



Centre for Research in Education Inclusion and Diversity



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# **TOWARDS A LIFELONG LEARNING SOCIETY IN EUROPE: THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM**

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## Sub-project 1: Patterns of policy in thirteen European countries

Lifelong Learning 2010 is a five year project funded through the EU 6th Framework European programme. This briefing provides an overview of the context and methods and then presents a summary of the main findings of subproject 1. This subproject focused on reviewing lifelong learning policy and practices in Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, England, Estonia, Flanders, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Norway, Russia, Scotland and Slovenia.

### Summary of findings

#### *Typologies of lifelong learning*

A refined version of earlier welfare models was used as a basis for drawing up a tentative typology of lifelong learning. The typology used statistical data on aspects of lifelong learning and key labour market indicators. The following models were identified:

- Scandinavian (Norway) with high GDP and high investment in all forms of learning. It has tightly regulated labour markets and strong emphasis on social inclusion.
- Anglo-Celtic (UK and Ireland) with relatively high GDP and emphasis on lifelong learning as a means of securing economic prosperity and ensuring social inclusion. It has flexible labour markets and a relatively high risk of poverty.
- Continental (Austria and Belgium: Flanders) which has rigid and stratified systems of education linked to a highly regulated labour market and limited emphasis on including socially excluded groups through lifelong learning.
- Catching Up (post-communist partner countries). This model is problematic because countries are undergoing rapid social change. There are similarities between the countries in that lifelong learning is generally seen in terms of building human capital rather than combating social exclusion. However, there is also diversity with Slovenia emphasising the role of learning to combat social exclusion. It is anticipated that this model in particular will be further refined by the end of the project.

#### *EU policy and national policies*

The Lisbon Strategy initially emphasised the role of lifelong learning in order to promote economic growth. It was revised to include greater focus on social capital and personal development – equity was stressed as well as efficiency. However, our analysis shows that most national policies focus on the economic rather than the social aspect.

#### *The importance of national contexts and diversity of approaches in post-communist countries*

Our research thus far suggests that the diversity of national contexts is likely to counteract the development of a single European model of lifelong learning. It is likely individual countries will adapt overarching EU policies to fit in with their particular contexts.

### *Balance between vocational and non-vocational lifelong learning*

National lifelong learning policies and strategies are more strongly orientated toward vocational than non-vocational goals. The national reports criticised this approach and we would argue for the importance of lifelong learning in the development of social as well as human capital.

### *Impact of globalisation*

It is clear that the increasing reach of the global market-place is placing intense pressures on many economies and societies. Among its effects are intensified disparities of income, wealth and power. Lifelong learning is often seen as providing a mechanism for addressing some of these problems. However, in general, patterns of lifelong learning appear to reflect, rather than challenge, these inequalities.

### *The importance of labour conditions*

It is clear that labour market conditions are central in defining the nature of lifelong learning in any particular country and we would therefore argue that typologies of lifelong learning need to include reference to labour market conditions.

### *Demographic change and implications for lifelong learning*

Across the EU overall there is limited evidence of demographic changes in the near future. However, this masks discrepancies between EU countries and population projections suggest that countries such as the Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania and Hungary are likely to experience a decrease in the working age population earlier than is anticipated in the rest of the EU and Norway. Russia is also at risk in the more immediate future.

### *Strategy and administrative co-ordination*

There were differences between the countries in relation to developing a coherent strategy for lifelong learning, with some countries having a fully developed strategy whilst others were only in the process of developing one. Responsibility for lifelong learning was shared between ministries in some countries with lack of coordination between key stakeholders.

### *Lifelong learning and social inclusion*

At the policy level, most countries recognise that there is a need to tackle social exclusion and that lifelong learning can make a contribution, however, there are significant differences in approaches. Some countries see community related learning as a means of tackling social exclusion whilst others emphasise the development of skills and employability.

### *Lifelong learning and ethnic minorities*

A number of countries emphasised the problems faced by ethnic minorities with the Roma population mentioned in several national reports. However, statistical data on ethnic minority participation in lifelong learning was very limited.

### *Lifelong learning and gender*

Women generally participate more and are more successful in formal lifelong learning. However, this fails to translate into a labour market advantage. They are less likely to be employed than men, and are therefore less likely to participate in work-based learning.

