is **to contribute to attaining the target of 15% participation rate of adults in learning as stated in Europe 2020 Strategy**. To do so, better policies on adult education need to be promoted. With this project we are targeting local authorities to empower them to:

- understand and appreciate the importance of the adult education;
- be prepared to draft local adult education (and/or skills) policy.

The main impact is envisaged on policy level, specifically on local policy level. The primary target group are **local decision-makers**, council members, staff of local authorities. We expect that the awareness of local authorities on the importance of adult education for the future will rise. After using the Toolkit, training and the Guide, the policy makers will be able to formulate a simple local policy document. When the local authorities adopt the agenda of adult education and skills, they will be able, with simple steps, bring more learning opportunities to citizens and see improved participation rates of adults in learning. This might bring other benefits – more satisfied citizens, better skilled workforce and potentially increase in economic activities.

The secondary target group are **the adult education ecosystem stakeholders** such as education providers, learning centres, cultural centres, civic society, employers who have vested interests in having a good policy. They need to understand the issues and cooperate with policy makers in order to set up a functioning and effective policy. And finally, the beneficiaries will be the general public who will be given quality learning opportunities.

### The planned results of the project are:

1. The **LEAP platform** as an Open Education Resource. It provides also the entry to the Community of Practice in the domain of local AE policy, and gives the LEAP project visibility.
2. **Report on Trends and Dynamics in Local AE Policy Making.** The mapping of situation in project countries (common methodology, research, report on findings) will highlight the opportunities in local policy making for inclusion of adult education.
3. **Toolkit for policy-makers, including a training module.** The Toolkit will be an organised body of knowledge in the domains of the local policy making and adult education. The attention will be drawn to potential topics for civic education on local level / case studies in climate change, digital skills, health education – pandemic threats.
4. **Guide on local adult policy making.** It will be a very practical tool, a template for drafting of a simple local policy document, applied in practice and produced local policy documents.

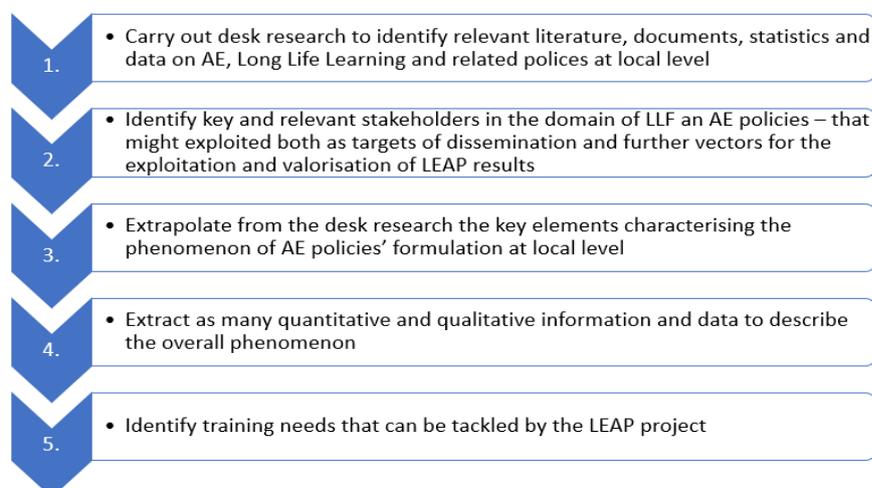
### Project partners:

- [Academia Istropolitana Nova](#) / SK (coordinator)
- [Mesto Nitra](#) / SK
- Pedagogical Faculty of the University of Constantine Philosopher in Nitra / SK
- [Radio ECCA](#) /ES
- [Institute de Haute Formation aux Politiques Communutaires](#) /BE
- [Inspectoratul Scolar Judetean Neamt](#) /RO
- [IDP European Consultants](#) /IT
- [Nevelők Háza Egyesület](#) /HU

### Methodology for research work

All partners investigated a set of trends and dynamics that drives or inhibits the formulation of AE policies. This work allowed to define, identify and take stock of the “policy tools” available within the regions and territories represented, as well as in the countries represented by the LEAP Partnership<sup>1</sup>.

The basis of the research work was the establishment of the Common Methodology, which settled the operative tools of investigation and their architecture. The work plan for the report was designed as follows:



<sup>1</sup> The only exception is represented by IHF. The Belgian partner, as a pan-European think-tank, conducted the research at EU level

Desk researches were conducted within each national context represented by the multinational heterogeneity of the partnership giving an overall snapshot<sup>2</sup> about relevant trends and social dynamics pertaining AE and LLL in the given country highlighting:

- Recent changes in AE policies on national level;
- Qualitative and Quantitative Indicators;
- Funding Means

The main research was done as secondary research of relevant documents among others:

- The European Agenda;
- Council Resolution on Renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning;
- Europe 2020 Strategy;
- Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways;
- UNESCO, Learning Cities initiative;
- OECD Skills Strategy.
- National regulatory documents (e.g. laws, national plans/programs, strategic documents);
- National Recovery and Resilience Plans;
- Regional and local regulatory documents, development plans etc.

As part of the Common Methodology beside the formal desk and policy research there were also interviews conducted during the period January – June 2021. with the aim to map:

- How AE policies are defined at local level;
- How AE policies are designated at local level;
- What is the implementation process;
- What are the main funding means.

26 personal interviews were carried out (2-5 persons/each partner/in 5 countries): stakeholders and practitioners representing policy makers, internal policy staff, external consultants, development agencies, chamber of commerce, scholars/experts, organisations providing non-formal/formal AE education. The interviews were structured into four sections devoted to specific aspects of local public policy making<sup>3</sup>:

- Policy Trends: How is LLL and AE local policy making shaped and formulated;
- Local views and perception of EU policies in LLL and AE;
- Reflecting EU Strategies in Local AE Policies;
- Qualitative and Quantitative Underpinnings of Local AE Policies.

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<sup>2</sup> Annex 1 contains detailed information about the structure of the country snapshots.

