

Adult Learning Policies in Europe. An Insight of Regional and Local Stakeholders

This book summarises the results of a survey on regional capacity for adult learning and education (RegALE), led by the European Association for Education of Adults (EAEA) and funded by the European Commission.

The goal of the survey is to derive a multi-layered view on:

- the challenges and opportunities of the adult education sector at the regional and local level, and
- the gaps and needs of the adult learning and education staff to use them for the future steps of the project.

Opinions of regional and local European policy makers and professionals, here presented, suggested three key findings: (i) Local and territorial networks are the solution to the lack of overarching adult learning systems;

(ii) Like employers, civil service organisations represent an essential actor to implement and deliver non formal and in-

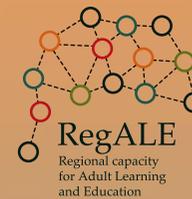
formal adult learning opportunities, especially for medium and low skilled adults; (iii) Adult learning reaches millions of adult citizens thanks to the engagement of a wide variety of adult learning professionals being both teaching and non-teaching professionals.

Nonetheless, everywhere in Europe, public policies pay little attention to the quality of adult learning workforce.

The book analyses each of the findings based upon the opinions that were expressed by regional and local policy makers and professionals on actual and future adult learning policies.

These are common issues at European level and in all the seven countries that were investigated (Croatia, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Norway, The United Kingdom).

The same problems exist everywhere, albeit in different ways. The Country Reports provide an in-depth insight on it.



Adult Learning Policies in Europe. An Insight of Regional and Local Stakeholders





Adult Learning Policies in Europe.

An Insight of Regional and Local Stakeholders

The RegALE project (621444-EPP-1-2020-1-BE-EPPKA3-IPI-SOC-IN) was funded with the support of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Commission under the call Social inclusion and common values: the contribution in the field of education and training.



With the support of the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

The RegALE project contributes to the following EC policy objectives:



@RegALE (www.regalenetwork.eu)

Reproduction is authorised for non-commercial purposes provided that the source is acknowledged.



This book has been published with the contribution of the Department of Social, Political and Cognitive Sciences of the University of Siena.

© 2023 editpress, Firenze
Via Lorenzo Viani, 74
50142 Firenze - Italy
www.editpress.it
info@editpress.it
Printed in Italy

ISBN 979-12-80675-28-6
Permalink Open Access:
<digital.casalini.it/9791280675286>

Research Team

Francesca Torlone, Principal investigator (University of Siena, Italy)
Paolo Federighi, Research design (EAEA consultant)
Francesca Operti, Supervision (EAEA, Belgium)
Tina Mavrič, Data management (EAEA, Belgium)
Ecem Akarca, Research management on a national/local level
(AONTAS Ireland's National Adult Learning Organisation, Ireland)
Andrea Bernert-Bürkle, Research management on a national/local level
(Volkshochschulverband Baden-Württemberg e.V. – VHS BW, Germany)
Noelia Cantero, Supervision (Earlall, Belgium)
Francesco De Maria, Support in data processing (University of Florence, Italy)
Margit Düüna, Research management on a local level
(Estonian Non-Formal Adult Education Association, Estonia)
Marit Einen, Research management on a national/local level
(Vestland County Council, Norway)
Iva Janežić, Research management on a national/local level (Varaždin County, Croatia)
George Koulaouzidis, Research management on a local level
(Hellenic Adult Education Association, Greece)
Silvija Ladić Fischer, Research management on a national/local level (Varaždin County, Croatia)
Aslan Liivak, Research management on a local level
(Estonian Non-Formal Adult Education Association, Estonia)
Levenez Molac, Data management (Earlall, Belgium)
Sarah Perry, Research management on a national/local level
(Learning and Work Institute, The United Kingdom)
Shahnaz Shefa Amin, Research management on a national/local level
(Vestland County Council, Norway)
Alex Stevenson, Research management on a national/local level
(Learning and Work Institute, The United Kingdom)
Camilla Winter, Guidance and survey results validation (Vuxenutbildningen Borås, Sweden)

Acknowledgements

The research team is grateful to the ones who shared their opinions and provided information analysed in this Report through the RegALE survey between April and July 2021. They are:

- regional ministers/politicians responsible for adult learning and education policies
- delegates of the regional minister/politician responsible for adult learning and education policies
- regional or national lawmakers in the field of adult learning and education policies
- regional officers responsible for adult education and learning provision
- deputy Mayors involved in adult education and learning policies
- chairs of local adult education councils
- local officers responsible for adult learning and education provisions
- leaders of adult learning and education organisations
- managers of adult learning and education organisations
- coordinators of adult learning and education organisations

This Report has been prepared by the authors to the best of their ability and knowledge.

English translation and proofreading: Robert Chroscicki

Design and edition: Spazio Ada – www.spazioada.it

Authors and Responsibilities

All texts have been written by Francesca Torlone.

Francesco De Maria took care of data processing and Tina Mavrič of data management.

Validation of National Reports has been carried out by Iva Janežić (Croatia), Margit Düüna (Estonia), Andrea Bernert-Bürkle (Germany), George Koulaouzidis (Greece), Shahnaz Shefa Amin (Norway), Alex Stevenson (The United Kingdom). In Italy validation took place through debate in a workshop (February 2022) and in a seminar (June 2022) with policy makers, adult learning and education professionals, stakeholders.

Data quality assessment was by Prof. Paolo Federighi.

Table of contents

<i>Executive Summary</i>	8
<i>1. Introduction</i>	12
1.1. Objectives of the survey and methods for data collection and processing	12
1.2. The sample	13
1.3. The set of non-linear systems	16
1.4. The learning exclusion equilibrium	18
<i>2. Adult learning policies in Europe. Regional and local stakeholders' insights</i>	19
2.1. Public policies, systems, investments, organisations	19
2.2. Adult learning and education offer, demand, workforce	27
2.3. Disadvantaged groups	32
2.4. Governance	35
2.5. Internationalisation of Adult Education Organisations	35
2.6. Conclusion	42
<i>3. Adult Learning Policies in Croatia. Regional and local stakeholders' insights</i>	45
3.1. Public policies, systems, investments, organisations	45
3.2. Adult learning and education offer and workforce	49
3.3. Disadvantaged groups	51
3.4. Governance	52
3.5. Internationalisation of Adult Education Organisations	53
<i>4. Adult Learning Policies in Estonia. Regional and local stakeholders' insights</i>	54
4.1. Public policies, systems, investments, organisations	54
4.2. Adult learning and education offer and workforce	59
4.3. Disadvantaged groups	61
4.4. Governance	62
4.5. Internationalisation of Adult Education Organisations	63

5. <i>Adult Learning Policies in Germany. Regional and local stakeholders' insights</i>	65
5.1. Public policies, systems, investments, organisations	65
5.2. Adult learning and education offer and workforce	70
5.3. Disadvantaged groups	72
5.4. Governance	73
5.5. Internationalisation of Adult Education Organisations	74
6. <i>Adult Learning Policies in Greece. Regional and local stakeholders' insights</i>	76
6.1. Public policies, systems, investments, organisations	76
6.2. Adult learning and education offer and workforce	81
6.3. Disadvantaged groups	82
6.4. Governance	84
6.5. Internationalisation of Adult Education Organisations	86
7. <i>Adult Learning Policies in Italy. Regional and local stakeholders' insights</i>	87
7.1. Public policies, systems, investments, organisations	87
7.2. Adult learning and education offer and workforce	92
7.3. Disadvantaged groups	94
7.4. Governance	95
7.5. Internationalisation of Adult Education Organisations	96
8. <i>Adult Learning Policies in Norway. Regional and local stakeholders' insights</i>	97
8.1. Public policies, systems, investments, organisations	97
8.2. Adult learning and education offer and workforce	101
8.3. Disadvantaged groups	103
8.4. Governance	104
8.5. Internationalisation of Adult Education Organisations	105
9. <i>Adult Learning Policies in the United Kingdom. Regional and local stakeholders' insights</i>	107
9.1. Public policies, systems, investments, organisations	107
9.2. Adult learning and education offer and workforce	112
9.3. Disadvantaged groups	114
9.4. Governance	115
9.5. Internationalisation of Adult Education Organisations	116

Executive Summary

This Report summarises the results of a survey carried out in the framework of the RegALE project (Regional capacity for adult learning and education), led by the European Association for Education of Adults (EAEA) and funded by the European Commission.

The goal of the survey is to derive a multi-layered view on:

- the challenges and opportunities of the adult education sector at the regional and local level,
- and
- the gaps and needs of the adult learning and education (further ALE) staff to use them for the future steps of the project.

The survey was carried out in 2021 and designed taking into account the results of the research heritage accumulated in recent decades (from historical studies on nineteenth-century utopias to the idea of “educating communities” of the middle of the last century to the most recent approach of “local learning ecosystems”).

The RegALE survey focused on an additional research level: the stakeholders’ subjective perceptions, attitudes, and opinions about the actual situation and future perspectives of adult learning and education in Europe. The reason is that, in a democratic society, stakeholders’ views, mind-sets, and ideas determine the development prospects of adult education in regions and cities.

This report analyses the results of the survey referring to nine thematic areas:

- **Public policies.** It is a general opinion that the European countries surveyed are experiencing a favourable time for the development and adoption of plans, strategies, regulations, frameworks, and special projects on adult learning. However, it is also noted that their implementation is slow to manifest significant and perceptible effects at the local level. According to the respondents, this issue can be caused by the inability of policies to act in the long-term perspective. Furthermore, the belief emerges that policies focus on sectoral aspects and areas of adult learning, that originates patchy systems. Improvements could be achieved by adopting a more holistic approach and evidence-based policies.

- **Systems.** The respondents indicated that there is no European country where a comprehensive adult learning system endowed with shared values, principles, missions, functions, and concerted priorities exists. The cooperation and coordination among the various stakeholders are considered casual or weak. They often operate within project clusters, with few opportunities for interrelation and without structural support.

- **Investments.** The prevailing opinion is that current funding is adequate to maintain the existing balance between supply and demand for adult learning. However, this funding is considered insufficient to guarantee the expansion of ALE. About 4 out of 5 respondents believe

that priorities for spending are not well selected and that the effectiveness and impact of expenditure are scarce.

- *Adult education organisations* (further AEOs). The opinions expressed within the survey highlight how AEOs can cover complementary, substitutive, or completely autonomous functions concerning public policies in lifelong learning. However, everywhere AEOs are given a central role that is more relevant than the role played by public institutions. That is because of the variety of fields in which they operate and their ability to include targets who are excluded from participation in ALE. The survey highlights some limits to be overcome that concern, in particular, the need to increase the relevance and the quality of the adult learning offer, specifically, the one addressed to the diverse groups of the disadvantaged public. In the near future the number of AEOs is expected to be reduced due to centralisation and efficiency processes. At the same time, demand for adult learning, skills for life, and closer relations with the labour market are expected to grow.

- *Adult learning and education offer and demand*. In all the surveyed countries, the training and education offer covers a lot of fields (i.e., second-chance education, cultural activities, health). However, learning opportunities are deemed insufficient to meet the needs of different groups of the population, in particular, the most vulnerable ones. The training in basic skills for work, life, and

citizenship is considered an improving trend by respondents. The mismatch between training supply and demand is common in all the surveyed European countries. According to the majority of respondents, the discrepancy between the training offer and the training demand is due to the lack of knowledge of current and future training demands by public and private stakeholders. This is also for European countries where there are dedicated forecasting services related to the evolution of labour markets and social innovations.

- *Adult learning and education workforce*. The lack of an adequately qualified ALE workforce constitutes a problem that respondents equate to the need to build a healthy economic and financial situation for the AEOs. The opinion of 3 out of 4 respondents is that, without qualified staff, it will be challenging to face the complexity of the future learning demand. About 2 out of 3 believe that the current policy commitment to support their professionalisation is insufficient. Furthermore, the survey results underline the need for actions to improve the status of the adult learning and education workforce.

- *Disadvantaged groups*. Dissatisfaction with the low level of the investments addressed to disadvantaged groups is expressed by 4 out of 5 respondents. The factors that limit equity in access are economic barriers, the lack of relevance of the training offer, and the lack of progression pathways and outreach

activities. At the same time, the lack of guidance and support services is evident, and the policies aimed at encouraging disadvantaged groups to make their learning demands explicit are rare. That is considered crucial in contributing to the stagnation in the participation of vulnerable learners.

- **Governance.** In spite of the different models of administrative decentralisation in Europe, respondents were asked to provide views on vertical and horizontal governance. For the former one, views on decentralisation models are divergent: among respondents who expressed an opinion, the ones who consider that there is a good balance of power between central and local governments or a high level of autonomy prevail (61.4%). Other respondents (33.6%) highlight excessive centralism in power distribution. Horizontal governance calls into question the ability of those who carry out public functions to establish forms of collaboration with a great variety of public, private, and private-social actors. The collected opinions assessed the cooperation between regional and local governments and actors such as social partners, businesses, and adult learning organisations. A widespread dissatisfaction emerges about the ability to build and strengthen partnerships among the wide range of social actors involved in adult learning and education policies.

- *Internationalisation of adult education*

organisations. The benefits of boosting the internationalisation of adult learning stakeholders are confirmed by 2 out of 3 respondents. The remaining did not answer or considered themselves not interested or not competent in the field. Respondents indicated that internationalisation could produce the following benefits (in order of importance):

- a) develop and innovate through mutual learning processes (67%)
- b) access to international financing (50.6%)
- c) influence international policies (46.8%)
- d) globalise organisations and activities (45.5%).

The RegALE¹ project (*Regional capacity for adult learning and education*)

The objective of the project is to increase the capacity of partners as well as their networks, stakeholders, partners and members, at their level of activity, to respond to their challenges, to build cooperation structures, and promote an adult learning and education culture in communities, cities and regions in the European Union.

The research project is headed by the European Association for Education of Adults (EAEA) and funded by Erasmus+ programme of the European Commission. The consortium is composed of 11 partners (and 7 associate) representing public authorities operating at local and regional level, ALE associations from all over Europe, a university, and two networks-EAEA and EARLALL.

¹ More information available at <https://regalenetwork.eu/>



1. Introduction²

1.1. Objectives of the survey and methods for data collection and processing

The Report presents the results of a survey carried out within the framework of the RegALE project. The survey gathered responses from local and regional stakeholders asking about the current status and future perspectives of adult learning and education in Europe.

The objective of the survey is to get a multi-layered view of

- the challenges and opportunities of the adult education sector at the regional and local level, and
- the gaps and needs of the adult learning and education staff to use them for the future steps of the project.