### *Recognising non-formal and informal learning*

The arrangements for recognising non-formal and informal learning are weak in the majority of countries. Some countries have well developed systems of accreditation; however, it was noted that assessment required for accreditation may discourage certain people from engaging with learning, thus potentially increasing social exclusion.

### *Workplace learning*

Learning in and through the workplace tends to favour those who have higher levels of prior educational attainment and those in the public sector.

### *ICT and lifelong learning*

Many countries recognise that they lag behind international levels of IT literacy, and see overcoming this as important in the quest for economic competitiveness and personal development. This requires not only developing better ICT structures, but also ensuring equity in access to such training.

## **The context**

In the policies of the European Union, especially the Lisbon Strategy, lifelong learning has been a means of achieving both competitiveness and social cohesion in an increasingly knowledge-based and globalised economy. Though the concept itself is far from new, lifelong learning's current policy incarnation dates from the mid-1990s. The LLL2010 Research Project seeks to examine how lifelong learning has been understood and operationalised, focussing in particular, though not entirely, on countries within the area of the EU's expansion. The countries included in this project are older EU members: Belgium, Austria, England, Scotland and Ireland; more recent members: Estonia, Lithuania, Czech Republic, Hungary, Bulgaria and Slovenia. Two non-EU European countries are also included: Russia and Norway.

### **The aims of subproject 1**

The purpose of this subproject was to review how lifelong learning is being conceptualised and put into operation across a range of countries in Northern, Central and Eastern Europe. The nature of the educational and lifelong learning regimes in each country and their changes were examined. It considers how far lifelong learning has entered the policy rhetoric in each country, and in what forms it has done so – in particular, how far it has been shaped by the European Union's thinking, or by national or other influences. It considers how far rhetoric and practice diverge in each country. Lifelong learning can occur in all areas of social life: we therefore also consider how far the actions of different areas of policy and government support it, or hinder its development.

## **The methods**

The sub-project applies a comparative documentary analysis of approaches to lifelong learning. Through analysing national policy documents and addressing lifelong learning in participating countries, it aims to assess critically the concept of lifelong learning at various levels; to investigate and develop a typology of different policies and initiatives across the countries; and to explore the range of initiatives to encourage the participation of socially excluded groups in lifelong learning. Each team produced a national report and these reports formed the basis for the comparative report.

## **Issues to be further developed within the project**

The research in this first sub-project has provided a substantial volume of evidence about lifelong learning policies in a number of countries. However, it has also raised a number of issues for further inquiry, and it is intended that a number of these are addressed during the remainder of the project.

These include:

- The development of a more *robust* typology of lifelong learning policies and practices that includes all aspects of lifelong learning and, in particular, one that differentiates better within the countries currently in the 'catching up model'.
- Similarities and differences between national contexts will be examined both in relation to individual participation/non-participation in lifelong learning (subprojects 2 and 3).
- The impact of national context and institutional structures on patterns of lifelong learning (subproject 3)
- The balance between vocational and non-vocational learning in formal institutions and also at the workplace (subprojects 3 and 4).
- Recognition of non-formal and informal learning in the formal education system (subproject 3)
- The nature of workplace learning and employer views (subproject 4)
- Participation in formal learning in relation to gender and ethnicity (subproject 3)

## **Implications for EU policy-makers from subproject 1**

There is a need to:

- Develop more robust statistics on lifelong learning especially in relation to socially vulnerable groups and ethnic minorities.
- Continue the development of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and encourage links to national qualifications framework, especially those that provide an effective system for recognising non-formal/informal learning.

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- Develop mechanisms that allow qualifications to ‘transfer’ between EU countries based on EQF.
  - Consider the role of social capital and personal development in lifelong learning and ensure that measures are taken that encourage support for this aspect of lifelong learning.
  - Encourage men to engage with learning in educational institutions and women to engage in work-based learning.
  - Encourage the development of welfare policies (e.g. provision of accessible and affordable childcare) to allow women to transfer gains in formal education into better opportunities in the workplace.

### **Further information**

A report and executive summary are available on the Lifelong Learning 2010 (<http://lll2010.tlu.ee/>) website and on the website of the Centre for Research in Education Inclusion and Diversity at the University of Edinburgh ([www.creid.ed.ac.uk](http://www.creid.ed.ac.uk)).

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