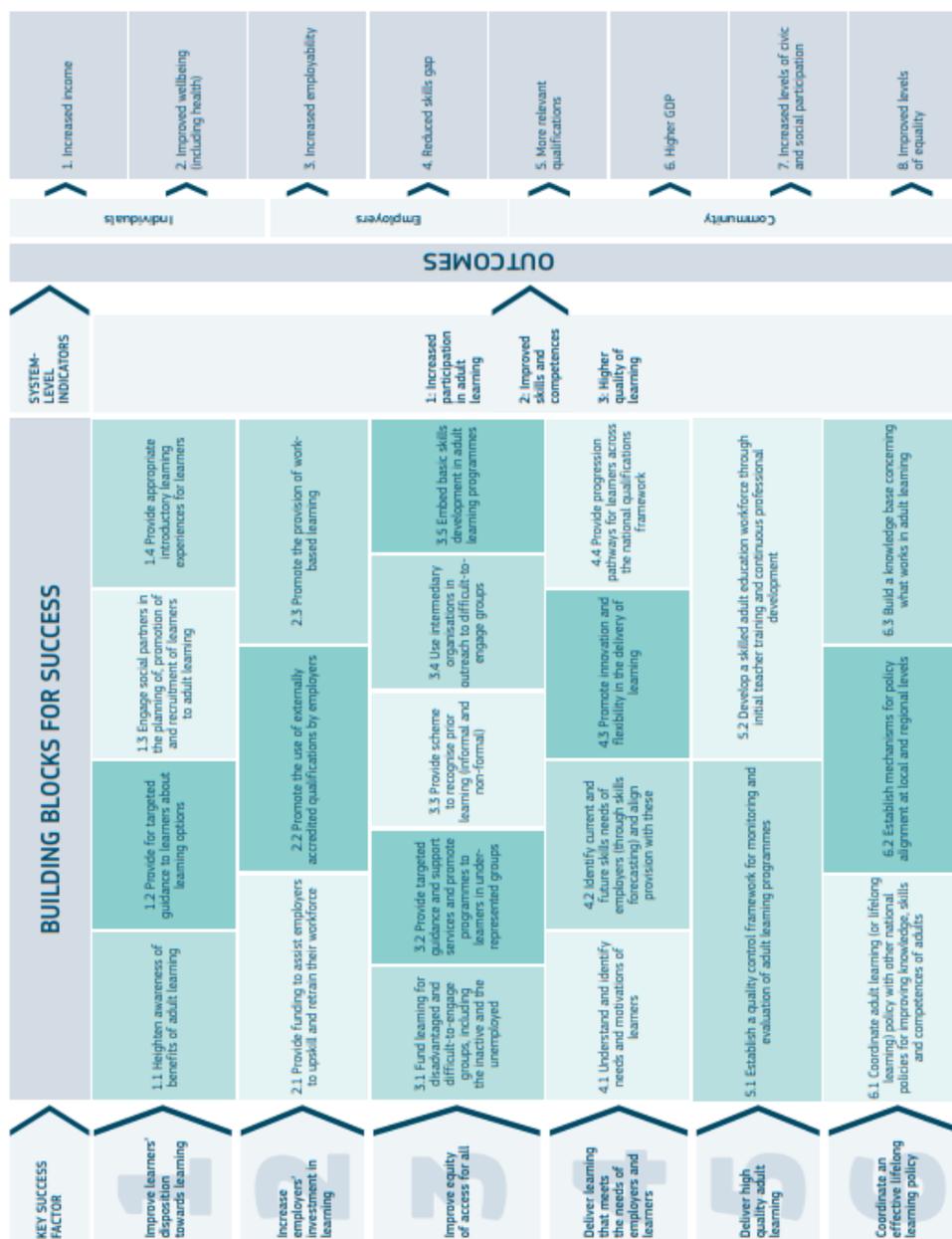
<sup>3</sup> Annex 2 contains detailed information about the common methodology of interviewing.

## Section 1 The European Perspective

In this part of the report, we provide a better sense on what is the current status of AE and adult learning systems in Europe.

The picture emerging from our analysis is of a system that is: stagnant in numbers<sup>4</sup>, highly fragmented and self-referential to local contexts. On one hand, key policy recommendations from the EU for AE and adult learning give great flexibility to stakeholders established at local level; on the other, stakeholders struggle in embedding these same recommendations (Exhibit 1) in their policy framework – limiting their interventions to assuring findings availability, budget control and audit.

Exhibit 1: The Building Blocks for Adult Learning policies<sup>5</sup>



<sup>4</sup> Eurostat, Adult Learning Statistics, last available data: May 2020

<sup>5</sup> Source: Towards more effective adult learning policies: helping adults develop the knowledge and skills they need, EU Commission

The actual deployment of AE programmes relies on semi- or fully independent organisation and third parties deciding themselves for the structure, overall outline and content of the training. This happens on the basis of internal needs-analysis and assessments carried out internally.

When translated from policy to practice (i.e. from the EU ecosystem to local and regional level), the integrity and operative coherence of the framework is jeopardized by a dispersion and fragmentation of shares of responsibilities, common understandings and groups of interest.

Per se, the fact that local AE policies are finetuned based on the specific sectorial and territorial ecosystem, is something expected and desired by the EU institutions. The issue is that, at local level, the whole process is generally implemented with no coherent alignment to the aforementioned framework, making reference instead to internal policy processes. Interestingly, positive outcomes are achieved regardless: this poses some genuine reflections on the untapped potential that could be effectively exploited (achieved) if only local public administration start to integrate and coordinate their actions based on EU's guidelines.

#### How are AE policies defined in Europe?

It should be kept on mind that the EU competence in the education area is just supportive. The main responsibilities for education, including the adult education, rest with the national authorities.

Adult learning is recognised of pivotal priority for the economic and social development of Member States. Numerous actions and initiatives have been implemented at EU dimensions to foster the upskilling and capacity building opportunities of adults. Increasing digital divides and social inequalities within and between EU societies triggered the consideration of a renewed set of skills for adult learners to better (re)integrate their citizen status in current changing economies.

One of the most important pieces of legislation is the **Resolution** adopted by the Council on a **Renewed Agenda for Adult Learning**<sup>6</sup>. The resolution calls for:

1. Enhancing the access opportunity for adults in education and training, both in formal and non-formal settings;
2. Developing new training models that learners-centred, flexible and empowering of learners' self-awareness and self-efficacy;
3. Nurturing and valorising public awareness on the subject as a concrete response to unemployment, underemployment, socio-economic marginalisation;
4. Strengthening at national at international level the formal and non-formal support system of socio-economic operators involved in domains of public relevance;
5. Ensuring the provision of highly qualifying skills and competences and supported/promoted by civil society, third sector and public stakeholders;
6. Promoting work- and experienced training models;
7. Encouraging cooperative models between adult education institutions and other formal institutions operating in different educational settings (i.e. Higher Education);

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<sup>6</sup> Council Resolution on a renewed European agenda for adult learning (2011/C 372/01). Available at: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32011G1220\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32011G1220(01)&from=EN)

8. Empowering the role of social partners and private organization as key agents of innovation and development for new sustainable AE frameworks;
9. Providing senior citizens concrete opportunities for active ageing, prevention of health disease, proactive engagement in culture and societies;
10. Leveraging on AE as a concrete means to foster solidarity and inclusion.

The resolution clearly stems from the roots of **Europe 2020**<sup>7</sup>, a major strategy established at the beginning of the last decade for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

AE falls under “An agenda for new skills and jobs”<sup>8</sup> in which Member States are recommended to “ensure that the competences required to engage in further learning and the labour market are acquired and recognised throughout general, vocational, higher and adult education, including non-formal and informal learning”.

Throughout the last decade, the Council resolution has been complemented by several other major initiatives, namely:

#### **Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways**<sup>9</sup>

In December 2016, the Council published 25 key recommendations (8 of which addressed at the EU Commission) highlighting new key intervention areas to sustain the competitiveness and attractiveness of national AE systems.

These inputs are clustered based on the specific strategic dimensions they belong to:

- Skills assessment: literacy, numeracy and digital skills;
- Three-phase methodology: assessment > tailoring > validation;
- Coordination, partnerships and Stakeholder Management;
- Outreach of targets, guidance and orienteering, establishment of supporting networks;
- Follow up and evaluation.

Overall, these recommendations are aimed to strengthen highly-qualifying training and education provision at national and local levels by encouraging long-standing, trust-based and flexible cooperating models between formal and non-formal operators, civil society representatives, local stakeholders and third sector.

Member states are encouraged in being sensitive to national-related circumstances and ecosystems.

In this regard, the Commission role is to:

- Facilitate the emergence of a transnational collaboration networks – formal and non-formal – among practitioners and policy stakeholders;
- Elaborate new policy proposal that are informed by inputs and assessments from large international institutions (i.e. UNESCO, OECD, etc) so as to tackle also international trends that are of relevance for the European Union;
- Mainstream and promote the availability of EU Funds as a supporting mechanism for flexible, innovative and highly impactful AE programmes at local level;

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<sup>7</sup> Communication from the Commission Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/COMPLETE%20EN%20BARROSO%20%20%20007%20-%20Europe%202020%20-%20EN%20version.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Flagship no. 6

<sup>9</sup> COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 19 December 2016 on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults (2016/C 484/01), Available at: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32016H1224\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32016H1224(01)&from=EN)

- In cooperation with Members States representatives, stock-take and report to the Council results and impacts achieved.