The method used for the RegALE Survey is the Delphi method, designed to facilitate a material comparison between opinions and assessments of the experts responding to the survey. The survey was divided into a cycle of two further phases aimed at clarifying the responses and sharing, discussing, and interpreting the results (through various local and international webinars and seminars) collectively.

The tool adopted is a questionnaire, where the items are structured according to the conceptual framework for adult learning policies assessment proposed in a study by the European Commission (2015³). This study developed a conceptual model which explains the links between policy actions and their effects, thus helping in assessing to what extent existing

policy interventions and broader policy frameworks are effective in achieving their aims. In particular, in the RegALE survey, this framework has been adopted to collect the assessments of respondents according to the essential factors influencing the participation in adult learning and education and their capability to deliver adequate skills supply both for individuals (equity) and for society (sustainability).

In addition, the RegALE survey included some items to contextualise these responses within the current period (the pandemic and the implementation of Next Generation Europe), and investigate their expectations about the near future.

Respondents were asked to assess each of the items, expressing their views about

- the probability of occurrence, and
- the arguments that were useful to explain their personal view.

The questionnaire was delivered via the Survey Monkey platform. After a preliminary test, the questionnaire was available online for three months. The required time to fill it was

- approximately 20' for the quantitative assessments, and
- approximately 40' for the qualitative assessments.

² Introduction by Paolo Federighi and Francesca Torlone.

³ For a full description of the study and related framework see European Commission (2015). An in-depth analysis of adult learning policies and their effectiveness in Europe, available at http://ec.europa.eu/epale/sites/epale/files/all_in-depth_analysis_of_adult_learning_policies_and_their_effectiveness_in_europe_12.11.2015_pdf.pdf

Respondents also had the option to upload any documents they found useful concerning the item and expressed opinions.

For the items having to do with the assessment of the status of policy implementation or the forecasting of future developments, respondents were asked to rank their opinions against a 5-point rating scale. A total of 11 categories of items were related to the following thematic areas: 1. Develop learners' interest in learning (guidance, validation and recognition included). 2. Increasing employers' investment in learning. 3. Improving equity of access for all. 4. Learning that is relevant. 5. High quality learning. 6. Coherent, complementary and evidence-based policy. 7. Regional and local, or national if it applies, investments in adult learning and changes over time. 8. European support via structural funds (primarily European Social Fund) and Next Generation Europe, the COVID-19 Recovery Package. 9. Cooperation among stakeholders. 10. Sustainability. 11. In your opinion to what extent each of the following factors do have an impact on the sustainability of adult education organisations?. In these cases, a unipolar scale was adopted. In relation to that scale respondents expressed their assessment or opinion by choosing from five options through which to modulate their percentage of agreement, from the lowest to the highest option (5%, 30%, 50%, 80%, 100%).

As far as the data processing is concerned, to simplify the reading of the semantic differential, the present Report proposes an aggregated reprocessing of the results that allowed a subsequent comparison of the least favorable opinions -corresponding to the choices of 5%, 30%, and 50% - with the most favorable ones -corresponding to the choice of 80% and 100%-. The position of those who chose the intermediate option was not considered a "non-choice," but an adherence to the option proposed by the item, which nevertheless calls out the desirability of improvement interventions. Therefore, where the Report identifies a tendentially prevailing opinion, this is a result of the type of elaborations as outlined above.

1.2. The sample

The survey targeted ALE experts, stakeholders from public authorities, and private institutions from 21 European countries. Project partners selected the sample in each country based on predefined criteria. A total of 241 professionals took part in the study.

1.2.a. Professional position

The data for professional positions in the sample needed careful revision to be validated.

The overall sample (241 respondents) consisted of:

- Regional minister / politician responsible for adult learning and education policies (2.90%, i.e. 7)

- Delegate/Representative of the Regional minister/politician responsible for adult learning and education policies (0.83%, i.e. 2)
- Regional or national lawmaker in the field of adult learning and education policies (0)
- Regional officer responsible for adult learning and education provision (9.13%, i.e. 22)
- Deputy Mayor involved in adult learning and education policies (0.83%, i.e. 2)
- Chair of the local adult education Council (1.66%, i.e. 4)
- Local officer responsible for adult learning and education provisions (12.45%, i.e. 30)
- Leader of an adult education organisation (21.99%, i.e. 53)
- Manager of an adult education organisation (21.58%, i.e. 52)
- Coordinator of an adult education organisation (28.63%, i.e. 69)

The following took part in the Survey:

- 67 policymakers and professionals involved in governing the local and regional adult education system (28%)
- 174 professionals engaged in directing, managing, and coordinating adult education organisations (72%).

The following did not specify any challenges and opportunities:

- Regional minister/politician responsible for adult learning and education policies (3)
- Delegate/Representative of the Regional minister/politician responsible for adult learning and education policies (1)

- Regional or national lawmaker in the field of adult learning and education policies (0)
- Regional officer responsible for adult learning and education provision (5)
- Deputy Mayor involved in adult learning and education policies (0)
- Chair of the local adult education Council (2)
- Local officer responsible for adult learning and education provisions (14)
- Leader of an adult education organisation (22)
- Manager of an adult education organisation (13)
- Coordinator of an adult education organisation (25).

Overall it consists of:

- 25 policymakers and professionals engaged in the governance of the local and regional adult education system, representing 40.3% of the category
- 60 professionals engaged in directing, managing and coordinating AEOs, representing 34.5% of the category.

1.2.b. Distribution by country

A total of 241 people from 21 European countries participated in the survey. Of these, 156 from 18 countries completed the questionnaire in its entirety. Eighty-

five answered only the questions that required expressing an assessment omitting the questions that required a more in-depth reflection about the system and an indication of the challenges and opportunities for its development (Table 1):

	Survey completed	Survey completed partially	Total
Austria	1	1	2
Belgium	-	2	2
Bulgaria	1	-	1
Croatia	20	12	32
Estonia	16	5	21
Finland	1	-	1
Germany	12	9	21
Greece	23	4	27
Hungary	2	1	3
Iceland	-	1	1
Ireland	7	2	9
Italy	32	16	48
Latvia	1	-	1
The Netherlands	1	-	1
Norway	23	21	44
Portugal	-	1	1
Slovakia	1	1	2
Spain	2	1	3
Sweden	3	4	7
Switzerland	1	1	2
The United Kingdom	9	3	12
Total	156	85	241

Table 1. Countries participated in RegALE survey and the completion of the survey by respondents.

The data processing adopted in this Report results from a preliminary data analysis and an interpretation aimed at capturing the main implications emerging from the data collected.

This Report provides an account of reading to identify emerging challenges and opportunities, taking into account the six key success factors but devoting special attention to the issues particularly relevant to the AEOs and the Regional and Local Governments (for example, governance and quality of professionals). For the formulation of challenges and opportunities, the researchers adopted a multitrait/multimethod approach based on:

- qualitative and quantitative analysis of the survey results
- their interpretation of the most significant data in terms of opinions expressed and the potential relevance in terms of the impact of possible opportunities
- comparison of the survey results with the relevant literature (but the emergence of conflicting and original insights was still respected)
- the interpretations and evaluations that emerged during two focus groups organised with experts from the project partner countries
- the development of a provisional summary based on a criterion of desirability and sustainability.

1.3. The set of non-linear systems

Adult learning and education is a complex field, with a set of dynamic, non-linear systems driven by public and private stakeholders, for-profit and not-for-profit, and professionals qualified in specific areas of adult learning or trained for other educational sectors. Policy fragmentation is high as the policies that deal with ALE (labour, education, justice, training, transportation, etc.) are drafted without cross-sectorial and intra-institutional strategies.

The snapshot emerging from the survey (in particular, when respondents assess the level of cooperation between stakeholders) is that each sector organises the training offer with different rules and acts according to the various ALE representations and narratives related to their strategies or educational services.

The more developed the public ALE system is in the country, the higher the variety of public and private stakeholders is - including their specialities and functions. It is also true that where public intervention is weak and demand for training is high, for-profit or not-for-profit private ALE initiatives develop.

The diversity of visions and perceptions seems to manifest in relation to the specific sector each stakeholder belongs to. The work done by the respondent shapes the idea of education accompanying the practices (or rather, the narratives with which they are communicated).

In the open-ended questions of the survey, no matter the country they come from, teachers tend to focus on teaching issues, while managers on management or organisational issues. That highlights the diversity of interest among different professional categories.

The survey does not reveal a strategic vision or common orientations about the future, even among those who work in public institutions. Perceptions and plans are related to the mission of the sector (education, vocational training, culture, services, social policies, etc.) or to the specific institution to which respondents belong.

The diversity of organisational contexts that generate and manage adult learning processes has a unifying element in the function performed, namely adults' learning. However, there is no evidence of an holistic system, general plans, consistent organisation, coherent services, and dedicated financial resources. That, at least, is not apparent from any of the responses. Diversity and competition or parallelism characterise the relationships between actors. These appear to be structured primarily as relationships within sector clusters, with a local and regional dimension, even if they belong to national networks and systems. These clusters are often territorially based and gather interconnected organisations, specialised providers, service providers, and associated organisations operating in a particular field and characterised by

the simultaneous presence of competitive and cooperative relationships.

Hence, the challenge and the generalised demand for public policies that orient and support all actors towards strategic priorities respond to the development objectives each local and national reality has. Moreover, public policies are required to orient and support all actors towards adequate quality standards of the learning offerings.

Rules, services, and funding are the tools on which everyone expectations converge. That is also the case for a more equitable distribution of opportunities to participate in adult learning.

1.4. The learning exclusion equilibrium

Setting priorities, advocating for quality, and ensuring equity are the main functions recognised in public policies. That remains a challenge in all the surveyed countries⁴. Everywhere, expectations and opinions point out the most serious problem: the difficulty for public policies to act to alter the “learning exclusion equilibrium”⁵ for the progressive reduction of low-skilled and low-qualified adults.

The idea of “learning exclusion equilibrium” helps understand why levels of participation in adult education do not increase. That is typical of situations where an economy becomes trapped in a vicious circle of low added value, lacking skills, and insufficient wages. It occurs wherever the weak demand for skills from businesses is added to the inadequate attention to this problem from public policies. In other words, both the labour market and the State contribute to a poor skills supply for citizens. At the same time, young people and adults have a weak propensity to invest in their education and training. The economy and society seem to have adapted to the high number of low-skilled and low-qualified adults living in the respondents’ contexts. In this frame, their training is entrusted to the incidental informal learning processes occurring where they live and work.

That explains why, with respect to each of the themes investigated by the survey, it is possible to find a significant number of

respondents who express their satisfaction with the existing situation. But it also explains why most respondents (being politicians and professionals involved in the governance of the local and regional adult education system or professionals engaged in the direction, management, and coordination of AEOs) express dissatisfaction with a situation they consider inadequate and characterised by inefficiencies and short-term plans.

In the following pages, we propose some interpretive hypotheses to understand the challenges faced when strengthening the action of the various actors, clusters, and public sector systems in order to increase citizen participation in adult learning opportunities. Understanding the challenges of this period and the coming years should help identify the opportunities that lead to fostering the capacities of all public and private actors operating at local and regional levels all over Europe to action and impact.

⁴ The three functions of public policies are explained by the European Commission in the above-mentioned publication (2015, An in-depth analysis of adult learning policies and their effectiveness in Europe, available at http://ec.europa.eu/epale/sites/epale/files/all_in-depth_analysis_of_adult_learning_policies_and_their_effectiveness_in_europe_12.11.2015_pdf.pdf).

⁵ The “learning exclusion equilibrium” has its roots in the “low skills equilibrium”. The latter one was coined in the late 80ies by Finegold and Soskice. The idea that stands beyond is that participation in adult learning and education is a variable of this equilibrium. This is to say that there is an equilibrium that is being accepted by public policies and businesses between the competence supply and the skills demand. Demand is predominantly for low skills job and supply tends to provide low skilled workforce. This is also connected to little incentives to participate in education and training and raise qualifications levels and aspirations of individuals.

2. Adult learning policies in Europe. Regional and local stakeholders' insights⁶

2.1. Public policies, systems, investments, organisations

2.1.1 Public policies

In Europe, States at different levels of government have been adopting policies on adult learning over the past several decades.

The survey highlights that we are currently going through a historical moment characterised by a significant production of strategies and policies prepared by the different sections of public administration, so much so that one respondent states:

“There is a lot of ‘policy’ and ‘strategy’ development - from a vast array of stakeholders - including Dept. Rural Community; Dept. Welfare; Dept. Justice; Dept. Health; and many, many agencies and organisations.”

The Council Recommendations on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults (Council of the European Union, 2016) and proposed strategies developed at the European level have likely encouraged reflection in the Member States. The national strategic plans for the development of the skills of the adult population seem to have accompanied the issuing of sectoral policies, but not general ones aimed at coordinating all the plans

and interventions according to shared objectives.

The current European and national strategies for digital and green transitions have favoured the preparation of national projects aimed at investing existing resources for this purpose.

However, respondents believe that in most cases, the results of such efforts are limited to the funding of projects and best practices. The difficulty is to let them become opportunities to initiate lasting interventions that have long-term effects.

In the immediate term, this produces the development of “patchy systems” whose weak capacity for impact is aggravated in the less-favoured areas: in the most disadvantaged regions and the peripheral territories (city outskirts and the countryside).

The adoption of new policies and legislative acts is evaluated positively if it reinforces existing provision with measures that aim to establish or enhance additional services, such as validation of skills and guidance. Many respondents perceive the latter as attractive strategies in existing policies or valuable if included in interventions related to the labour market. Work-based learning is considered a crucial area of intervention because it brings adult education of the working population closer to the world of work.

⁶ Written by Francesca Torlone, data processing by Francesco De Maria, data management by Tina Mavrič, validation by Noelia Cantero and Francesca Operti, under the supervision of Paolo Federighi.

“Without integrated, impartial and accessible, professional Guidance & Information the access to ‘Pathways’ remains inaccessible for the majority of adults that would benefit from such information.”

However, public policies aimed at incentivising businesses to invest in training are considered inadequate to support the role that entrepreneurs can play in ALE participation for workers of all ages. Respondents believe that the third sector plays a more vital role for that purpose than the public policy (48% vs. 52%⁷), albeit this is often limited to disadvantaged workers. This opinion is widespread among politicians involved in the governance of the local and regional adult education system (59.5%), as well as, albeit to a lesser degree, among professionals dealing with the direction, management, and coordination of educational organisations (47.6%).

In a rich and jagged framework of policies and acts, innovation is focused on individual systems or specific services. The strive for innovation is also affected by the trade-off between the promotion of innovative processes and the inertia produced by the push for maintenance of the existing systems. It is well-known that overcoming resistance to systems change and self-reproduction requires long-term policies. The lack of processes that allow monitoring and evaluating results and impact of policies is not conducive to the forward-looking policies adoption and, therefore, to innovation development. That is a widely shared problem: the

need to move towards evidence-based strategies, at the local level especially, as it is considered weak by 72.9% of respondents.