Concerning point no. 4, the first comprehensive transnational report<sup>10</sup> was published by the EU Commission in 2019. The data support the conclusion that the overall phenomenon of AE and adult learning is highly fragmented. At the same time, the EU Commission identified some common traits that pose as challenges and threats to an effective rollout of the recommendation and matching with the expected outcomes:

- In the vast majority of cases, the three basic skills<sup>11</sup> are not directly addressed. On the other hand, greater focus is given to VET and work related-skills for employment and (re)integration in the labour market – which per se is not a negative result, but it is just indicative of the mismatch between policy and practice level;
- The three-steps approach lacks in implementation. A large number of training programmes relies on generic curricula out of the focus of Council’s recommendation. This questions the idea if tailoring guideline is actually putted in practice;
- AE initiatives are not appealing: data suggest that potential targets of adult learning programmes lack of motivation/interest in getting engaged. This might be really an issue of how AE initiatives are marketed and promoted at national and local level, how AE operators target their cohort of reference, design, structure and implement communication plans;
- Numerous funded programmes launched and supported by the EU Commission are specifically dedicated to address the challenges tackled by the upskilling pathway’s Recommendations, namely:
  - [EaSI](#)
  - [European Social Fund \(ESF\)](#)
  - [Erasmus+](#)
  - [European Regional Development Fund \(ERDF\)](#)
  - [Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived \(FEAD\)](#)
  - [European Globalisation Adjustment Fund \(EGF\)](#)
  - [European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development \(EAFRD\)](#)

Evidences from the analysis suggest that grass-root AE programmes are too dependent on the cycle of EU funding opportunities. This is a symptom of the fact that initiatives of such kind are not able yet to trigger a self-sufficient cycle and to nurture long-term plans for sustainability and valorisation.

What followed is a recent Council Conclusion<sup>12</sup> taking-stock of EU Commission’s input and detailing ten other strategic areas in which the Council commits to focus energies and resources.

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<sup>10</sup> COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT, Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults - Taking stock of implementation measures, 2019. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/file\\_import/implementation-report-upskilling-pathways\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/file_import/implementation-report-upskilling-pathways_en.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Literacy, numeracy and digital skills

<sup>12</sup> Council conclusions on the implementation of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults (2019/C 189/04), 2019. Available at: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52019XG0605\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52019XG0605(01)&from=EN)

## ET 2020

The strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) provide to Member States new opportunities to exchange best practices in the field of education and training, advance the policy dialogue in innovative reforms, mainstream case studies of international relevance. The framework is not AE-centered – as being much more oriented toward a LLL approach – but it represents one the most important lighthouse for AE policies and programmes.

### European Skills Agenda<sup>13</sup>

The new European Skills Agenda is a five-years plan to sustain businesses and citizens in transiting into the new post-Covid societies and economies. The plan stems from the ten original pillars of the 2016 Skills Agenda<sup>14</sup> in which the aforementioned Upskilling Pathways represented the very core of the legislative proposal. The new agenda is subdivided in four main domain areas, each of which including specific “Action” to tackle further sub-priorities (Table 2).

#### “Action” to tackle further sub-priorities (Table 2).

Joining forces for a collective effort	Ensuring the right skills for jobs	Supporting people in LLL	Unlocking investments in skills
Action 1: A Pact for Skills	Action 2: Strengthening skills intelligence Action 3: EU support for strategic national upskilling action Action 4: Proposal for a Council Recommendation on vocational education and training (VET) Action 5: Rolling out the European Universities Initiative and upskilling scientists Action 6: Skills to support the twin transitions Action 7: Increasing STEM graduates and fostering entrepreneurial and transversal skills Action 8: Skills for life	Action 9: Initiative on individual learning accounts Action 10: A European approach to micro-credentials Action 11: New Europass platform	Action 12: Improving the enabling framework to unlock Member States’ and private investments in skills

#### Specific targets are agreed for AE, adult learning and low-skilled adults by 2025 (Table 3)

Participation of adults aged 25-64 in learning during the last 12 months (in %)	+50%
Participation of low-qualified adults 25-64 in learning during the last 12 months (in %)	+30%
Share of unemployed adults aged 25-64 with a recent learning experience (in %)	+20%
Share of adults aged 16-74 having at least basic digital skills (in %)	+70%

Overall, available literature sources stress the fact that the efficiency and effectiveness of adult learning initiatives implemented at local and territorial level can be attributed to synergies and dynamics emerging from the coordination of multiple socio-economic agents operating in the system. For the most, policy interventions are aimed to sustain the availability of funding and investments from

<sup>13</sup> European Skills Agenda for Sustainable Competitiveness, Social Fairness and Resilience. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=22832&langId=en>

<sup>14</sup> A NEW SKILLS AGENDA FOR EUROPE. Working together to strengthen human capital, employability and competitiveness (SWD(2016) 195 final). Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52016DC0381&from=EN>

which formal and non-formal AE providers draw monetary funds to tackle and addresses challenges and need-assessment as observed from their ecosystem.

The fact that policy stakeholders tempt to limit their areas of intervention on auditing and budget control, leaves AE providers relatively free to decide themselves what are the most relevant areas of interest for their operative action. In turn, this produces a “drift effect” of the priorities addressed for adult learning at local level from the ones strategically designed by EU institutions.

Council, Parliament and Commission openly incentivise a flexibility principle that allows for strategies and interventions to be better finetuned on the considered context. At the same time, this flexibility should be applied within the same policy frameworks of EU institutions.

Based on that, specific takeaways<sup>15</sup> for local policy makers are as follows:

1. Increasing public awareness on AE opportunities:
  - a. Benefits for economic inclusion;
  - b. Benefits for social inclusion;
2. Increasing investments (financial and not) in adult learning:
  - a. Programmes for workforce development and skills-alliance to new thriving occupations;
3. Increasing access opportunities/removing barriers to training and education:
  - a. Strengthening the role and influence of local support networks both operating in formal and non-formal settings;
  - b. Marketing and engagement plan of marginalised groups;
4. Increasing time- and social relevancy of the training programme offer:
  - a. Tackling labour market needs/opportunities;
  - b. Tackling employer’s needs;
  - c. Tackling personal aspirations;
5. Increasing the quality of the training and education offer:
  - a. Strengthening the validation and recognition of learning outcomes;
6. Increasing the cooperation-axis with other education and training settings
  - a. Engaging a wider range of social partners (i.e. Academics) in the definition and deployment of training programmes.

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<sup>15</sup> An in-depth analysis of adult learning policies and their effectiveness in Europe. European Commission, Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, 2015. Available at: <https://op.europa.eu/it/publication-detail/-/publication/c8c38dc9-89d0-11e5-b8b7-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

## Section 2.1 Trends and dynamics of policy making

### Relevant trends and social dynamics pertaining AE and LLL

In this section we give an overview about relevant trends and social dynamics pertaining AE and LLL based on country snapshots. Project partners were analysing recent changes in AE policies and focuses on national and local level (e.g. due to population ageing, digitalisation, unemployment, migration, crime/safety, COVID). They put questions whether there has been more / less interest from policy makers, more / less demand from users; growing or declining interest in specific topics, like the currently adopted national Recovery and Resilience Plans, qualitative/quantitative indicators, funding means.

While analysing AE policies and focuses on national level what we can state, **like in Italy**, is that the perception of “Adult Education” at policy and practice level is very broad – usually referred as a synonymous of Lifelong Learning and with Vocational Education and Training. **In some countries like in Spain** the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports is responsible for the general regulatory framework however there is no specific national plan aimed at adults acquiring basic skills, in a flexible way, outside the regulated educational system. A change in attitude or trends can be detected, but the difficulties are in the concretion of these measures and the procedures that must be carried out for their implementation.

**In Romania and Slovakia** at national level several new strategic documents addressing AE/LLL appeared or are expected to appear soon, showing an increase of interest on the side of policy makers. In the frame of National Reform Programs in both countries clearer objectives related to adult education are defined with the priority to strengthen population participation in lifelong learning process to facilitate transitions and labour market mobility. The key challenge remains setting up a strategy covering all current issues and clear governance system for the area of adult education. In Romania a national strategy for continuous and adult education (2021-2027), **in Slovakia** the new Strategy on LLL is expected to be elaborated soon, and the Proposal for Priorities of the Partnership Agreement 2021-2027<sup>16</sup> in objective on Social Slovakia reflects the priority Quality and Inclusive Education. The expected results include, among others, also increased participation of adults in lifelong learning, and also increased number of persons who raised their education level through second chance programmes.<sup>17</sup>

In **Hungary** there has been a shift in policy orientation in AE, due to growing unemployment. The Hungarian Government has adopted the Vocational Training 4.0 strategy for vocational training and adult training<sup>18</sup>. However, national policy on AE is simply VET oriented and has neglected quite many initiatives EU-member states have mainly followed on the basis of international documents, research findings and recommendation from UIL, OECD, ILO and from EU Commission. In this respect the

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<sup>16</sup> <https://digitalnakoalicia.sk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Na%CC%81vrh-priori%CC%81t-pre-PD-SR-na-roky-2021-2027-29.9.2020.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> The introduction of ILAs is included in the Implementation Plan for the National Programme of Development of Education from 2018. The Plan includes the piloting of financial support scheme based on individual education accounts of EUR 200 for non-formal education, and 25% tax base deductions for employers on expenses for training. The timeframe is 2020+. Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports of Slovakia (Národný program rozvoja výchovy a vzdelávania a Implementačný plan), <https://www.minedu.sk/17786-sk/narodny-program-rozvoja-vychovy-a-vzdelavania>

<sup>18</sup> 11/2020. (II. 7.) Government Decree on the implementation of the Adult Education Act. (2020)

Hungarian government does not show interest in raising participation in learning programmes<sup>19</sup> to be developed for senior citizens, migrants, young adults, women and for other members of vulnerable groups.

In spite of the fact that some national plans propose a very ambitious target (e.g. Agenda for competences in Romania aims for participation rate of 10% by 2025) the overall participation rates in AE remains low (e.g. in Romania 1.3% according to the Education and Training Monitor 2020). It is due to several factors, like accessibility of training (time, place or finance-wise), forms of training. In order to foster greater participation in adult learning three main factors should be considered according to the **OECD Skills Strategy for Slovakia (2020)**<sup>20</sup>:

- Equipping younger and older generations with the right skills for the future;
- Ensuring inclusiveness in the development of skills;
- Strengthening the governance of skills policies.

Most of the national level policies and initiatives seem to target low level qualification and training programs addressed to the low skilled including vulnerable groups.

The pandemic has also an effect on ALE policies. **In Spain** the Covid-19 have been doomed to unemployment, and for example the hotel and leisure industry had to be reconverted. **In Romania** ad-hoc private initiatives/online trainings were put in place by training providers, however due to the pandemic context there was a lower demand for training from potential beneficiaries and an obvious uncertainty for citizens to be part of a training group. **In Hungary** the government has changed attitude towards AE due to following its own approach to continuing vocational education and training (CVET) for adults in a limited format trying to follow some technical and vocational education and training (TVET) trends and automatization, digital transformation, and its impact on vocational changes.

COVID 19 brought attention on digital skills development. Most of the national Recovery and Resilience Plans also contain that element. The Agenda for Competences for Romania for 2025 lists digital competences as a priority for connectivity and the labour market, as well as among key competences for life. Digitization of the learning process has also accelerated after the pandemic. Among the new topics it also worth to mention the green skills and mental health.

**The National Recovery and Resilience Plans also define some objectives related to ALE policies, but a different way giving large scope. The Romanian Plan** (adopted in April 2021) does not explicitly address or mention ‘adult education’, providing only some ‘hints’, e.g. ‘78% of adult Romanian population is financially uneducated’, ‘...less than 60% of adults used the internet on a daily basis in 2018’, ‘...very low level of training opportunities for adults is representing an important problem...’ **The Slovak Plan** aims at catching-up with the other EU countries and bases this process on the upgrade of the human capital and innovation-friendly environment. The draft version of the **Hungarian National**

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<sup>19</sup> The adult training expert system require extremely complex conditions. To become an adult training expert in Hungary, the candidate should has a degree in one of the following fields: administrative training, law enforcement or military training, a lecturer/ teacher in pedagogy, a humanities teacher in pedagogy, a psychologist, a behavioral analyst or andragogy. In terms of language, a language teacher qualification is required. Moreover, the adult training expert must have at least five years' professional experience as an expert in education, organization or management of education, quality management, programming, proofreading, measurement and evaluation or adult education.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/skills/centre-for-skills/OECDSkillsStrategySlovakRepublicReportSummaryEnglish.pdf>

Recovery and Flexibility Plans published so far emphasises future support for the disadvantaged, low-skilled, long-term unemployed, support for digitization.

Adults participate in learning actions for various reasons: to updating knowledge in a field to improve their career prospects, to develop personally or professionally, to remain competitive in the labour market. In Hungary there is a significant gap between those who are better educated and those who have low levels of qualifications. The former group is much more inclined to take part in any form of training.

It is also very important to have a look on the financial aspects, which basically influence the formulation of ALE policies. **In Italy** the majority of AE actions are financed by the European Social Fund. **In Spain** the lack of transparency clouds the question of whether investments are being prioritised in an appropriate way. Almost all of the funds for training are transferred to training providers and employers. European funding has allowed many AE stakeholders to launch experimental actions (pilot projects) that try to respond to the needs of vulnerable adult groups. **In Romania** most of the free programmes depend on financing through various projects (mainly under the framework of the Human Capital Operational Programme and Erasmus+). **They seem to be designed according to the priorities of those financing mechanisms rather than following a specific need analysis at local level.** In **Slovakia** the whole sector of education, at all levels, is under-funded and relies heavily on EU funds. The financing of the AE is mainly dependent on ESF. The funds in the new programming period and the funds from the Recovery and Resilience Facility are an opportunity for much needed reforms and investments. **In Hungary** the funding system for adult education is changing. The full new financing system has not yet emerged in practice. More flexibility and longer periods of financing are needed. The introduction of adult education programs is funded through grants from the government office - if there is such support.

[How are the AE policies defined at local level? How are the AE policies implemented at local level?](#)

The project partners analysed the dynamics and process that happens before the definition and implementation of AE policies in the national ecosystem. They were interested in how these policies are designed and what kind of inputs local AE policy makers rely on to structure the plans and if there is no specific AE policy, where can the AE elements be found (social policies, employment policies, economic policies – skills development, digitisation policy, cultural policy). It was also very important to identify how EU agendas in the domain of AE have been (or have not been) reflected by local AE authorities. They give an overview of the process in which local AE programmes are implemented, to identify who is in charge of deploying AE programmes, whether training needs analyses were made in order to design the AE programmes according to the demand of the beneficiaries. A very important point was the identification of the relevant stakeholders and non-formal support networks.