“There is a lot of inquiry going on, which supports the development of policy and new initiatives. At the same time, a lot of initiatives tend to be based on random opportunities and “the hot topic of the day” implemented superficially.”

Challenges

At the moment, the national strategies taken up by the National Strategic Plans for the development of the competencies of the adult population have not yielded significant results concerning the preparation of implementation policies. There is a prevailing trend towards sectoral and short-term measures.

Opportunities

The new European programmes and the need to address the post-pandemic crisis also through adult learning can be seen as a historic opportunity to strengthen the role of public policies and their ability to promote the construction of services and incentives for the development of participation in adult learning and a more qualified offering for disadvantaged groups.

⁷ Data reported in this Chapter refer to the data processing methods as described in § 1.1.

2.1.2. Systems

The number of public spheres involved in adult education is trending upward at the national and local levels. Looking at public administration domains such as labour, justice, or defence, we can observe different sectorial systems adopted to train adults as employees or recipients of their policies (i.e., judges, prisoners, employers, workers, soldiers, migrants, etc.). This variety constitutes a set of misaligned approaches, according to 72% of respondents⁸. This problem concerns the development of national strategic guidelines and the orientation and management of services and activities. The set of procedures coexists within a polycentric structure that hinders coherent action even at the local level:

“Policy is expected to be decided at national level. In Ireland, we now have (at least) three organisations involved with national policy: DFHERIS, SOLAS, ETBI. In guidance we are an agency (comprising 7 staff) that are currently under two Government Departments. There is a lot of ‘policy’ and ‘strategy’ development [...] However - the implementation of policy is left completely to local organisations - thus, the uneven, inequitable issues and challenges noted.”

“The cooperation between ministries is not relevant for real needs.”

The link between systems and actors is considered poor, chaotic, episodic, or absent, especially concerning some cross-sectional services. As far as guidance is concerned, for example, in the qualitative

portion of the survey, two respondents stated:

“The Irish model (AEGI/ AEGS) is a small and good model but in a (FET) landscape that has no coherence and is indeed likely to confuse rather than support.”

“Often interventions are not designed in a network, so they are dispersive.”

Each sector is regarded as independent, with its own rules of operation by virtue of which it reproduces itself and prolongs its influence on the local level independently of the others. Every system operates within its cluster.

Because of these rules and the fragmentation of their missions, public systems perpetuate their dysfunctions. That is even more evident in policies addressed to disadvantaged groups whose learning needs can be met only through the coordinated action of different sectors. One respondent refers to that by taking as an example what is happening in the adult correctional education system by referring to the scarcity of financial resources:

“In Italy, there is little or no investment in adult education in prison, especially for education through art even when in the last 20 years this practice had demonstrated efficacy.”

Challenges

The main challenge is related to the plurality of systems and sectors that tend not to talk to each other and

⁸ Data reported in this Chapter refer to the data processing methods as described in § 1.1.

duplicate activities and services or create inefficiencies for the potential impact of the overall offering. That is the result (of) and reveals different cultures of education and learning as well as profoundly different and inconsistent training strategies. Public policies should be designed considering three vital steps: setting priorities, advocating for quality, and ensuring social equity.

Opportunities

Based on the great variety of existing systems, it is possible to promote their convergence and give rise to a holistic approach to adult learning policies. This approach should foster exchange among sectors, increase cooperation structures and create synergies for improving the educational conditions of the most disadvantaged groups of the population (e.g., the literacy demand of immigrant prisoners).

2.1.3. Investments

According to the survey respondents, investments in adult education at the regional and local levels are there but spending goals and their adequacy to current and potential demand are problematic. 64.2%⁹ consider these investments only sufficient to ensure basic supply and make the system work.

However, 82.4% of respondents feel these investments are scarce to answer the existing demand. In particular, they believe that investments do not meet the

complexity and variety of the needs of disadvantaged groups.

“The importance of adult education continues to grow, but at the same time, it is becoming more difficult to reach the target groups. Better funding is needed.”

“We need to connect more the investments with the territory’s necessities.”

Moreover, public investment does not seem oriented towards the right priorities (76.8%).

“Sometimes priorities change between the period when investment is planned and when implemented.”

In addition, there is a widespread opinion (80.3%) that their effectiveness and impact are reduced because:

“Investments in adult learning and changes over time are not fully well-coordinated although they are referred to within different policies (social policies, employment policies, cultural policies, etc..).”

The impact is further undermined by the fact that investments are often for projects of limited duration and limited audiences and thus do not achieve socially relevant goals. That is confirmed by a few respondents through their qualitative responses:

“Not investments, but project funding opportunities.”

“The public support to adult education is project-based since 2013 and not stable.”

“State investment into adult education has

⁹ Data reported in this Chapter refer to the data processing methods as described in § 1.1.

been project-based since 2005.”

“There are too few funding opportunities for outreach projects.”

As for regional and local investments for post-pandemic recovery, 119 respondents (or 72.1% of respondents) highlight the need for new investment plans. The types of intervention considered necessary are infrastructures, digitalisation (i.e., digital technologies and digital skills for adult education workforce), and thematic areas such as green transition, unemployment of young people, and modernising upskilling and reskilling systems.

“The majority of investment into infrastructure is through public funding often in response to ring-fenced opportunities surfaced piecemeal and require an immediate response.”

Challenges

Adult learning and education systems appear to be underfunded and exposed to reduced or stagnating public investment. Moreover, public spending is oriented towards unstable and short-term priorities, which reveals a lack of attention to the social impact of public investment. That calls for an increase in spending as well as its redistribution towards new priorities to be pursued in the medium and long term.

Opportunities

Current investments allow the system to exist and provide a basic offering. Businesses and individuals show a propensity to invest in training. The strong potential in demand and growing need for skilled workers could

produce a financial restructuring of public investment that would allow a redefinition of short-, medium, and long-term financial needs, planning, monitoring, and managing to secure needed resources in a consistent way.

2.1.4. Adult education organisations

Adult education organisations everywhere play an independent role, complementing or replacing the tasks and commitments undertaken by the State. The survey shows that their existence and function are considered essential by both institutional representatives and adult learning professionals.

Therefore, public policies are necessarily based on the role played by AEOs. Even where the presence of directly managed public bodies is substantial - with respect to funding - AEOs are recognised as having complementary chores. The widespread provision of adult learning depends on them.

“I think in our specific field of adult learning and democracy education, providers of adult education could be more aware of the significant role they have in proactively supporting the development of active citizenship and sustainable development goals related issues.”

The role of AEOs is significant both in terms of the audiences they can reach and the variety of issues they can tackle with the activities and services they provide.

“Adult education organisations host the most committed and willing range of people and services.”

The capacity of AEOs to reach a wide range of audiences (particularly disadvantaged groups) and improve equity in accessing learning opportunities is recognised by 60.6% of respondents¹⁰. That is a considerable number, but it highlights that, for almost 40% of them, there are shortcomings in addressing disadvantaged groups.

“In Germany, the international and European work of the adult education active citizenship field is a catastrophe [...]. There is a handful of organisations - most in the field of classic Volkshochschulen and DVV international who do differently. But the field as such is not adequately taking over the responsibility, and a country with a well-established and well-funded adult education system should take over this responsibility.”

Many respondents recognise that some groups of the disadvantaged population remain excluded by the activities promoted even by AEOs. One example is prisoners and, particularly, those with a migration background. The learning opportunities for them are inadequate in relation to their demand. An obstacle to that demand being satisfied is the lack of public funds allocated to redistributive objectives, the weight of economic and financial constraints, and the structural barriers that inhibit the activities provided.

“Adult education organisations try to improve equity, yet the outcomes are minimized due to external barriers.”

“However, we struggle to support the necessary

services and infrastructures financially as there is limited financial support.”

AEOs are committed to providing and managing activities relevant to participants and society at large. That is acknowledged by 60.9% of respondents, while a substantial percentage (39.1%) believe there are weaknesses in this regard. That is also evident when considering evaluations of the ability of AEOs to offer relevant learning opportunities also for employers: 48% responded in the affirmative. This capability is not generalised.

The quality of the supply of AEOs is related first and foremost to the knowledge, skills, and attitude of adult learning and education professionals. For 62.8% of the respondents, this is an area where further action is needed, especially on the part of public policies, since the in-service training of the adult learning and education workforce in the AEOs is up to the initiative of individual organisations.

“Skilled adult education workforce is developed by providers but no government or regional strategy.”

“There is a skilled adult education workforce and further qualification opportunities, but there is not a proficient profile of the adult educator.”

Some room for improvement is verified in relation to public policies about AEOs.

¹⁰ Data reported in this Chapter refer to the data processing methods as described in § 1.1.

In this regard, the survey respondents highlight the consequences of some limitations imposed on AEOs: in particular, the funding stream through which public authorities steer their activities. The inadequate size and discontinuous nature of funding hinder the undertaking of a medium-term planning perspective and force AEOs to operate on short-term plans and programmes. That prevents functional investments which look beyond the implementation of specific funded projects or activities. In addition, there is another limitation of those public policies, namely their orientation with respect to content and objectives that do not always meet the needs of management and development of interventions. For example, in some countries, there has been a reduction in funding for outreach activities and low-threshold learning offer that are preparatory to the entry of disadvantaged groups into education pathways.

The relevance of the activities carried out by the AEOs is based on their ability to work in clusters and to develop cooperative networks with other institutions and organisations (from local and regional governments, schools, businesses, social partners, cultural institutions, and associations of every kind to other adult education organisations). However, a large majority of respondents believe that network development and cooperation are areas for improvement. Enhancement needs are identified concerning each type of stakeholder or partner. In particular,

for 73.7% of respondents, collaborative relations need to be strengthened with public authorities at regional and local levels. Compared to the other partners, areas that require more attention emerge concerning:

- private and social enterprises (78.9%)
- social partners (74.4%)
- other AEOs (63.7%)
- social and cultural organisations and services (63.5%).

Beyond even significant percentage variations (over 15%), the picture that emerges from the survey responses is that AEOs require decisive strengthening of their organisational capacity for cooperative work and networking.

The survey investigated respondents' expectations for the future in a 10-year outlook.

The expectation which prevails significantly (64.6%) is that by 2030 adult education organisations in their region and local community will probably or certainly be fewer in number. That is related to the expectation - shared by 52.2% of respondents - that the AEOs that will operate at that date will probably or certainly be more effective and will probably or certainly be able to make use of a more qualified workforce (51.6% of respondents).

The reduction in the number of AEOs, connected to their increased efficiency and better professionalisation of their workforce, is an expectation related to organisational contexts. That is

particularly true for those more exposed to processes of concentration: competition between organisations and reduction of public funding, and possible prevalence of the more evolved and structured organisations. At the same time, large groups of respondents of all types (between 36% and 49% according to the items) do not expect substantial changes.

It is widely believed that if AEOs would like to meet the challenges of the next decade, they must equip themselves to address:

- a growing potential demand for adult learning and education that will expand the number of potential adults who want to enter training and expand the fields of training to new areas and settings
- the challenge of balancing its focus on both adult education, training, and the development of skills to support social life
- the need of establishing a more direct relationship with the labour market demand and the development of career management skills.

Again, respondents emphasise that this will be possible provided that the professionalism and professionalisation processes of the adult learning and education workforce are supported and financed.

Challenges

The main challenges for AEOs seem to be as follows:

- the risk of depending on public policies that cover only part of the needs, with insufficient and discontinuous funding

- the scarcity of forms of cooperation and coordination with other stakeholders
- insufficient types of strategic activities and services of common interest that are not widely available today and that reduce the impact of activities and increase their costs (outreach, guidance, career management, etc.).

Opportunities

The survey shows that there is a strong tendency to work towards:

- intentional change management of organisational strategies
- diversification of financing sources
- the development of a more professional adult learning and education workforce.

2.2. Adult learning and education offer, demand, workforce

2.2.1. Adult learning and education offer

In all countries, there is a varied range of services and training activities of a formal and non-formal nature that involves a significant percentage of the population. The learning offer, although substantial, is still considered insufficient, especially considering the weak response to the potential demand of different types of vulnerable groups. The scarcity of free, affordable, and accessible public provision drives people to the private and, often, expensive adult learning market.

“Participants often end up enrolling in costly private courses.”

“Many people who are foreign nationals and have low levels of education need more training than what is offered to them.”

In all countries investigated, typical formal education activities addressed either the issuance of certificates and qualifications for professional (re-)employment or the basic skills provision with the purpose of developing paths within the educational and training systems are dominant. More attention is directed towards this type of activity and towards those addressed to up-skilling rather than re-skilling. Respondents consider this tendency a barrier to designing programmes and courses that meet the real needs of individuals, also those without previous training experience.

“Education not only to reach PISA or other skills standards but to realize (or to support to identify) the adult’s life project.”

In some countries, the focus on activities aimed at achieving certificates goes hand in hand with the tendency to reduce (leisure) course provision aimed at people excluded from those training opportunities. That is exacerbated by the lack of support for outreach activities.

In addition, there is an insufficient supply of activities favouring work-based learning among young people who are not employed and among workers, especially in small and medium-sized businesses.

All this reinforces the processes of exclusion of disadvantaged groups with “specific needs” that the public learning offer struggle to address.

The expressed opinions concern the overall assessment of the adult education offerings of the countries covered by the survey. Alongside respondents highlighting the critical points in the various countries, there are others that highlight results and trends that testify to the existence of processes aimed at guaranteeing an adequate supply of adult learning.

This positive trend concerns, in particular, the strengthening of the provision of basic skills to reintegrate people into a learning path for progressing in their education, career, and active citizenship.

“In Norway, Competence Plus is a grant scheme that will contribute to more adults, through training in basic skills, being able to

take part in further education and training and strengthen their participation in working life and society. It is a weakness that this is a national scheme rather than a regional scheme that meets regional needs."

2.2.2. Adult learning and education demand

The development of the ALE market emerges everywhere as the object of respondents' attention. However, the opinions highlight the inadequacy of dedicated instruments to know and respond to the learning needs of individuals and the marketplace. The focus on demand is weak, and, as a result, the supply design does not take this criterion into account either.

"There are no local and regional needs assessments."

"There is an absence of a mechanism for the training needs diagnosing."

These are instruments implemented only in limited education fields, such as vocational education and training (VET). But VET can also have weak connections to the labour market.

"Public VTIs [Vocational Training Institutes] have little, if any, connection with the labour market."

The ability to plan an ALE provision that takes into consideration medium- and long-term forecasts is equally weak. That makes it particularly problematic to align the adult learning and education offer

with the demand for skills related to the evolution of the labour market resulting from economic and social innovations.

"There is no funding for forecasting labour market skills' needs."

"Adult education programmes exist. However, they are often not in line with market needs or do not anticipate market trends, so they are again late."

The mismatch is not just about the relationship between supply and the skills required by the labour market. This trend inevitably also affects the peculiarity of the ALE demand of the most vulnerable groups of the population. Also, in this case, a standardised offering prevails and lacks personalisation and customisation.

"There is a dearth of knowledge about the needs and opportunities for vulnerable groups and how training can be tailored to the individual's learning opportunities."

This mismatch between supply and demand is mitigated in countries where predictive instruments for labour market skills needs exist. However, even in these cases, the availability of data and information does not always translate into an alignment of supply and training demand:

"There is a mismatch between skills forecast and education provided."

The tendency to disregard forecast data, even where they exist, is emphasised by several respondents. The planning process does not seem to be influenced by

the analysis of the demand but rather by the tendency to propose a predetermined offering defined on the basis of the resources and skills of the providers. That also reflects negatively on the propensity to make learning offers flexible and to innovate its content and delivery methods.

“Providers offer courses depending on the funding programmes and not on identified needs.”

“Private and public investment in all areas of adult education is done without central planning, needs assessment, action plan, and evaluation.”

That may appear to be a trend fostered by the fact that, in the field of publicly funded educational offerings,

“...The financial and operational support for educational organisations is not provided to achieve this goal.”

This type of criticality is widespread, perhaps prevalent, but not generalised. Alongside opinions that point out the poor adherence of skills supply to skills demand, others highlight an alignment between the two, correlated to specific productive sectors. At the same time, there is evidence (31.8% of respondents¹¹) of a trend towards fostering the emergence of new adult education and learning demands. This trend is linked to an innovative and flexible supply and new methods of management. This propensity is attributed primarily to private ALE providers by all kinds of respondents.

These elements affect the quality of ALE provision. For many respondents (62.3%), the low quality depends on the lack of mechanisms dedicated to the evaluation and monitoring of adult learning and education supply in a systematic way. Where those exist, the problem shifts to the evaluation subject, which is rarely centred on the participants' learning outcomes but rather on the process, namely the content and delivery methods.

“No monitoring on quality of learning outcomes.”

“At the same time, a lot of initiatives tend to be based on random opportunities and the hot topic of the day implemented superficially.”

However, some basic processes are implemented everywhere and, in particular, where activities are financed through public funds and thus involve stringent and pervasive procedures:

“Adult education is publicly funded, and the outcomes are assessed on a regular basis. Funding covers all aspects of the sector.”

However, the problem of shifting attention to learning outcomes is a trend towards which institutions and providers are turning their attention.

“We are introducing new providers and focusing on outcomes to become more effective.”

¹¹ Data reported in this Chapter refer to the data processing methods as described in § 1.1.

Paying attention to the relationship between the learning and education demand and the learning outcomes achieved is also indispensable for allowing policies to base decisions and programmatic objectives on facts. Then, on this basis, policies can work to improve the supply and align it with individual and employment outcomes. Otherwise, as noted by some of the respondents, randomness and superficiality drive provider choices:

“Evaluation is often the basis of new policy or initiatives, but at the same time, some policy initiatives are put into place with little or no empirical evidence to support it.”

“Collecting more data on outcomes of funding for adult education to better target available funding.”

“Currently there is a very strong drive on employment which, whilst important, fails to recognise the essence of social and economic impact. Adult education starts with aspiration and confidence, and progression pathways are key to achieving ultimate outcomes of health and well-being as well as potential employment or in-work progression.”

2.2.3. Adult learning and education workforce: professions, quantity, quality

The presence of adequately professionalised adult learning and education trainers and staff working in favourable conditions is the key to the future of adult education. 51,6% of

respondents¹² believe that, in 2030, adult education organisations are likely to or will certainly have a more qualified workforce. 75.3% of respondents consider the availability of a well-qualified workforce will be significant for adult education organisations’ sustainability or have a crucial impact in the context of the transformations expected from them by 2030.

The issue of professionalism and recognition of practitioners’ role are considered as meaningful as the issue of funding. These issues appear to be the most widely shared views and the primary concerns of the large majority of respondents.

2.2.3.1. Training

62.8% of respondents believe that initial and continuing education for adult education providers is a widely shared need.

“An adequate commitment to guarantee the development of skilled adult education workforce is missing.”

The first issue is the incoming selection.

That is often not based on an assessment of the possession of specialised skills:

“Many adult educators are not qualified: they work because there is a need. That will lead to big gaps in professionalism.”

¹² Data reported in this Chapter refer to the data processing methods as described in § 1.1.

The random nature of recruitment processes is probably motivated by the absence of an adequate presence in the labour market of the adult learning and education workforce, endowed with the theoretical and practical skills required by the complexity of this profession. That explains the spread of opinions such as:

“To some extent, I think part of the workforce is too far away from the actual activity and lacks the knowledge of how things are delivered to the participants.”

On the other hand, it is a complex profession that is required to interpret, design, manage, and evaluate the educational and learning processes of a wide variety of populations, organisations, communities and for a wide range of ever-changing issues. In addition, there are new challenges that educational work must face in terms of content and methods (e.g., the digital transition). Therefore, many respondents believe that:

“Support needs to be provided for a workforce that is constantly having to adapt to a changing world. Changes are accelerating, and the need for people working in adult education to be flexible and resilient is only going to get more important over the short to medium term.”

2.2.3.2. Status

The widespread opinion among representatives of institutions and AEOs staff, as evidenced by the qualitative parts of the survey, is that the professionalism of the ALE workforce should be increased

concurrently with the development of professionalisation processes. More specifically, that is true in relation to the reinforcement of their professional status, its recognition also by means of legal instruments, the improvement of the economic conditions, the introduction of basic standards to access the profession, and the support in their daily work. The role of the adult learning and education workforce receives “poor recognition at a national and regional level” that legitimises expressions such as “we are absolutely invisible.”

Even where there is a trend to attract new and young professionals with high levels of specialised skills, strengthening their professional role is necessary, possibly through legislative instruments that define and protect its quality and prestige.

At the same time, the professionalisation process must also include salary increases and better working conditions in general (adequate funds, support, social functions, quality of organisations, and the whole system). That is critical to overcoming the “low level of social and economic recognition recognised to the adult education professional.”

Challenges

The challenges relate to the desired transformations that address three main aspects:

- Recognition of the variety of professionals working in different roles in the field of adult learning and education and the quality criteria governing

recruitment, access, and practice of the profession;

- The assurance of adequate initial and continuous training courses that guarantee basic and specialised skills corresponding to the variety of professional profiles;
- The guarantee of working conditions that correspond to the importance of the performed functions.

Opportunities

Increased demand for adult learning and education should be accompanied by increased investments and a greater focus on the return-on-investment (ROI) of training. That depends heavily on the quality of the adult learning and education workforce.

2.3. Disadvantaged groups

Disadvantaged groups are not the priority target audience for adult learning and education policies and investments. The prevailing opinion (78.5%¹³) is that there are no investments to meet the potential learning demand of disadvantaged groups. This view is shared by all types of respondents (institutional representatives from regional and local governments and professionals from AEOs). Some also note the need not to focus exclusively on large categories such as the low-skilled and the low-qualified adults and emphasise the need to direct the attention of programmes and projects towards specific groups of the population usually neglected even by

adult education. We refer, for example, to the “people with disabilities” or to the

“LGBT+, Roma community, Traveller community, literacy/numeracy/computer literacy learners, people with learning disabilities, etc.”

As regards the type of organisations that must play a central role in the non-differential inclusion of disadvantaged groups, it is widely agreed (in responses to open-ended questions) that third-sector organisations are irreplaceable:

“Third sector organisations working in the field of education make a great effort to maintain the quality of education with more precarious resources than the public service. Mostly they are aimed at a target that does not have resources and has needs, both social and educational.”

The public system of adult learning and education (including vocational education and training) has a role that is considered complementary to the other stakeholders. Indeed, if outreach activities depend on the third sector (despite their insufficiency), the public system has the power to certify skills, including issuing degrees and professional qualifications.

The access of different groups of the population to education and learning is hindered by obstacles such as:

¹³ Data reported in this Chapter refer to the data processing methods as described in § 1.1.

- The economic and structural barriers associated with:

- the poor investment in *“vulnerable individuals”* (e.g., *“inmates”*), even though some regional governments have adopted financial measures to support access to training (*“Tuscany Region provides study vouchers”*)
- architectural barriers (*“wheelchair accessibility is an issue”*)
- the inadequacy of tools and technologies to provide *“remote training”*.

- The provision of *“relevant”* education and learning offers:

- insufficient supply of basic skills development and VET opportunities (some respondents state the contrary, as they believe their regional governments are *“highly committed to upskilling and reskilling policies for adults”*)
- lack of attention to potential demand for training (reported by 60.9% of respondents: *“educational programmes and teaching methods do not correspond to the expectations, beliefs and special characteristics of adults”*)
- the opportunities for progression in the educational pathway are limited. This possibility is primarily related to the chance of earning certificates and qualifications within the formal education and training system. That excludes the progression to developmental goals learners have for themselves, even though paths made up of non-formal and informal learning opportunities
- the scarcity of outreach activities and information campaigns: *“it is very*

challenging to reach potential users.”

- The lack of support services for
 - informing and motivating potential participants as *“opportunities are not known, and people don’t consider adult education useful”*
 - the recognition of prior learning acquired in non-formal and informal contexts or official diplomas issued by non-European countries.
- The possibility of freeing up time to devote to training (formal/ non-formal)
 - Certain respondents declare that *“for the employed, there are study permits”*; others state that *“unemployed people can learn, but working people should also have possibilities to learn.”*

Policies aimed at disadvantaged groups are essentially related to active labour market policies (welfare, employment, security, training/re-training, etc.), which implies that only the (potential) working population can benefit from them.

These policies tend to prioritize upskilling over re-skilling those who no longer possess the appropriate skills for the labour market and do not look at the personal development of the individuals¹⁴.

“There have been massive cuts and, although there has been some investment (e.g., through the National Skills Fund), there needs to be less bureaucracy around the funding rules and re-skilling, not just up-skilling needs to be considered fundable.”

¹⁴ Also called Bildung: “an individual maturing process connecting education, upbringing, knowledge, culture, and personal responsibilities towards humans and our globe”. <https://eaea.org/project/bildung>

Active labour market policies, however, have the merit of linking labour policies with adult learning and education (where they are not limited to passive policies). This approach is not extended to other social policies (e.g., housing, health, culture, etc.) where sectoral strategies prevail. Disadvantaged groups need answers and integrated services that are, unfortunately, rare:

“As a result, this is highly difficult since there are almost no answers to integrated and targeted approaches made to provide adequate to people and marginalised groups, groups at risk and with specific needs.”

has provided operational guidance on where to intervene, and several best practices have given concrete suggestions on how to do so. In the medium term, a new political will might regain so that public intervention will contribute to correcting the unbalanced distributional effects produced by the current ALE public policies and private provision. In the short term, third-sector organisations are considered irreplaceable in increasing disadvantaged learners’ participation in educational opportunities.

Challenges

Disadvantaged groups are not a priority of policies and investments aimed at adult education. Understanding how to progressively change this “learning exclusion equilibrium” is the most significant challenge of our times. To avoid immobility of the quantity and quality of adult learning and education sector, economic and structural barriers decreased, while the relevance of the offer, support services, and incentives should be increased.

Opportunities

The need to develop the capabilities and skills of the entire population, including disadvantaged groups, is at the heart of many acts of the European Union. The national implementation plans for the European Skills Agenda should certainly tackle that. Research

2.4. Governance

It is well known that there are different models of administrative decentralisation in Europe. Nevertheless, this diversity does not make the assessment of the set of models impossible. Respondents were asked to focus on the systems' functionality and evaluate the good governance in relation to adult learning and education policies.

Views on decentralisation models are divergent: among respondents who expressed an opinion, the ones who consider that there is a good balance of power between central and local governments or a high level of autonomy prevail (61.4%¹⁵). That could justify the assertion that local governments' capacity and resources are adequate to support adult learning and education policies. This percentage increases to 67.1% among those who hold public office or perform public functions.

Other respondents (75, or 33.6% of the total) highlight excessive centralism in the power distribution. Perceptions of the marginality of local authorities relative to central power are most pronounced among professionals in AEOs (33.7%). If the negative opinion affects one out of every four respondents having public responsibilities or functions, this ratio rises to 1:3 among adult learning professionals.

However, 62% of policymakers and 75% of adult learning professionals consider the alignment between central and local policies weak. Accordingly, the

existence of margins of autonomy of local governments can emerge from centralised systems. This assessment combines both the opinions of those who believe that the level of decentralisation is weak and those who value the capacity for the autonomous initiative of the decentralised authorities.

Coming to the structural assessment of the various national, regional, and local models, we can observe problematic situations in which decentralisation appears to be formal but not substantial:

"We are facing a great paradox where funds and access are majorly centralised and targeted too many times to sterile employability promises while actual adult education is happening only through local autonomous and solidary actions."

Or other cases in which, on the contrary, decentralisation is seen as a further complication of management processes:

"With the merger of municipalities, a great deal of bureaucracy has arisen."

All of this leads some respondents to value the ability to align central and decentralised powers in order not to weaken the overall action of the State:

"The power is centralised, but also the awareness is centralised and not regionally dispersed."

¹⁵ Data reported in this Chapter refer to the data processing methods as described in § 1.1.

Nonetheless, as one respondent noted, “adult learning happens” anyway. This consideration makes sense because, by implication, it emphasizes that adult education is rooted within an articulated field of dynamic, non-linear systems that are only partly dependent on public policies.

Other considerations concern the horizontal dimension of governance, which is characterised by a high degree of cooperation and interaction between the State and other actors. These partnerships aim at shaping socio-economic structures and processes and solving problems of general interest outside of hierarchical decision-making models. To this end, policymakers interact with social actors that are in the position to advance the needs of the groups they represent and promote solutions on their behalf.

In the adult learning and education field, horizontal governance calls into question the ability of those who carry out public functions to establish forms of collaboration with a great variety of public, private, and private-social actors. Those are the ones that can make explicit the problems of the different groups of learners they represent and reach and contribute to implementing policies for growth, emancipation, and development in collaboration with the decentralised levels of government.