The results of the desk research confirmed that elements of adult education are difficult to find at regional and local level, **AE dedicated policies or strategies designed by a local authority could not be really identified.** In **Hungary and Slovakia** they are virtually non-existent, only some specifically formulated activities and goals for the improvement of adult education can be found. There is no 'tradition' of policy making at local level neither **in Romania**, the process remains highly centralised, in national AE/LLL - related policies, documents, and action plans, references to local authorities can be found, **but rather with attributions in implementation and support than in policy design.** Since local

authorities are involved in AE activities mainly through European projects, concrete references to AE or LLL can be found for example within the Strategies for Integrated Local Development, or Strategies for Integrated Urban Development. This is also why other actors playing a significant role in strategic development and policy making at local level are the Regional Development Agencies, Territorial/Local Employment Agencies and School Inspectorates. **In Slovakia** the state can impose an obligation on a local authority, but only by a law. Since there was no such law issued in the field of AE or lifelong learning, the main strategic development documents similarly to Romania are regional plans of social and economic development<sup>21</sup> and/or programme of town development. These plans reflect the EU and national strategies in **individual areas**, however they depend largely on the competences that the authorities have in a certain area. The development plan today serves primarily as a formal strategic document to back the involvement of a local government in calls financed from European Structural and Investment Funds and the state budget of the Slovak Republic and are not really a true development tool.

The main elements of the modernised cohesion policy after 2020 give some floor to regional authorities to bring up the adult education policy, plan some measures and secure financing. AE elements are usually not explicitly reflected within local policies, although EU agendas are highly reflected into the concrete activities implemented at local levels, **like in Romania** – as most of them depend on EU funds and therefore they are designed in accordance with the priorities of funding programs. **In Spain** the situation seems to be similar, AE policies are adapted according to the users, their profiles and their needs. In general, AE entities adapt EU policies and strategies in their AE policies and initiatives **indirectly due to lack of knowledge**. In Italy **a total ignorance of EU strategies can be observed** at the local and the municipality level.

A general problem is also a missing **common coherent framework for needs analysis** at local levels and **no primary data are gathered from direct beneficiaries** what sort of training programmes they actually need.

**In Spain** many AE entities exercise political and social influence. The Autonomous Governments are responsible for the implementation of the AE training initiatives, in the framework of **State regulations**. Nevertheless, tensions between regional/national governments and the State mean that some policy developments have not been implemented in some territories.

**In Italy** the national network of policy and public stakeholders responsible for the efficacy, innovation and overall performance of the national AE and LLL **ecosystem is very wide**. Despite the numerous policy interventions at national level, the great number of stakeholders involved and aimed at increasing the attractiveness and efficacy of AE programmes, the Italian adult learning ecosystem is still **stagnant and highly fragmented**. Since 2012 CPIAs (Provincial Centres for Adult Education) occupy the “frontline” of AE and LLL provision<sup>22</sup>. Regions and local public authorities are responsible for the alignment and consistency of local/regional AE programmes to EU objectives and framework, but the

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<sup>21</sup> Regional Development of the Slovak Republic by 2030 mentions the educational level as one of the important factors in the competitiveness of the region. Municipalities and cities are obliged to implement this strategy through their economic and social development plans. The adult education activities are often referred to as activities "to support the lifelong learning system and lifelong guidance", but are not always implemented.

<sup>22</sup> Based on Law no. 296/2006 art. 1 paragraph 636.

way in which these programmes are actually designed, developed and deployed fall under the faculty and responsibility of CPIAs. In principle, they are **receptive of national recommendations that are EU-informed, as such it is possible to assume that CPIAs operative framework is compliant with EU priorities as well**, but in practice this is a much less automatic effect, and still **institutionalised relations are much less common than ad-hoc cooperation programmes** implemented to carry out specific initiatives.

In **Romania** the main actors **implementing** AE policies at local/regional levels are the Local/Territorial Employment Agencies, Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Regional Development Agencies, specialized institutions providing continuous professional development to certain professional categories, cultural organizations such as public libraries, second chance schools, private providers (NGOs and SMEs). **Each provider is promoting its training offer individually, no commonly promoted database could be found.**

In terms of dynamics, the entire Hungarian adult education process is shifting towards vocational training centres. The quality-based adult education institutions operating on a market basis have either ceased to exist or can operate with minimum efficiency. The adult education offer that can be shaped at the local level is determined by processing information obtained from companies.

In most of the cases, since **the whole AE ecosystem is fragmented**, entities of the **third sector and civil society play a key role in adult education and training**. Most entities interviewed agreed that **the policies would have to start from a consultation with the third sector**, since the training needs are detected in the field work. In spite of this evidence **training and AE needs analysis carried out could not really be identified by directly reaching the local community members**. Some analyses were done on a case-by-case basis e.g. by some Hungarian adult education companies but they implement them through their own network of contacts according to their interests.

**In the absence of specific policies** on AE at the local level, we were interested to learn more about **individual activities** carried out, like festivals, education activities of museums and libraries. We found that developing non-formal and informal education opportunities for the local communities, developing competences of the community members, promoting volunteering and active ageing are on the top of their agendas. New topics and forms of AE and LLL emerged, which can also be linked to a pandemic situation: digital skills, climate change (sustainability issues), civic education (citizenship education) and health education, courses for migrants, European and national values, addressing the needs of those at risk of exclusion. They however did not yet find their way into the agendas of local decision-makers.

## Section 2.2 UNESCO Learning Cities

Applying for the UNESCO "Global Learning City Award" is of great importance in the life of a town, as it is an initiative affecting the entire community, which has a fundamental impact on all the processes that enable knowledge-based development. Local governments play a decisive role in all of this, because without their commitment the initiative cannot lead to success.

As stated in the introductory part of the report, the low participation rates of adults in learning activities are seen across a number of EU countries. In many cases it applies that increasing participation in adult learning requires a policy framework that is well co-ordinated. In order to encourage adults to participate in learning and education over their life course, the importance of adult learning, as well as a clear definition of what it is, needs to be acknowledged across all levels of government and society.

The UNESCO program on learning cities can be an incentive to make a specific action plan that will lead to relevant results. Therefore in this section we present the good example of the Hungarian city of Pécs.

The Hungarian project partner, "Nevelők Háza Egyesület" (NHE) is based in the City of Pécs. The town received the UNESCO "Global Learning City Award" in 2017, which was won by a Hungarian and a Central European town for the first time. An international jury chooses to award towns, where the development of education and lifelong learning is outstanding and "tangible." The communication published by the UNESCO on Pécs points out, that the city created a platform that can facilitate and significantly contribute to the further development of education and learning. With the prize being awarded, the city of Pécs wishes to continue with the community and city development, that enables a multi-ethnic settlement and home to a number of confessions and remain an attractive place for learning, and wishes to contribute to the progress of educational innovation, be it formal or extracurricular.

### What is the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC)?

**The UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities is an international policy-oriented network providing inspiration, know-how and best practice.**

Learning cities at all stages of development can benefit greatly from sharing ideas with other cities, as solutions for issues that arise. The Network supports the achievement of all seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 4 ('Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all') and SDG 11 ('Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable'). The UNESCO GNLC supports and improves the practice of lifelong learning in the world's cities by promoting policy dialogue and peer learning among member cities; forging links; fostering partnerships; providing capacity development; and developing instruments to encourage and recognize progress made in building learning cities.

### Why learning cities?

**Lifelong learning lays the foundation for sustainable social, economic and environmental development.**

The idea of learning throughout life is deeply rooted in all cultures. However, it is becoming increasingly relevant in today's fast-changing world, where social, economic and political norms are constantly

being redefined. Studies have shown that lifelong learners – citizens who acquire new knowledge, skills and attitudes in a wide range of contexts – are better equipped to adapt to changes in their environments. Lifelong learning and the learning society therefore have a vital role to play in empowering citizens and effecting a transition to sustainable societies.

While national governments are largely responsible for creating strategies for building learning societies, lasting change requires commitment at the local level. A learning society must be built province by province, city by city, and community by community.

We consider this topic as an important source of inspiration for local policy making and recommend including it into the learning module and training resources on the LEAP platform.

### **Learning cities: Drivers of inclusion and sustainability**

Today, more than half of the world’s population – 3.5 billion people – lives in cities; this is projected to increase to 5 billion by 2030. Cities around the world face acute challenges in managing rapid urbanization, which has a severe impact on ensuring quality education for all.

A learning city enables people of all ages, from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, to benefit from inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities.

### **What is a learning city?**

Driven by the principle of inclusion, learning cities advance policies and practices that foster sustainable development, notably through lifelong learning programmes that promote equity, cohesion and peace. When local governments empower communities and social actors to engage in the implementation of lifelong learning strategies and programmes, they sponsor the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

More specifically, a learning city is one that:

- Effectively mobilizes resources in every sector to promote inclusive learning, from basic to higher education;
- Revitalizes learning in families and communities;
- Facilitates learning for and in the workplace;
- Extends the use of modern learning technologies;
- Enhances quality and excellence in learning;
- Fosters a culture of learning throughout life.

In doing so, a learning city supports individual empowerment and social inclusion, economic development and cultural prosperity, and sustainable development.

### **How do learning cities support equity and inclusion?**

To support equity and inclusion, learning cities for example:

- Promote education and learning opportunities for all, in particular for vulnerable groups who are not in formal schooling or training, enabling them to acquire literacy and other basic/vocational skills and participate in continuing education;
- Offer online learning courses that allow people to attend free lectures on a range of topics relevant to their local community;

- Establish migrant colleges, enabling migrant workers to obtain professional qualifications, thereby helping them to integrate into society;
- Promote intergenerational learning initiatives, encouraging children and their caregivers together to learn together;
- Provide career guidance, particularly for women, to encourage them to pursue higher qualifications that will allow them to assume leadership positions;
- Set up mobile libraries, providing reading opportunities for all, especially people with disabilities, older adults and preschool children;
- Make use of cultural centres that serve as learning sites, thereby bringing together culture, art and learning, and hosting projects run jointly by local educational and cultural institutions as a means of enabling people to access celebrate their cultural identities and to promote intercultural tolerance;
- Establish schemes that mobilize trained volunteers to encourage residents at risk of isolation (e.g. older people, people with disabilities) to participate in cultural activities, workshops, physical activities, etc.;
- Create ‘civic participation networks’ that encourage citizens to take part in the city’s decision-making processes, supported by the use of social media and modern technologies.

#### [How to build a learning city?](#)

Building a learning city is a collective and continuing journey. It requires a concrete action plan with strong political leadership and steadfast commitment; participation and involvement of all stakeholders; diverse celebratory events charged with enthusiasm and inspirations; easy accessibility and enjoyable experiences for all citizens; a proper monitoring and evaluation of progress; and sustainable and secure funding.

#### **Further resources:**

[UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities | UIL](#)

[International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities – ICCAR \(unesco.org\)](#)

[PASCAL International Observatory | A worldwide perspective on local possibilities... \(pascalobservatory.org\)](#)

[Learning Cities Networks | A worldwide perspective on local possibilities... \(pascalobservatory.org\)](#)

[ASEM LLL HUB](#)

[Guni Reports | Guni Network](#)

[Tanuló Fesztivál 2020 \(ckh.hu\)](#)

Educatio, XXV. évf. (2016) 2. sz. /Tanuló városok, tanuló közösségek/. pp. 161–308. [Educatio \(iif.hu\)](#)

### Section 3 A Bottom-up Perspective

While not statistically and scientifically representative, the interviews provide interesting insights and perspectives on the dynamics of AE. Policy making at local levels directly engaging the participants in the system of policy making for AE at local level greatly complements the desk research efforts carried out by the partners. Those interviews do provide a useful perspective and contribute to the results of the literature review and analysis of policy documents also providing anecdotal evidence to the trends and dynamics of local policy making in the field of AE.

#### Policy Trends: how is LLL and AE local policy making shaped and formulated?

Learning needs of adults are constantly changing and adapting to the existing economic and social context. Initiation of policy action needs awareness, relevant information on the funds available, legal background, case studies to relate to, stakeholder collaboration. The **proactive groups of local responsible citizens** who create **progressive community initiatives** need to be identified and supported.

One of the main focuses in AE and LLL policy making is to give everyone the opportunity to improve their skills, to succeed in the job market, and to maintain constructive relationships in society. Still there is a gap between those who are better educated and those who have low levels of qualifications, the former group is much more inclined to take part in any form of training.

**In Hungary**, due to growing unemployment, there is a limited interest towards non-vocational adult education and reduced focus to VET-related trainings directed through county VET-centres for unemployed adults. On the other hand, as the population is ageing, local policies emphasize developing opportunities for healthy, active and prosperous ageing. Older people are increasingly receptive to new forms of learning, not only as passive receivers but also as active participants in the process. The motto for the development of lifelong learning competences is **“Active for a lifetime”**.

We have still a lot of to do in these fields, the topics are not well developed, even **the term adult education is not widely used or understood**. **A lot of residents are disconnected from civic life**, in Hungary 95 % of the people do not take part in any of the civic groups, 55 % do not find any interest at all in public activities in spite of the fact, that civil society groups and voluntary formations try to maintain their services and programmes, and small communities and micro-regions have become very proactive during the past 25 years.

On the one hand, **In Romania** changes could be experienced in EA policies **and a changed attitude of decision makers, policies and / or civil society towards LLL / AE, due to global trends with special regard** to the context of COVID. On the other hand there was a lower demand for training from potential beneficiaries requiring **adaptability to blended-learning programs**, which combine type training. classic (in the classroom) with online training.

**In Slovakia** the local governments with their limited capacities focus mainly on **the obligations stemming from the laws**. When planning they are mainly **inspired by the regional development plan, a document that enables a municipality to apply for projects funded by European funds**. A positive element is that while designing **a new measure, they often look at examples from other towns, and use some experience from abroad** in the town. **UNESCO documents on Learning Cities** were useful, as well as **the process of applying for the European Cultural Capital by town of Trnava**. The **process**

**was participative** and the communication, preparation process, networking were **inspiring** for the initiative on Learning Trnava. Another very interesting initiative in towns is the use of the „**participative budget**“, i.e., involving the people **in deciding what projects will be financed** in the town.

During the last few years **new topics and forms of AE and LLL** emerged due to the changing global trends in which the COVID plays a key role, need for community learning has increased especially because of the pandemic:

- Digital skills, computer literacy, cyber security, financial literacy;
- Health preservation;
- Education for sustainable quality life, preparing for quality old age;
- Environmental education and protection, green responsibilities like waste management;
- Training actions aimed at the vulnerable and marginalized groups, as an indispensable condition for their integration and social participation;
- Active citizenship: methodological-scientific discussions, lectures (e.g. Senior Learning Academies), intergenerational and intercultural learning, training seminars on hot and current issues, like inclusion, voluntary activities, community learning, family life, citizen and senior safety, migration;
- COVID, materialized seminars and training workshops.