The collected opinions assessed the collaboration between regional and local governments and actors such as social partners, businesses, and adult learning

organisations. Among those, a widespread dissatisfaction emerges about the ability to build and strengthen partnerships among the wide range of social actors involved in the field of adult learning and education policies, in some cases despite the efforts of local institutions:

“Regional policymakers are committed to this.”

Regarding cooperation to promote participation with social partner organisations representing the interests of European workers and employers, 63.1% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction. This trend is confirmed by the data on collaboration between regional and local governments and social partners, considered weak and in need of being strengthened (75%).

A slightly lower figure (73.7%) reports the same opinion in relation to collaboration between decentralised government and adult education organisations. That is likely to be connected to the policymakers’ lack of awareness about the opportunity (and benefits) of broadening the range of actors participating in territorial consultation so that they contribute to policies ex-ante evaluations to align them with social issues and learners’ needs.

The collected data highlight two specific weak issues:

- on the one hand, the need to strengthen the commitment of the local level of government to implementing policies and measures through social consultation is emphasised. This would be confirmed

by the weight of those who consider collaboration with social partners positive and necessary (25%). Similarly, the limited involvement of social partners in national policy-making is highlighted:

“While there is a high level of engagement on the level of the local authority, the State-level policies that have an impact do not sufficiently engage social partners, and thus limit local potential.”

The reasons for this tendency towards limited involvement of the social partners may stem from a mixed assessment of their representativeness in the development of educational policies at the local level;

- on the other hand, the percentage of those dissatisfied increases to 80% when opinions are expressed regarding the development of local partnerships between the decentralised powers of government and the productive world (private and social enterprises). That could be related to the total entrusting of the active workforce training to firms (except in some countries concerning various forms of apprenticeship).

In summary, horizontal governance is considered weak for three reasons:

a) The difficulty of intermediary organisations in asserting the learning needs of disadvantaged groups within consultation processes and political committees,

“Lifelong learning for adults is not seen as an important investment.”

“Educating adults is not considered a priority in society.”

b) The delay of policymakers in activating partnerships with the various segments of civil society that are poorly or not at all represented, especially in times of health emergencies where new problems come out or the unresolved ones are intensified, *“(There is a) disinterest for unemployed (people).”*

“(It) takes time for the system to change to actual needs and (the rapid) changes in society (i.e., COVID-19).”

c) The low propensity of public systems to build partnerships with other stakeholders in their areas of reference:

“Capacity of CPIAs to read the territory and make agreements to cooperate with actors other than local authorities.”¹⁶

In conclusion,

“We have to start a step earlier with concrete discussions on the actual needs of the community having the incentive and real will to act on these needs.”

¹⁶ CPIAs are the Provincial Centres for Adult Education in Italy.

Challenges

The challenges concern the ability of regional and local institutions to strengthen the participatory and coordinated mode of government by identifying the representative subjects of emerging and consolidated social problems, which can interpret, express and direct the process of conquest of educational spaces by eliminating risks of conflicts of interest and corruption.

Opportunities

The essential function of horizontal governance is capacity building. Fostering the implementation of complex, integrated policies requires the involvement of those who will need to implement them and those that will benefit from them. Focusing on the demand for adult learning - both high- and low-skilled adults - when it is not limited to obtaining certification requires strong cooperation between multiple actors. Public institutions may use conditionality measures in the funding distribution to promote it. However, using horizontal governance to build the capacity of stakeholders (and, in particular, policymakers) provides a unique opportunity to accelerate and increase the consistency and integration of practices promoted by different stakeholders.

2.5. Internationalisation of adult education organisations

Over a third of people did not participate in this part of the survey. This data requires a brief reflection because it highlights the existence of margins for improvement with respect to the objective of developing Europeanisation of strategies for the growth of the skills of the European population as a whole. The reasons could be due to:

- the weak legal binding power of the European institutions in adult learning and education as the European Treaties give exclusive competence in that field to the Member States
- a lack of interest in and knowledge of international level mechanisms, both financial and programming processes
- the priorities indicated by the management and/or the cost/benefit analysis done in each territorial context might not bring organisations to consider internationalisation an added value

“Very context/dependent, all or none of the above can apply depending on the organisation and the meaning of “the internationalisation dimension.”

However, even if lower than expected, the number of respondents is still significant. The reasons why respondents believe adult education organisations should start internationalisation processes are¹⁷:

1. Develop and innovate through mutual learning processes (67%).

¹⁷ Data reported in this Chapter refer to the data processing methods as described in § 1.1.

2. Access to international financing (50.6%).
3. Influence international policies (46.8%).
4. Globalise organisations and activities (45.5%).

Fifteen participants (3 politicians and 12 adult learning professionals) expressed additional arguments specifying further reasons: connected to migratory phenomena, processes of globalisation that affect businesses and local realities, and recalling factors that in some countries hinder these processes (e.g., the absence of the need to deal with “Europe” when national funding covers the operational needs of organisations, or the limits of promotion policies with respect, in particular, to the population over 19 years of age).

For each of the variables considered, no significant differences emerged in the distribution of opinions expressed due to the role of the respondents (representatives from regional and local institutions or professionals from AEOs).

Mutual learning and benchmarking between different regional and local governments and European organisations are the most popular reasons for starting an internationalisation process (67% of total respondents).

The survey results indicate that AEOs from all European countries face similar problems. That likely accounts for the strong interest in mutual learning and benchmarking, and the existence of broad networks provides opportunities to select appropriate partners.

Increasingly stronger processes are underway to create integration and dialogue between national labour markets, partly facilitated by the spread of skills classification systems. ALE providers that operate on a supranational scale are also growing in the private sector.

Given the limited legal binding power in the field of adult learning and education assigned by the European Treaties to the European institutions (unlike that established for agriculture, monetary, foreign, competition policies, etc.), mutual learning is undoubtedly the simplest and most impactful result to achieve in this field. The views on this are explicit:

“Because there is a real need to implement knowledge even outside the local reality.”

“Because they can adopt good practice and so not everything must be developed from scratch.”

It is particularly significant that this interest outweighs the other objectives, primarily *access to funding*. European financial instruments and programmes are not seen as an alternative source of funding to national public ones by the respondents.

For instance, as regards basic education, the widely held view (68.8% of respondents) that community investment supply is adequate. This evaluation is more widespread among regional and local institutional representatives (72.7%), whose position is 5.4 percentage points higher than the professionals’ (67.3%).

European funds and specifically the ones that are managed on a national and regional level (i.e. European Social Fund) are considered a source of sustenance for AEOs regardless of their link with national and international policies and objectives. At the same time, respondents indicate that access to funding is discouraged by the difficulty in finding information regarding calls for proposals, the administrative rules, and the bureaucratic burden associated with funding management:

“Call for proposals procedures are not always easy to manage for those asking financial support.”

“Although there has been some investment there needs to be less bureaucracy around the funding rules.”

“There is the need to lighten the bureaucratic and administrative burdens of the projects management.”

The possibility of *influencing European policies* is considered by 46.8% of respondents. The percentage is significant because it is an ambitious goal that can only be made explicit and pursued by people and organisations with high levels of awareness, a forward-looking vision, and an ability to manage networks of relationships and investment. The high percentage of respondents who did not consider this possibility is probably due to the absence of those conditions. In addition, it is possible that parts of the adult education community may not consider European international policies impactful as Member States remain responsible for

ALE policies or the internationalisation process relevant to their daily work.

Globalisation of organisations and activities was considered by 45.5% of respondents. This objective can be perceived as significant, especially by organisations that can define their global strategy, which crosses national boundaries. According to the respondents, acting on the global level can be beneficial for understanding the migratory phenomena, implementing peacekeeping actions, and providing meaningful continuous training for workers of all types and levels.

Operating on this scale requires the ability and willingness to extend their area of action into new markets and build joint venture processes with other similar or complementary organisations. Of the four challenges considered in the survey, this one is certainly the toughest, as it requires tackling local problems from a global perspective and going beyond organisations' comfort zone. Understanding the challenges and opportunities of globalisation, adopting a global strategy, and building the capacity of AEOs to open up to the world's complexity is not effortless.

“This is reality as the world is internationalising.”

“Because they need to understand the needs of migrants and the global community from a social perspective in order to integrate and cooperate respectively.”

Challenges

The exclusive education competence conferred to the Member States by the European treaties and the weak cooperation among them in this field are at the base of the difficulties in adequately developing internationalisation processes for local and regional AEOs and public authorities. Highly differentiated national models prevail in adult education, resulting in different cultures of adult education and hindering cooperation. International exchange among policymakers is discontinuous and not aimed at peer learning and policy transfer processes. To access European funding, influence European policy initiatives, and adopt a global agenda, AEOs and public authorities need to understand the benefits and increase their awareness, competences, and will.

Opportunities

The intensification of European action in the adult learning and education territory creates new opportunities to understand its role and relevance: for instance, the amount of investment in adult learning promoted by Next Generation Europe, the ALE headline target of the European Pillar of Social Rights, the resurgence of attention in the 2016 Recommendation on adult learning and education, and the appearance of elements of adult education-related conditionality in the Country Specific Recommendations.

The recently adopted Marrakesh Framework of Action adopted at the

Seventh International Conference on Adult Education by 142 Member States, the globalisation of small and medium-sized enterprises and migratory phenomena constitute opportunities for fostering AEOs' international strategies and action plans.

The existence of specialised European and international networks provides an opportunity to build partnerships, advocate before European institutions and create joint ventures to work on global issues. Fostering these processes is also an opportunity for regional and local governments.

2.6. Conclusion

Challenges

Although all European countries are committed to defining national strategic plans for the implementation of the “New Skills Agenda for Europe”, the adult learning and education systems appear to be underfunded and exposed to reduced or stagnating public investment. Moreover, public spending is often oriented towards unstable and short-term priorities. Public policies should act through long-term planning and not just through short-term projects and be more concerned about their impact on the different local and regional realities and their effectiveness.

The survey shows that there is a high demand to work towards:

- the definition of new institutional and organisational strategies
- the diversification of financing sources
- the development of a more professional adult learning and education workforce.

It seems that a coherent and comprehensive system of adult learning does not exist in any country of the RegALE partnership. Furthermore, actors tend to operate essentially through clusters of independent and uncoordinated providers.

In this context, AEOs are confronted with the risk of depending on public policies that cover only part of their needs, with insufficient and discontinuous funding. The scarcity of forms of cooperation and coordination with other stakeholders limits the possibility for AEOs to define and build up new sustainable strategies.

In order to guarantee a high-quality adult learning and education supply, it is necessary to urgently address and solve the crucial issues of status, role, professionalisation, and recruitment of the adult learning and education workforce.

Having adequate financial, human, and material resources is fundamental to changing the current “learning exclusion equilibrium” that places disadvantaged groups of the population out of the political priorities and investments aimed at adult learning and education.

To achieve this, it is necessary to rely on the ability of regional and local institutions to strengthen the participatory and coordinated mode of government involving a variety of social actors capable of contributing to the increase of participation in adult education and learning. Companies and social partners should be engaged to attain such a goal.

Highly differentiated national models prevail in adult learning and education in Europe, resulting in different cultures of adult education and hindering cooperation: challenges are similar, if not identical. Therefore, collaboration and benchmarking among stakeholders from all countries are necessary. International exchange among policymakers is discontinuous and not aimed at peer learning and policy transfer processes. To access European funding, influence European policy initiatives, and adopt a global agenda, AEOs and public authorities need to understand the benefits and increase their awareness, competences, and will.

Opportunities

The new European initiatives and programmes and the need to address the current economic challenges through adult learning and education can be seen as a historic opportunity to strengthen the role of public policies and their ability to promote the development of participation in adult learning.

Thanks to the great variety of existing systems, it is possible to promote their convergence and give rise to a holistic and coordinated approach to adult learning and education policies capable of improving the educational conditions of the most disadvantaged groups of the population.

Current investments allow the system to provide a basic offering. Coherent and forward-looking lifelong learning strategies are crucial for the development of adult learning and education policies to tackle “learning exclusion equilibrium”. The strong potential in demand and growing need for skilled workers could produce a financial restructuring of public investment.

It is necessary to encourage the promotion of a socially relevant and high-quality learning offer that is aligned with the - explicit and implicit - adult learning demand that is present at the local level.

The need to develop the capabilities and skills of the entire population, including disadvantaged groups, is at the heart of many acts of the European Union. The growing importance attributed to skills

for life will strengthen the role of adult learning and, in particular, the non-formal offer.

In the medium term, a new political will might regain so that public intervention will contribute to correcting the unbalanced distributional effects produced by the ALE current public policies and private offer. In the short term, third-sector organisations are considered irreplaceable in increasing disadvantaged learners’ participation in educational opportunities.

Fostering the implementation of complex, impactful, and integrated policies requires the involvement of those who will need to implement them. Using horizontal governance to build the capacity of stakeholders provides a unique opportunity to accelerate and increase the consistency and integration of practices promoted by different social actors.

The intensification of European action in adult learning and education creates new opportunities to understand its role and relevance.

It is necessary to encourage the internationalisation of the various adult learning stakeholders so that mutual learning paths are developed, their experiences are enriched, and European strategies gain concrete substance.

The recently adopted Marrakesh Framework of Action adopted at the Seventh International Conference on Adult Education by 142 Member States (2022), the globalisation of small and medium-sized enterprises, and migratory

phenomena constitute opportunities for fostering AEOs' international strategies and action plans.

European and international networks (like RegALE) provide the opportunity to build partnerships, advocate before European institutions and create joint ventures to work on global issues. Fostering these processes is also an opportunity for regional and local governments.

3. Adult Learning Policies in Croatia. Regional and local stakeholders' insights¹⁸

3.1. Public policies, systems, investments, organisations

3.1.1. Public policies

Survey results

The RegALE survey on Croatia¹⁹ examined both elements of perception and prospectation related to the current decade and elements of desirability and rationality in the construction of policies. This latter one is the starting point for our analysis of data from Croatia: the construction of political choices and measures based on expected changes is defined on the basis of results produced by previous implementations and documented by research, monitoring and evaluation. It is a crucial aspect that is related to the quality of policy making processes and motivates international cooperation in the field of adult learning and education policies.

In Croatia, as well as in all the surveyed countries, improvement of public policies is believed to depend on the construction of evidence-based policies. The need to move towards evidence-based policies, especially at the local level, is perceived as weak by 80.0% of respondents from Croatia (against 72.9% at European level, equal to 7.1 percentage points higher compared to the European figure).

Generally speaking, the adult learning and education is considered by some of the Croatian respondents an “*inert system*”²⁰.

Providing learning opportunities that are relevant also for employers is a challenge for the European strategies. To this regard, most of the Croatian stakeholders believe that the third sector do not play an important role (60% against 48% at European level). This opinion is widespread among politicians involved in the governance of the local and regional adult education system (80%), as well as, but to a much lesser degree, among professionals involved in the direction, management and coordination of educational organisations (46.7%).