Local views and perception of EU policies in LLL and AE: how much the local stakeholders (policy makers, but also the NGOs, users, etc.) are aware and inspired by the EU policies in LLL and AE

One of the main ideas behind the EU policies in AE and LLL is to **the decrease of the deficit of qualified labour force** in some fields. To promote innovation and reform in education, quality standards and professional competences must be highlighted.

The **European Agenda** is the central initiative of EU policies in the field of adult education, it ensures the analysis and enhancement of the educational offer and guide national and political choices. The **Europe 2020 strategy** promotes smart, sustainable growth, by improving the level of education and training. Beside these documents **the new Skills Agenda** and the **potential formation of a new European Agenda on Adult Learning** were mentioned as instrumental to promote initiatives upon adult learning in the new budgetary period of the EU in between 2021 and 2027.

Unfortunately, **EU documents are not particularly mentioned by the local stakeholders as leading instruments** shaping the future directions, only the funding possibilities are mentioned. Local authorities **do not really follow EU policies**, just when a certain project is drafted. The problem is also that typically **there is nobody in the local government office who would deal with ALE**.

An interesting additional point was raised by the **Italian partner**. Because the majority of AE actions are financed by the European Social Fund, and managed at regional or ministry level, **it is difficult to understand the principle of subsidiarity which starts from the EU cohesion policy and reaches the AE centres** instead of going the other direction.

**Most important EU documents, programmes, initiatives mentioned in the context of AE and LLL are the following:**

- The European Agenda is the central initiative of EU policies
- Europe 2020 Strategy
- Education & Training 2020
- EU policies for guidance and lifelong practice
- European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning
- European Network for Lifelong Career Policy
- Key competences for lifelong learning
- Skills Development Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults
- 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
- Erasmus + program
- The Unesco Learning Cities Program
- Global Network of Learning Cities
- Cultural Capital of Europe
- Green City
- Healthy City
- Accessible City

[Reflecting EU Strategies in Local AE Policies: how local stakeholders reflect and translate EU policies and strategies into local initiatives and policies](#)

As stated in the previous sections, in most of the countries we could observe at local level the **ignorance of EU policies**. Local government does not feel the need to deal with LLL or ALE, there are no people at municipalities who follow the ALE or LLL agenda, the **cooperation of towns and regions should be developed, networks among the different sectors do not work well**, often **unaware of the opportunities in AE**. Still there are positive efforts. In Romania the adaptation of EU policies and strategies in LLL and EA policies aims at realising **quality training programs and achieving the objective of national policies**.

**The adaptation of EU policies and strategies in LLL and EA policies and initiatives is reflected in the provision of training programs** tailored to labour market requirements for new skills or specialization, so that adults can be competitive in the labour market, **reducing the gaps in skills or specialization**.

The interview subjects highlighted that it is not possible to set a new policy without data. **They would welcome more and better data, case studies, examples of good practice** (e.g. from other towns), guidelines for doing certain things (eg planning of policies) and then training how to apply the guidelines. The state offices should issue such guidelines. An overview of up-to-date skills and information in the field of adult education and lifelong learning would be also beneficial.

**In the interviews** there were many complaints on the local authorities that did not require the staff to go to training, and that **often the quality of offered training was low**. In addition, the **individual AE providers** would welcome **if they had access to good practice examples** that they would adapt for

local conditions. The problem with training often is that the **general training cannot cover all the specificities of local environment, and this decreases the benefit for the participants.**

Speaking of AE and LLL, we can state that **the area is lacking in financial support.** Funding from public and European funds is essential, but there are very few calls for projects, **funding programmes should be more flexibles and reactive. Beside a longer periods of financing,** more transparency with regard to spending such funds would also be needed.

The AE and LLL programs and initiatives are mainly financed by the **European Social Fund**, but Erasmus+ projects (KA2 and KA3 projects in the field of Adult Education), Norwegian Fund, Visegrad Funds also play a key role in financing. The Erasmus+ projects deal with, amongst several dimensions, professional development, enhancement of community learning, active and global citizenship, basic skills development and learning cities. **In Italy** at the local level, adult education is mainly promoted through the involvement of people in the Erasmus+ AE mobility actions.

There is an interesting list of the main elements of the **Romanian projects** co-financed from the European Social Fund through the Human Capital Operational Program 2014-2020:

- Increasing the quality of educational services and access to them through reintegration into education and training;
- The social and economic integration of people belonging to vulnerable groups;
- Carrying out mentoring and direct support actions for vocational training participants;
- Encouraging social entrepreneurship / social economy initiatives;
- Development and implementation of integrated measures for what consist of Second Chance programs.

The importance of public and private funding, based on **public-private partnership, through funding** and co-financing was also mentioned. According to some, a larger budget could allow a **more effective communication. It would be really important for ALE to be appreciated in the society,** something like national marketing for ALE is needed.

[Qualitative and Quantitative Underpinnings of Local AE Policies: what measures local policy makers, while developing their policies/programmes, have or use](#)

When developing any policy or initiative, quantitative and qualitative elements are also considered.

The most common quantitative indicators which were mentioned: an analysis of expenditure funds, number of trainings, library equipment, programs introduced, consultation hours, number of participants, number of trainees and trainers, number of equipment, number of course hours, number of course materials, number of programs provided, number of persons certified.

As for the qualitative elements, methods were much more diverse. This is completely understandable since this is a much more abstract concepts including categories like improved social inclusion, enhanced citizenship which are very hard to measure.

**In Italy** the quality policy was activated within the CPIAs. They use both quantitative tools, like questionnaires, checklists for systematic observations and qualitative tools like interviews, focus groups, diaries and observation grids.

**In Spain** as a first step, when planning an AE intervention, initiative or policies, tools such as checklists that encompass planning and evaluation of results, the results of studies of emerging markets, new professions, trends in the labour market, study cases and best practices, among others, are used, especially at the national level (depending on the funds origin though). AE stakeholders also use documents related to measuring the impact and evaluation of training actions such as productivity indicators, common immediate result indicators or *Participa1420* questionnaires used by European funds. Especially relevant is the White Paper on education and training that gave rise to support of Second Chance Schools for young people up to 29 years of age.

**In Romania** focus groups, guides, case studies, examples of other initiatives, individual study for organizing and systematizing information are often used. There is a regular monitoring of the quality indicators like **increased social inclusion, more active citizenship**, the degree of satisfaction resulting from participating in the courses. Qualitative analysis consists of evaluating and measuring the impact of actions taken.

**In Slovakia** in case of education activities indicators are not really used. It seems that the word "**indicator**" got into negative context due to ESIF funded projects which required various, **not always clear indicators**.

**In Hungary** new elements in quantitative underpinning were the consideration of the time necessary to be spent while developing a programme, space of learning, but all in all more quality indicators were mentioned: sense of belonging, self-worth, hopefulness, learning leading to the development of skills and knowledge, awareness and critical thinking, more trustful relation, more credibility, willingness to cooperate. All these factors aim at orientation to quality development of provision, methodology, curriculum, monitoring, research, and development which are factors of quality in a wider dimension. Speaking about quality elements another dimension was also revealed: the human focus, enhancing equity, inclusion, equality, and participation especially for those who may have difficulties in learning or in attending learning activities.