Additional areas of improvement and areas for reflections are provided in the following chapters.

¹⁸ Written by Francesca Torlone, data processing by Francesco De Maria, data management by Tina Mavrič, validation by Iva Janežić, under the supervision of Paolo Federighi.

¹⁹ RegALE survey on Croatia is connected to the European survey on “Adult Learning and Education Policies in Europe. An Insight of Regional and Local Stakeholders”, carried out in the framework of the RegALE project (Regional capacity for adult learning and education), led by the European Association for Education of Adults (EAEA) and funded by the European Commission.

²⁰ Quotations from the Country respondents are reported in italics along with the English translation where needed. They report opinions expressed on the topic included in the item of the survey.

Challenges

At the moment the National Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia for the period 2018-2030 has not yielded significant results with regard to the preparation of implementation policies. There is a prevailing trend towards sectoral and short-term measures as well as towards strategies developed on a local level that *“are not always considered.”*

Opportunities

The new European programmes and the need to address the post-pandemic and economic crisis also through adult learning can be seen as an important and decisive opportunity to strengthen the role of public policies and their ability to promote the construction of services and incentives for the development of participation in adult learning and a more qualified offering for disadvantaged groups.

3.1.2. Systems

Survey results

The number of the diverse Croatian public systems involved in adult education is trending upward at the national and local levels. This happens in all the public administration domains: health, education, labour, military, culture, justice (from magistrates to prisoners), etc. All these domains have their education and training systems that work for the training of adults who affect the policies of the sector (as employees or as recipients of their policies: judges, prisoners, soldiers,

immigrants, etc.). However, this variety constitutes a set of misaligned systems according to 76% of respondents (slightly higher than the European average: 72%²¹). This problem concerns both the development of national strategic guidelines and the orientation and management of services and activities.

Each system is regarded as independent, with its own rules of operation by virtue of which it reproduces itself and prolongs its influence on the local level independently of the others. Every system operates within its clusters of sectoral organisations: *“We need a developed network of organisations and institutions that conduct adult education.”*

Challenges

The challenge is related to the plurality of systems and sub-systems made of organisations and institutions that do not talk to each other and create inefficiencies for the potential impact of the overall offering. This is the result (of) and reveals different cultures of education and learning. Public policy should strengthen three basic functions: setting priorities, advocating for quality, and ensuring social equity.

Opportunities

Based on the great variety of existing systems it is possible to promote their convergence and give rise to an

²¹ Comparison with average at the European level is included only when national data from Croatia are above or below 10 points % except for some particularly relevant cases.

overarching adult learning strategy. This general adult learning policy can support the development of the willingness to cooperate and promote greater attention and investment in improving the educational conditions for the most disadvantaged groups of the population.

3.1.3. Investments

Survey results

The regional and local investments in adult education are there, the problems concern rather the destination of spending and its adequacy to current and potential demand. 77.3% of Croatian respondents believe that these investments are adequate to ensure a basic supply to make the system work (this figure is higher than the European average: 64.2%).

However, these investments are considered inadequate to answer the existing demand by 86.4% of respondents. In particular, it is believed that investments do not meet the complex and varied demands of disadvantaged groups: *“adult education is performed in some vocational high-schools, which is another source of their income. Otherwise, the main generator of adult education is Open University, which offers partly free trainings (financed by the local community) and is partly on the market”; “Nedovoljno financiranje organizacija za obrazovanje odraslih; Nedovoljna financijska sredstva [insufficient funding for adult education organisations]”; “Local government should invest more in adult education.”*

Moreover, public investment does not

seem oriented towards the right priorities (77.3%): *“we need to respond promptly to the labour market demands and adjust education programmes. For the labour market requirements that are of local or national interest, co-financing of the programme by local and State authorities would be needed.”*

Challenges

The adult learning system appears to be underfunded and exposed to reduced or unmodified public investment. Moreover, public spending is not oriented towards the right priorities, and this reveals a lack of attention to the social impact of public investments, oriented towards the short term. This calls for an increase in spending as well as its redistribution towards new priorities to be pursued in the medium and long term.

Opportunities

Current investments allow the system to exist and provide a basic offering. Businesses and individuals show a propensity to invest in training. Strong potential demand and the growing need for skilled workers could produce a financial restructuring of public investment that would allow for redefining short-, medium-, and long-term financial needs, planning, monitoring, and managing to consistently secure needed resources.

3.1.4. Adult education organisations

Survey results

The ability of adult education organisations to reach a wide range of audiences (particularly disadvantaged groups) and improve equity in accessing learning opportunities is recognised just by 36% of respondents. The figure is much less than the European average (60.6%) and other local figures (i.e. 68.6% for the Italian respondents and 66.7% for the Norwegian ones). Also, AEOs in Croatia seem to meet obstacles in meeting adults learning demands and needs.

In the opinions of Croatian respondents obstacles to being committed to this direction are the lack of public funds that can be allocated to redistributive objectives, the weight of economic and financial constraints, and the barriers that inhibit the activities provided like the *“dependence on the State administration.”*

Commitment of AEOs in providing and managing activities that are relevant to participants and society at large is acknowledged just by 41.7% of respondents. The figure is much less than the European average (60.9%) and other local figures (i.e. 60% for the Italian respondents and 65.4% for the Norwegians). Accordingly, there is a substantial percentage (58.3%) who believe that there are weaknesses in this regard. At European level the figure is 39.1%. This is also confirmed by the evaluations of the weakness of AEOs in offering relevant

learning opportunities also for employers (60% against 48% at European level).

The development of networks of relationships and cooperation is a general area for improvement in the opinion of a large majority of respondents: *“quality and cooperation between all subjects (school, company, politics)”*, *“lack of coordination between institutions”* are seen as weak points by the Croatian respondents. Enhancement needs are expressed concerning each type of stakeholder or partner. In particular, for 86.4% of respondents, collaborative relations with government institutions at a regional and local level must be strengthened. This figure is 73.7% at European level. Compared to the other partners, areas that require more attention emerge:

- Private and social enterprises (90.9% against 78.9% at European level).
- Social and cultural organisations and services (90.9% against 63.5% at European level).
- Social partners (86.4% against 74.4% at European level).
- Other AEOs (81.8% against 63.7% at European level).

Expectations for the future were expressed for a 10-year outlook.

Among Croatian respondents, the expectation prevails significantly (72.7%) that by 2030 adult education organisations in their region and local community will probably or certainly be fewer in number. This forecast is accompanied by the expectation - shared by 63.7% of respondents - that the AEOs that will

operate at that date will probably or certainly not be more effective and will probably or certainly not be able to make use of a more qualified workforce (63.7% of respondents against 47.8% at European level).

Challenges

The main challenges for AEOs seem to be as follows:

- The risk of depending on public policies that cover only part of the needs, with insufficient and discontinuous funding.
- The scarcity of perspectives for development of AEOs.

Opportunities

The survey shows that there is a strong tendency to work towards:

- The need to increase the impact of skills strategies as it can lead to the third sector reinforcement before the likely impossibility.
- The possibility to diversify financing sources by developing the role of AEOs towards the variety of policies aimed at the skills strategy implementation.
- The need of development of a more professional adult learning and education workforce.

3.2. Adult learning and education offer and workforce

3.2.1. Adult learning and education offer

Survey results

In Croatia the offer of adult learning and education activities and services covers a lot of fields (i.e. education, cultural activities, health) as well as in all the surveyed countries: *“Adult education programmes exist. However, they are often not in line with the market needs, or do not anticipate market trends, so they are again late”; “too slow to respond to the labour market demands.”*

Thus, adult learning and education is considered insufficient to cover the potential demand of the different groups of the population: the needs are *“to have more different programmes available, a better understanding of the employers on adult education, a monitoring of the needs of the market”*; moreover *“the process of developing new programmes is slow and time-consuming.”*

The training of basic skills for work, life, and citizenship is considered an improving trend by respondents. The discrepancy between the adult learning and education offer and demand is caused by the lack of knowledge of the current and future learning and education demands by public and private stakeholders, according to the majority of responses. The majority of Croatian respondents think that labour market' skills needs are not forecasted (66.7%): *“No connection*

with the labour market." "One of the weak points being the monitoring of labour market needs." The figure is slightly higher than the European one (62.2% with a difference of 4.5 percentage points).

According to the survey results, the mismatch between adult learning and education supply and demand is an issue in Croatia as well as in most of the surveyed countries. The most disadvantaged groups do not have learning opportunities that can meet their specific problems and needs: "lack of interest from potential participants"; "Ograničavajući uvjeti u obrazovanju odraslih [limiting conditions in adult learning and education]"; "programs are not recognized by the Ministry of Education."

Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges and opportunities connected to the adult learning and education offer are represented by the set of challenges and opportunities on adult learning and education policies. This is because the offer in this field is the outcome of political decisions related to adult learning and education financing, organisation, services, workforce.

3.2.2. Adult learning and education workforce: professions, quantity, quality

Survey results

The quality of the supply of AEOs is related first and foremost to the quality of the skills of the adult learning and education workforce. For 72% of the respondents, this is an area where further

action is needed, especially on the part of public policies, since the training of the adult learning and education workforce in the AEOs is left to the initiative of individual organisations. At European level the figure is 62.8% (9.2 percentage points lower).

Nonetheless 40.9% of Croatian respondents thinks that the availability of a well-qualified workforce will have a significant or crucial impact on the sustainability of the transformations that are expected from adult education organisations by 2030. At European level the figure is 51.6% (10.7 percentage points higher). The opinion of Croatian respondents might be influenced by the scepticism they show on difficulties related to the actions that are necessary to implement for the increase of ALE workforce' quality and quantity. Moreover, Croatian respondents might be aware of the long period of time that expected results require to produce effect and impact.

The professionalism of the adult learning and education workforce should be strengthened concurrently with the development of professionalisation processes. This is specifically in relation to the strengthening of their professional status ("bad wages" are seen as a weak point), to its recognition also by means of legal instruments, the improvement of the economic conditions, the introduction of basic standards to access the profession, and to the improvement of work.

Challenges

The challenges correspond to the desired transformations that address three main aspects:

- Recognition of the multiplicity of professionals working in different roles in the field of adult learning and education and the quality criteria governing recruitment, access and practice of the profession.
- The assurance of adequate initial and ongoing training courses that guarantee basic and specialised skills corresponding to the variety of professional profiles.
- The guarantee of working conditions that corresponds to the importance of the performed functions.

Opportunities

Increased demand for adult learning and education should be accompanied by increased investment and a greater focus on the return-on-investment (ROI) of learning. This depends heavily on the quality of the trainers.

3.3. Disadvantaged groups

Survey results

Disadvantaged groups are not the priority target audience for adult learning and education in Croatia. The prevailing opinion (84%) is that there are no investments to adequately meet the potential demand for training disadvantaged groups. At European level the figure is 78.5% (the difference is 5.5 percentage points). This view is shared by all types of respondents (institutional

representatives from regional and local governments and professionals from AEOs).

The access of different groups of the population to the education and learning is conditioned by some factors with strong limiting power such as:

- The economic and organisational barriers associated with:
 - The poor investment in disadvantaged groups of adults and lack of support services for them: *“disinterest of the unemployed in learning and education”*; *“lack of interest of potential participants”*; *“disinterest in education.”*
 - Legal constraints: *“dependence on the State administration”*; *“Zakonska regulative [legislations].”*
- The creation of a “relevant” education and learning offers:
 - *“adult education programmes are often not in line with market needs, or do not anticipate market trends, so they are late.”*
- The creation of support services for motivation and guidance purposes:
 - *“Disinterest in education.”*
- The possibility of freeing up time to devote to training (formal/ non-formal)
 - *“Fluctuation in a sector is interpreted as a deficit, for example catering occupations.”*

Challenges

Disadvantaged groups are not a priority of policies and investments aimed at adult education. Understanding how

to progressively change this type of “learning exclusion equilibrium” is the most significant challenge to avoid immobility in the quantity and quality of adult learning participation. This trend was further exacerbated during the pandemic years.

Opportunities

The need to develop the capabilities and skills of the entire population, including disadvantaged groups, is at the heart of many acts of the European Union. The National Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia for the period 2018-2030 has shared this need. Research has provided operational guidance on how to intervene, and several best practices provide concrete evidence. It is possible that in the medium term a new political will shall manifest itself and that public intervention will assume as its task also the correction of the unbalanced distributional effects produced by the private market of adult education and by the training systems to the disadvantage of large groups of the population.

3.4. Governance

Survey results

Among those who expressed an opinion, the prevailing ones are those who support the statement confirming that there is there is a good balance of power between central and local governments or a high level of autonomy (56.3%). At European level the figure is 61.4% (5.1 percentage

points higher). This would justify the idea of the adequacy of local governments’ powers and resources to support and promote adult learning and education public policies. This percentage decreases to 54.6% among those who hold public office or perform public functions whilst it increases at European level among them (67.1%).

However, there is a distinct perception of weak alignment between central and local policies. This view is shared by 70% of policymakers and 80% of adult learning professionals.

Challenges

The challenges that emerge from the expressed opinions concern the ability of regional and local institutions to strengthen the participatory and coordinated mode of government by identifying the representative subjects of emerging and consolidated social problems, which can interpret, express and direct the process of conquest of educational spaces by eliminating risks of conflicts of interest and corruption.

Opportunities

The essential function of horizontal governance is capacity building. Fostering the implementation of complex, integrated policies requires the involvement of those who will need to implement them. Focusing on the demand for adult learning - both high- and low-skilled adults - when it is not limited to obtaining certification requires strong cooperation

between multiple actors. To promote it, public institutions may use conditionality measures in the provision of funding. However, the use of horizontal governance as a mode of capacity building provides an opportunity to accelerate and increase the consistency and integration of practices promoted by different stakeholders.

3.5. Internationalisation of adult education organisations

Survey results

The opportunity to reinforce the internationalisation of adult learning stakeholders is confirmed by 3 out of 5 respondents. The remaining did not answer or considered themselves not interested or not competent in the field. Respondents indicated that internationalisation can produce the following benefits (in order of importance):

- Access to international financing (43.8% against 50.6% at European level).
- Develop and innovate through mutual learning processes (31.3% against 67% at European level).
- Globalise organisations and activities (28.1% against 45.5% at European level).
- Influence international policies (21.9% against 46.8% at European level).

Challenges

A large part of Croatian respondents seems to be concentrated upon the national and local level, they do not see substantial benefits deriving from the international dimension of policies.

The lack of attention to European policies

is accompanied by a scepticism of the functions of community institutions and the relevance of the results that action directed at their policies can produce.

European funds are considered a source of sustenance for AEOs regardless of their connection to international policies and objectives (the item on “*access to international funding*” is the only one having 6.8 percentage points of difference with the European figure).

Opportunities

Increasingly strong processes are underway to create integration and dialogue between national labour markets, facilitated in part by the spread of skills classification systems. This likely accounts for the strong interest in mutual learning and benchmarking, and the existence of broad networks provides opportunities to select appropriate partners. The implementation in the different countries of the European Union of the Next Generation Europe implementation programmes will provide an opportunity for more organisations to learn about and use funds.

The intensification of the European action in the adult learning and education’s territory creates new opportunities to understand its role and relevance. Think of the amount of investment in adult learning promoted by Next Generation Europe, the resurgence of attention in the 2016 Recommendation on adult learning and education, and finally the appearance of elements of adult education-related conditionality in the Country Specific Recommendations.

4. Adult Learning Policies in Estonia. Regional and local stakeholders' insights²²

4.1. Public policies, systems, investments, organisations

4.1.1. Public policies

Survey results

The RegALE survey on Estonia²³ examined both elements of perception and prospectation related to the current decade and elements of desirability and rationality in the construction of policies. This latter one is the starting point for our analysis of data from Estonia: the construction of political choices and measures based on expected changes is defined on the basis of results produced by previous implementations and documented by research, monitoring and evaluation. It is a crucial aspect that is related to the quality of policy making processes and motivates international cooperation in the field of adult learning and education policies.

In Estonia, as well as in all the surveyed countries, improvement of public policies is believed to depend on the construction of evidence-based policies. The need to move towards evidence-based policies, especially at the local level, is perceived as weak by 76.5% of respondents (against 72.9% at European level²⁴). Generally speaking, the adult learning and education is considered by some of the Estonian

respondents a field where there is an *“uneven quality of training”*.²⁵

Providing learning opportunities that are relevant also for employers is a challenge for the European strategies. To this regard, Estonian respondents believe that the third sector do not play an important role (58.8% vs. 41.2%).

The issue concern more the way adult education is perceived by public policies and by local governments:

“Matter-of-fact and supportive co-operation with the local government is both a short-term and a long-term need.”

“Juhtida (reklaamida) inimeste arengut väärtustades kohaliku identiteedi [Lead and promote people's development by valuing local identity].”

“Rahastamise ja valdkonna koordineerimise strateegiad. Kohalikus omavalitsuses peab olema täiskasvanuhariduse valdkonna eest vastutav spetsialist [Funding and field coordination strategies. The local government must have a specialist responsible for the field of adult education].”

²¹ Written by Francesca Torlone, data processing by Francesco De Maria, data management by Tina Mavrič, validation by Margit Düüna, under the supervision of Paolo Federighi.

²² RegALE survey on Estonia is connected to the European survey on “Adult Learning and Education Policies in Europe. An Insight of Regional and Local Stakeholders”, carried out in the framework of the RegALE project (Regional capacity for adult learning and education), led by the European Association for Education of Adults (EAEA) and funded by the European Commission.

²⁴ Comparison with average at the European level is included only when national data from Estonia are above or below 10 points % except for some particularly relevant cases.

²⁵ Quotations from the Country respondents are reported in italics along with the English translation where needed. They report opinions expressed on the topic included in the item of the survey.

Additional areas of improvement and areas for reflections are provided in the following chapters.

Challenges

At the moment the national strategies taken up by the Education Strategy (2021-2035) by the Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Estonia have not yielded significant results with regard to the preparation of implementation policies. There is a prevailing trend towards sectoral and short-term measures.

Opportunities

The new European programmes and the need to address the post-pandemic and economic crisis also through adult learning can be seen as an important and decisive opportunity to strengthen the role of public policies and their ability to promote the construction of services and incentives for the development of participation in adult learning and a more qualified offering for disadvantaged groups.

4.1.2. Systems

Survey results

The number of the Estonian public systems involved in adult education is trending upward at the national and local levels:

“The cooperation between different fields is not strong. Even concerning the different fields of adult education and target groups the cooperation between ministries is not relevant for real needs. The Council of Adult Education

at the Ministry of Education and Research is very formal.”

This happens in all the public administration domains: the health, military, education, labour, culture, justice (from magistrates to prisoners), etc. All these domains have their education and training systems that work for the training of adults who affect the policies of the sector (as employees or as recipients of their policies: judges, prisoners, soldiers, immigrants, etc.). However, this variety constitutes a set of misaligned systems according to 88.2% of Estonian respondents (much higher than the European average: 72%). This problem concerns both the development of national strategic guidelines and the orientation and management of services and activities.

Each system is regarded as independent, with its own rules of operation by virtue of which it reproduces itself and prolongs its influence on the local level independently of the others. Every system operates within its cluster of sectoral organisations with no coordination: *“There is no overall coordination at the local government level.”*

“I believe more into cooperation as into competition in the field of adult education.”
“Vähene koostöö [little cooperation].”

Because of these rules, public systems perpetuate their dysfunctions linked to a definition of their mission that does not correlate in any way to the missions and programmes of other parts of the public administration.

Challenges

The challenge is related to the plurality of systems and sub-systems made of organisations and institutions that do not talk to each other and create inefficiencies for the potential impact of the overall offering. This is the result (of) and reveals different cultures of education and learning. Public policy should strengthen three basic functions: setting priorities, advocating for quality, and ensuring social equity.

Opportunities

Based on the great variety of existing systems it is possible to promote their convergence and give rise to an overarching adult learning strategy. This general adult learning policy can support the development of the willingness to cooperate and promote greater attention and investment in improving the educational conditions for the most disadvantaged groups of the population.

4.1.3. Investments

Survey results

The regional and local investments in adult education are there, the problems concern rather the destination of spending and its adequacy to current and potential demand. 58.8% of Estonian respondents believe that these investments are adequate to ensure a basic supply to make the system work.

However, these investments are considered inadequate to answer the existing demand

by 82.4% of respondents. The figure is equal to the European one. Moreover, investments are not for all: "*Väiksematel organisatsioonidel on raskem konkureerida ESF rahastusele. [It is more difficult for smaller organisations to compete for ESF funding].*" In particular, it is believed that investments do not meet the complex and varied demands of disadvantaged groups.

Moreover, 88.2% think that public investment does not seem oriented towards the right priorities (11.4 percentage points higher compared to the European figure: 76.8%):

"Funding for local non-formal education training centres has been insufficient since 2011 when we were deprived of the opportunity to diversify European- and Estonian-funded training with training that could be organised in cooperation with other local societies (craft societies and village societies)."

Challenges

The adult learning system appears to be underfunded and exposed to reduced or unmodified public investment. Moreover, public spending is oriented towards unstable priorities and this reveals a lack of attention to the social impact of public investments, oriented towards the short term. This calls for an increase in spending as well as its redistribution towards new priorities to be pursued in the medium and long term.

Opportunities

Current investments allow the system to exist and provide a basic offering.

Businesses and individuals show a propensity to invest in training. Strong potential demand and the growing need for skilled workers could produce a financial restructuring of public investment that would allow for redefining short-, medium-, and long-term financial needs, planning, monitoring, and managing to consistently secure needed resources.

4.1.4. Adult education organisations

Survey results

The ability of adult education organisations to reach a wide range of audiences (particularly disadvantaged groups) and improve equity in accessing learning opportunities is recognised by 58.8% of respondents. The figure is slightly less than the European figure (60.6%), and much lower than other local figures (i.e. 68.6% for the Italian respondents). To this regard Croatians are the ones having the worse opinions (36%).

For Estonian respondents an obstacle to being committed to this direction is the lack of public funds that can be allocated to redistributive objectives, the weight of economic and financial constraints, and the barriers that inhibit the activities provided:

“State investment into adult education has been project based since 2005”.

“The public support to adult education is project-based and not stable. All investments are based on learners’ fees. Some municipalities

support adult education providers, but this is a very modest investment.”

“Very low funds for the private and third sector.”

“Adult education organisations do not get sufficient investments for management, working staff, supply. Adult Education is organised in cooperation of vocational or general education - using the infrastructures of the schools.”

“The funding is not enough; only certain areas are covered.”

“The extent of funding for adult education organisations for third sector organisations is insufficient.”

Public investments also depend on territories and the lack of strategy:

“Investment outcomes vary a lot depending on the area”;

“Effectiveness from private investment is low since there is lack of motivational goals. Public investments are most effective but are lacking clear strategy”.

“Not enough. In January, only the organisations of Harju County and Ida-Viru County were supported. Creating unequal competition.”

AEOs are committed to providing and managing activities that are relevant to participants and society at large. This is acknowledged by 76.5% of respondents. The figure is much higher compared to the European average (60.9%) and to other local figures (Norway – 65.4%; Italy – 60%). Other local figures are more than 15 percentage points lower (Croatia

- 41.7%; Greece: 47.8%). Accordingly, there is a percentage (23.5%) who believe that there are weaknesses in this regard. At European level the figure is 39.1% (15.6 percentage points higher). Pessimistic view is much higher from local respondents from other territories: Greece (52.2%) and Croatia (58.3%). This is also confirmed by evaluations of the ability of AEOs to offer relevant learning opportunities also for employers: 41.2% responded in the affirmative (against 48% at European level).

The development of networks of relationships and cooperation is a general area for improvement in the opinion of a large majority of respondents: *"vähene koostöö vabatühendustega [lack of cooperation with NGOs]"*. Enhancement needs are expressed concerning each type of stakeholder or partner. In particular, for 87.5% of respondents, collaborative relations with government institutions at a regional and local level must be strengthened. At European level the figure is 73.7% (13.8 percentage points lower). Compared to the other partners, areas that require more attention emerge:

- Social partners (87.5% against 74.4% at European level): *"Engaging social partners is very formal and the situation is getting worse"*.
- Private and social enterprises (75% against 78.9 at European level).
- Social and cultural organisations and services (75% against 63.5% at European level).
- Other AEOs (50% against 63.7% at

European level).

Expectations for the future were expressed for a 10-year outlook.

Among Estonian respondents, the expectation prevails significantly (62.5%) that by 2030 adult education organisations in their region and local community will probably or certainly be fewer in number. This forecast is accompanied by the expectation - shared by 75% of the Estonian respondents - that the AEOs that will operate at that date will probably or certainly be more effective and will probably or certainly be able to make use of a more qualified workforce (81.2% of respondents against 51.6% at European level). Nonetheless, there are opinions like *"Many adult educators are not qualified, and they work because there is need. This will lead to big gaps in professionalism."*

Challenges

The main challenges for AEOS seem to be as follows:

- The risk of depending on public policies that cover only part of the needs, with insufficient and discontinuous funding.
- The scarcity of forms of cooperation and coordination with other stakeholders.
- Insufficient types of strategic activities and services of common interest that are not widely available today and that reduce the impact of activities and increase their costs (outreach, guidance, career management, etc.).

Opportunities

The survey shows that there is a strong tendency to work towards:

- Intentional change management of organisational strategies.
- Diversification of financing sources.
- The development of a more professional adult learning and education workforce.

4.2. Adult learning and education offer and workforce

4.2.1. Adult learning and education offer

Survey results

In Estonia the offer of adult learning and education activities and services covers a lot of fields (i.e. education, cultural activities, health) as in all the surveyed countries. Nonetheless, it is considered insufficient to cover the potential demand of the different groups of the population: *“Regional government should order and finance more courses for the general public that are carried out by the local adult education organisations. Those courses could be for the certain groups of employees.”*

The training of basic skills for work, life, and citizenship is considered an improving trend by respondents. The discrepancy between the adult learning and education offer and demand is caused by the lack of knowledge of current and future learning demands by public and private stakeholders, according to the majority of responses. Estonian respondents think that labour market' skills needs are not

forecasted (58.8%): *“There is gap between job seekers qualification and demand for skilled HR demand by employers”*. Estonia respondents also refer to the national Authority in charge with the skills forecasting: *“In Estonia Qualification Authority analyses the needs for labour and skills necessary for Estonia’s economic development over the next 10 years.”* At European level the figure is 62.2%. Other local figures are much higher (i.e. Greece – 86.4%).

According to the survey results, the mismatch between adult learning and education supply and demand is an issue in Estonia as well as in other countries that were surveyed. The most disadvantaged groups do not have learning opportunities that can meet their specific problems and needs.

Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges and opportunities connected to the adult learning and education offer are represented by the set of challenges and opportunities on adult learning and education policies. This is because the offer in this field is the outcome of political decisions related to adult learning and education financing, organisation, services, workforce.

4.2.2. Adult learning and education workforce: professions, quantity, quality

Survey results

The quality of the supply of AEOs is related first and foremost to the quality

of the skills of the adult learning and education workforce. For 70.6% of the respondents, this is an area where further action is needed, especially on the part of public policies, since the training of the adult learning and education workforce in the AEOs is left to the initiative of individual organisations. At European level the figure is 62.8%.

Nonetheless, the availability of a well-qualified workforce will have a significant or crucial impact on the sustainability of the transformations that are expected from adult education organisations by 2030. This is the opinion of 62.5% of respondents. At European level the figure is 51.6%.

The professionalism of the adult learning and education workforce should be strengthened concurrently with the development of professionalisation processes. This is specifically in relation to the strengthening of their professional status, to its recognition also by means of legal instruments, the improvement of the economic conditions, the introduction of basic standards to access the profession, and to the improvement of work: *“Adult educators need also training the same way as new educators. They need courses for increasing their mental health, motivation, professionalism.”*

“Our altruistic goals and aspirations are not understood.”

This is also in relation to recruitment of new AEOs professionals:

“Too much old educators and lack of new

educators in the region.”

“Uut põlvkonda koolitajaid vähe peale tulemas. Koolitajad töötavad nagu eraettevõtjad, ei tööta töölepinguga. Koolituskeskustel ei ole võimalik koolitajaid palgal hoida. Vanema põlvkonna koolitajate digioskused ja võõrkeeled vajavad arendamist [A new generation of trainers is coming up a little. Trainers work like private entrepreneurs; they do not work with an employment contract. Training centres cannot keep trainers on salary. The digital skills and foreign languages of the older generation of educators need development].”

Challenges

The challenges correspond to the desired transformations that address three main aspects:

- Recognition of the multiplicity of professionals working in different roles in the field of adult learning and education and the quality criteria governing recruitment, access and practice of the profession.
- The assurance of adequate initial and ongoing training courses that guarantee basic and specialised skills corresponding to the variety of professional profiles.
- The guarantee of working conditions that corresponds to the importance of the performed functions.

Opportunities

Increased demand for adult learning and education should be accompanied by increased investment and a greater focus on the return-on-investment (ROI) of training. This depends heavily on the

quality of the trainers.