#### Section 4 Recommendations for Intellectual Output 3

Based on the findings of IO2, it is important and useful to dedicate a chapter to the recommendations that prepare the next stage of the project, IO3: “AE Policy Making Tools for Local Authorities“. The IO3 aims to enhance the understanding, adoption and integration of EU priorities, strategies and programmes as well as national strategies based thereof in the field of Policy Making for AE (to bridge the gap between EU policies and their reception at local/regional level).

Within the framework of IO3, the project creates training contents and accompanying resources (Toolkit), which not only collect good practices, but also will contain examples and cases, guidelines, and glossary.

The list below contains the most important recommendations in this context:

- Consider using the The Building Blocks for Adult Learning policies from the EU Commission document *Towards more effective adult learning policies: helping adults develop the knowledge and skills they need* to organise the information in the platform;
- The adult education and learning policies need to be explained “from scratch” as the local authorities are not aware of them;
- The Toolkit should be renamed to Studykit to reflect the point above;
- The EU policies on education and related issues should be explained, as well as the way how they are adopted on the EU level, and by whom they are adopted;
- Explain the related EU / international initiatives like Green Cities, Sustainable Cities, Healthy Cities, Cultural Cities or Smart Cities and how they are linked to Learning Cities;
- Collect more materials on Learning Cities (the UNESCO initiative) as it seems to be the only concrete practical example in the adult learning and education area;
- Compose a glossary and explain notions like LLL, VET, AE / ALE;
- Emphasise the topics of green, digital and civic competences;
- Ensure that the area of adult learning and education is presented in its fullness, ie that also simple community activities can and often have educational or awareness-raising elements;
- Stress the benefits of adult learning.

## Conclusions and Takeaways

Having scrutinized the recent developments and evolution of AE and LLL with a special attention to local and regional dimensions, we aim at pointing out the following conclusions.

**AE and LLL is not sufficiently defined and recognised** as a stand-alone policy, **the term adult education is not widely used or understood**. Often there is a lack of political consensus about the fundamental building blocks of the educational system as such. Sometimes we feel that **AE is a lost or rather to say forgotten child separated from public education, higher education and VET**. We could also establish that still most attention is paid to education and training for employment, not so much for civic or interest education. There were no concrete examples of local cooperation, networking partnerships for adult learning and education identified.

There is **no real 'tradition' of policy making at local level**, the process remains mainly centralised, local authorities are not heard by the central authorities. The procedures are mainly **over regulated**, but at the same time AE policies are **not linked necessarily to other policies** (social, economic, integration). National level does not sufficiently communicate with the lower levels about the adult learning and education issues. Even if many initiatives (policy papers and strategies) are available at EU or national levels, there is not a sufficient response from lower levels. It would be beneficial to create coordination bodies at different levels of government, in order to improve the common understanding - between companies, training providers and the government - of skills needs.

The data at local level on education levels and needs are missing, as well as the data from direct beneficiaries. For the future, money should be also spent for the **promotion of public policies based on prior research**, rigorously substantiated. It must be an essential element in **providing quality results with a positive impact on the lives of citizens**.

The problem is also that often the local **strategic plans haven't been translated into a set of objectives** and indicators that can be monitored and reviewed, so the assessment of progress and ensuring the accountability of the stakeholders is very slim. Practitioners need to understand better the importance of adult education and the needs. For this, a wide analysis needs to be done and then the results will support a more effective and efficient strategic planning. The missing focus on a strategic, long-term, and "intimate" vision seems to have negative impacts also on other important management functions and lead to a phenomenon of organisational anarchy.

Local policy makers and AE practitioners indicated that **EU and national policies are too complex for their realities**, too vague, too distant. They would prefer something that is more engrained in their territories and realities, something "simpler" to design and "faster" to implement. As a first step simple tools, primarily examples and case-study-based training would be needed.

There is a **lack of synergies** on national and local level, local policy making in AE is left to the initiative of the policy maker, it is not coordinated and is fragmented, outside of a more global framework. Even if local authorities would like to be more efficient and effective in their strategic planning, the coordination is challenging. There are some efforts to link educational authorities' lifelong learning policies at either the state level or regional/national level but often due to the political tensions between the diverse levels of the administration it becomes extremely complicated. This lack of coordination can lead to the duplication of some initiatives as well as gaps in the delivery of others.

In spite of the fact that statistics indicate that, although the number of people accessing to AE and LLL increased from the beginning of the last decade, it is still below the EU average in the countries we observed. Unfortunately, often there is a lack of interest in adult education from citizens, even if training opportunities are available, 'marketing' seems to be ineffective. More awareness-raising campaign is needed on the benefits of learning for individuals as well as for communities.

In order to raise participation amongst adult learners in local and regional environments, it is necessary to improve several critical conditions so as to realise social inclusion through adult learning. Better governance and local-regional planning must include **a wider spectrum of educational and training programmes** so as to incorporate both VET and non-vocational adult learning for community development. Setting up a local/regional AE centre is vital in order to develop and provide adult learning services for learners who would like to develop their skills and competences both in vocational and in non-vocational aspects. The lack of coordination impedes the creation of a learning culture outside the walls of the school.

An important common focal point during the interviews was **the quality of the trainings and services**. Improvement should be materialized e.g., in diversification of authorized training programs, which provide participants with the skills required in the labour market, supporting the unemployed through **counselling and financial incentives**. A larger budget could also help training providers in **developing innovative training programs**. Local authorities typically support community (cultural, sport) activities and initiatives which are also a part of (informal) adult learning, but at the same time neither Covid 19 related issues, nor the topics related to environment, digital skills, health issues are not yet largely included in the education and training plans. Another problem is that the trainings and activities under EU funded projects are mainly free, and are no longer feasible when the funding ceases. There is a need to concentrate much more on sustainability, and to teach people to appreciate what they have around.

Another important and challenging issue is the **improvement of recognition and validation** of prior learning and learning experience so as to attract more adults into continuous and lifelong learning. Currently there is no real system of recognition of results of non-formal trainings. It is known that the better educated people pursue more education and training themselves. It is the lower educated people who need more help, support, guidance and need to be reached out.

A significant challenging aspect is **professional development of ALE staff and**, more precisely, adult educators. Teachers are multipliers, and they should be intensively supported through - mainly digital - trainings in order to train future adult educators. In this regard, continuous professional development of educators is an important matter to respond to through collaborative actions. There is no system of recognition neither of trainers' knowledge/skills obtained through practice, non-formal or informal training.

It would be fortunate if all collections of EU and national legislation and good practice were available in one place, constantly updated. Maintaining and operating an interactive professional network can be a huge step forward. The importance of the activities of the 3rd sector / NGOs needs to be stressed. Financing plays a key role in the implementation of AE and LLL policies. Better financing would be very much needed to raise the participation in AE and LLL actions. More funds to apply for would require

more transparency to spend such funds according to the needs of people. National adult education programmes often heavily rely on EU funding which also means that the projects funded need to reflect the national priorities. The national priorities do not always correspond to local needs and so it happens that the projects funded are not well targeted. This ought to be improved by responding to relevant good practices from other EU-member countries.

However is the funding from public and European funds and European programs essential, the sector should make an effort to raise funding from national public and private sources, based on public-private partnership. It would be important to move our habits of depending dominantly on European and central state-funds.

## Annexes

### Table of Contents

**Annex 1** LEAP, Local Adult Education Policy, Intellectual Output 2, Country Snapshot Template

**Annex 2** LEAP, Local Adult Education Policy, Intellectual Output 2, Interview questions