4.3. Disadvantaged groups

Survey results

Disadvantaged groups are not the priority target audience for adult learning and education in Estonia. The prevailing opinion (70.6%) is that there are no investments to adequately meet the potential demand for training disadvantaged groups: *“Unemployed people should learn but working people should also have the possibilities to learn”*. This is included also in the survey where respondents were asked to point out the needs to be taken into consideration in the short and medium term: *“Koostöösus, erivajadustega inimestega arvestamine, majanduslik stabiilsus [Cooperation skills, consideration for people with special needs, economic stability]”*. At European level the figure is 78.5%. This view is shared by all types of respondents (institutional representatives from regional and local governments and professionals from AEOs): *“The extent of funding for adult education organisations for third sector organisations is insufficient”*.

The access of different groups of the population to the education and learning is conditioned by some factors with strong limiting power such as:

- The economic and organisational barriers
 - *“People see learning more as an expensive hobby.”*
 - *“Puuduvad finantseeringud [No financing*

available].”

- *“Competition between numerous AEOs because of the small number of active adult learners in the region.”*

- The cultural and historical constraints

- *“People in rural areas have not yet got rid of the Soviet way of thinking and middle-aged people, especially women, are not entrepreneurial.”*

- The location constraints, also for AEOs professionals

- *“enamik koolitusi toimuvad maakonnakeskustes [most trainings take place in county centers]”; “koolitus peab olema kättesaadav vaatamata elukohast [training must be available regardless of place of residence].”*

- *“Koolitusi pakutakse peamiselt suuremates keskustes, mandril, kuhu Saaremaalt liikuda on keeruline, ressursimahukas (aeg ja raha) [Trainings are offered mainly in larger centres, on the mainland; it is difficult to travel from Saaremaa to these centres, it is resource-intensive (time and money)].”*

- *“väga vähe pakutakse isikuarengukoolitusi Saaremaal [very few personal development trainings are offered in Saaremaa].”*

- The creation of a “relevant” education and learning offers

- *“info erinevate koolitusvõimaluste kohta on väga piiratud [information about different training options is very limited].”*

- The creation of support services for particular groups of adults

- *“ei pakuta tasuta koolitusi lapsehoolduspuhkusel olevatele vanematele*

[no free trainings are offered to parents on parental leave]."

Challenges

In Estonia disadvantaged groups are not a priority of policies and investments aimed at adult education. Understanding how to progressively change this type of "learning exclusion equilibrium" is the most significant challenge to avoid immobility in the quantity and quality of adult learning participation. This trend was further exacerbated during the pandemic years.

Opportunities

The need to develop the capabilities and skills of the entire population, including disadvantaged groups, is at the heart of many acts of the European Union. The Education Strategy (2021-2035) by the Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Estonia has shared this need. Research has provided operational guidance on how to intervene, and several best practices provide concrete evidence. It is possible that in the medium term a new political will shall manifest itself and that public intervention will assume as its task also the correction of the unbalanced distributional effects produced by the private market of adult education and by the training systems to the disadvantage of large groups of the population: *"Eestis täiskasvanuharidus on rahastatud ainult tasemeõppes: täiskasvanute gümnaasiumid, kutseõppeasutused ja kõrgkoolid ning ülikoolid. Muu täiskasvanuharidus on vabal turul ja*

organisatsioonid majandavad isemajandamise põhimõttel. Riiklik kui ka regionaalne rahastussüsteem puudub. [In Estonia, adult education has been financed only in some levels of education: adult gymnasiums, vocational training institutions, colleges, and universities. Other adult education is in the free market and the organisations manage that on the principle of self-sufficiency. There is no national or regional funding system]."

4.4. Governance

Survey results

Among those who expressed an opinion, the prevailing ones are those who support the statement confirming that there is a good balance of power between central and local governments or a high level of autonomy (52.4%). This percentage is 33.3% among those who hold public office or perform public functions. One critical issue is considered that refers to the reproduction of centralism on a local level:

"Local power is arrogant and has gained power through political means, i.e. local elections. With the merger of municipalities, a great deal of bureaucracy has arisen."

"Local and regional adult education and learning strategies are not actually considered."

"We are stagnant and tired locally."

At European level the figure is higher (61.4%). This would only partially support the idea of the adequacy of local governments' powers and resources to support and promote adult learning and

education public policies. The weakness is the lack of resources: *“Local municipalities do not have resources to support local adult education.”*

“Raising the interest of government in adult education. Better education ensures higher incomes for people and higher tax revenues for government.”

However, there is a distinct perception of weak alignment between central and local policies: *“Responsibility for formal adult education is centralised. Responsibility for non-formal adult education is chaotic”*. This view is shared by 33.3% of policymakers and 87.5% of adult learning professionals.

Challenges

The challenges that emerge from the expressed opinions concern the ability of regional and local institutions to strengthen the participatory and coordinated mode of government by identifying the representative subjects of emerging and consolidated social problems, which can interpret, express and direct the process of conquest of educational spaces by eliminating risks of conflicts of interest and corruption.

Opportunities

The essential function of horizontal governance is capacity building. Fostering the implementation of complex, integrated policies requires the involvement of those who will need to implement them. Focusing on the demand for adult learning - both high- and low-skilled

adults - when it is not limited to obtaining certification requires strong cooperation between multiple actors. To promote it, public institutions may use conditionality measures in the provision of funding. However, the use of horizontal governance as a mode of capacity building provides an opportunity to accelerate and increase the consistency and integration of practices promoted by different stakeholders.

4.5. Internationalisation of adult education organisations

Survey results

The opportunity to reinforce the internationalisation of adult learning stakeholders is confirmed by 5 out of 7 respondents. The remaining did not answer or considered themselves not interested or not competent in the field. Respondents indicated that internationalisation can produce the following benefits (in order of importance):

- Develop and innovate through mutual learning processes (47.6% against 67% at European level).
- Globalise organisations and activities (42.9% against 45.5% at European level).
- Access to international financing (38.1% against 50.6% at European level).
- Influence international policies (23.8% against 46.8% at European level).

Challenges

Estonian respondents seem to be concentrated upon the national and local level; they do not see substantial benefits

from the international dimension of policies.

The lack of attention to European policies is accompanied by a scepticism of the functions of community institutions and the relevance of the results that action directed at their policies can produce. This might explain the reason why not all the Estonian sample answered this set of questions.

European funds are considered a source of sustenance for AEOs as in some other European countries although not the main one.

Opportunities

Increasingly strong processes are underway to create integration and dialogue between national labour markets, facilitated in part by the spread of skills classification systems. This likely accounts for the strong interest in mutual learning and benchmarking, and the existence of broad networks provides opportunities to select appropriate partners.

5. Adult Learning Policies in Germany. Regional and local stakeholders' insights²⁶

5.1. Public policies, systems, investments, organisations

5.1.1. Public policies

Survey results

The RegALE survey on Germany²⁷ examined both elements of perception and prospectation related to the current decade and elements of desirability and rationality in the construction of policies. This latter one is the starting point for our analysis of data from Germany: the construction of political choices and measures based on expected changes is defined on the basis of results produced by previous implementations and documented by research, monitoring and evaluation. It is a crucial aspect that is related to the quality of policy making processes and motivates international cooperation in the field of adult learning and education policies.

In Germany, as well as in all the surveyed countries, improvement of public policies is believed to depend on the construction of evidence-based policies. The need to move towards evidence-based policies, especially at the local level, is perceived as weak by 61.5% of respondents (against 72.9% at European level²⁸). Views of German respondents stress that monitoring and evaluation are *“up to individual organisations and to some degree to professional associations”*²⁹. Generally speaking, the adult learning and education is considered a field where *“it is very much up to individual organisations”*. This is also in relation to the role that adult learning and education organisations played and are still playing in the German society: *“the adult education field has the problem that the biggest providers and organisations have not found it necessary for ages to contribute to the development of basic adult education and of basic issues in adult education. In spite of social oriented organisations and the Volkshochschulen, the specific adult learning centres remained ambivalent in recognising their responsibility for outreaching a diverse community, in basic skills learning and especially in basic literacy - as they were more orienting towards classical further education and training and qualification work. As a*

²⁶ Written by Francesca Torlone, data processing by Francesco De Maria, data management by Tina Mavrič, validation by Andrea Bernert-Bürkle, under the supervision of Paolo Federighi.

²⁷ RegALE survey on Germany is connected to the European survey on “Adult Learning and Education Policies in Europe. An Insight of Regional and Local Stakeholders”, carried out in the framework of the RegALE project (Regional capacity for adult learning and education), led by the European Association for Education of Adults (EAEA) and funded by the European Commission.

²⁸ Comparison with average at the European level is included only when national data from Germany are above or below 10 points % except for some particularly relevant cases.

²⁹ Quotations from the Country respondents are reported in italics. They report opinions expressed on the topic included in the item of the survey.

result, it is highly difficult since there are almost no answers to the demand for integrated and targeted approaches that are adequate to marginalised groups, groups at risk and with specific needs, to people.”

Providing learning opportunities that are relevant also for employers is a challenge for the European strategies. To this regard, German respondents believe that the third sector play an important role (69.2% vs. 30.8%). This opinion is widespread among politicians involved in the governance of the local and regional adult education system (50%), as well as, albeit to a higher degree, among professionals involved in the direction, management and coordination of educational organisations (72.7%).

Challenges

The German National Skills Strategy, launched in 2019, was adopted by the Federal Ministries of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS) and Education and Research (BMBF), in cooperation with several partners from politics, business associations, trade unions. The Strategy is being monitored in its implementation. At the moment there is a prevailing trend towards sectoral and short-term measures such as increasing transparency and improving the quality of adult learning and education offer, improving learning demand forecasts.

Opportunities

The new European programmes and the need to address the post-pandemic

and economic crisis also through adult learning can be seen as an important and decisive opportunity to: i) promote a new adult learning and education culture; ii) strengthen the role of public policies and their ability to promote the construction of services and incentives for the development of participation in adult learning and a more qualified offering for disadvantaged groups.

5.1.2. Systems

Survey results

In Germany the number of public systems involved in adult education is trending upward at the national and local levels. This happens in all the public administration domains: the military, education, labour, justice (from magistrates to prisoners), etc. All these domains have their education and training systems that work for the training of adults who affect the policies of the sector (as employees or as recipients of their policies: judges, prisoners, soldiers, immigrants, etc.). However, this variety constitutes a set of misaligned systems according to 75% of German respondents (against 72% at European level). This problem concerns both the development of national strategic guidelines and the orientation and management of services and activities.

Each system is regarded as independent, with its own rules of operation by virtue of which it reproduces itself and prolongs its influence on the local level independently of the others. Every system operates within its cluster of sectoral organisations

operating in specific sectors, with no coordination: the *“weak cooperation with industrial companies”* is pointed out.

Because of these rules, public systems perpetuate their dysfunctions linked to a definition of their mission that does not correlate in any way to the missions and programmes of other parts of the public administration.

Challenges

The challenge is related to the plurality of systems and sub-systems made of organisations and institutions that do not talk to each other and create inefficiencies for the potential impact of the overall offering. This is the result (of) and reveals different cultures of education and learning. Public policy should strengthen three basic functions: setting priorities, advocating for quality, and ensuring social equity.

Opportunities

Based on the great variety of existing systems it is possible to promote their convergence and give rise to an overarching adult learning strategy. This general adult learning policy can support the development of the willingness to cooperate and promote greater attention and investment in improving the educational conditions for the most disadvantaged groups of the population.

5.1.3. Investments

Survey results

The regional and local investments in

adult education are there, the problems concern rather the destination of spending and its adequacy to current and potential demand. 91.7% of the German respondents believe that these investments are adequate to ensure a basic supply to make the system work. The figure is much higher compared to the European average (64.2%) and to other local ones (i.e. Estonia – 58.8%; Italy – 59.4%; Norway – 61.5%; Croatia – 77.3%).

However, these investments are considered inadequate to answer the existing demand by 83.3% of respondents. In this case figure is similar to the European one (82.4%) and other local ones like Italy (88.2%), Croatia (86.4%), Estonia (82.4%). In Greece the figure is much higher (95.7%). In particular, it is believed that investments do not meet the complex and varied demands of disadvantaged groups: *“[...] we struggle to support the necessary services and infrastructures financially as there is limited financial support”*. Innovation and flexibility are promoted but *“the financial and operational support for educational organisations is not provided to achieve this goal”*. Moreover *“there are new investment plans, but financing is insufficient. Right now, it is up to the individuals themselves, if they want to take part in any courses”*. *“Funding is effective, however, in Germany it only covers parts of the infrastructure and management costs. Participants in adult education usually need to pay for education and training.”*

Furthermore, public funds are not easily accessible by organisations and a strong commitment is required to look for

additional financial resources:

"We as a small organisation providing adult education cannot access European funds, so I do not believe that they make any difference to the state of adult education in our locality". "Unfortunately, there is not enough funding available at first sight. The manager of an adult education centre really has to do a lot of research to find other sources of funding (which do exist) and has to show a lot of commitment when it comes to applications."

Adult education is considered to be a "voluntary service for local authorities", this is the reason why it is "subject to frequent cuts and lack of funding."

Moreover, public investment does not seem oriented towards the right priorities (58.3%): There are "not investments, but project funding opportunities". To this regard at European level the figure is 76.8%.

Challenges

The adult learning system appears to be exposed to unstable and not regular public investment by local authorities. Moreover, public spending is oriented towards unstable priorities and this reveals a lack of attention to the social impact of public investments, oriented towards the short term. This calls for an increase in spending as well as its redistribution towards new priorities to be pursued in the medium and long term.

Opportunities

Current investments allow the system to exist and provide a basic offering. Businesses and individuals show a

propensity to invest in training. Strong potential demand and the growing need for skilled workers could produce a financial restructuring of public investment that would allow for redefining short-, medium-, and long-term financial needs, planning, monitoring, and managing to consistently secure needed resources.

5.1.4. Adult education organisations

Survey results

The ability of adult education organisations to reach a wide range of audiences (particularly disadvantaged groups) and improve equity in accessing learning opportunities is recognised by 66.7% of respondents. The figure is a bit higher than the European one (60.6%) and near to other local figures (i.e. 68.6% for the Italian respondents), but higher than other countries (i.e. Croatia – 36%).

For German respondents an obstacle to being committed to this direction is the lack of public funds that can be allocated to redistributive objectives, the weight of economic and financial constraints, and the barriers that inhibit the activities provided.

AEOs are committed to providing and managing activities that are relevant to participants and society at large. This is acknowledged by 77% of respondents. The figure is much higher compared to the European average (60.9%) and to other local figures (Norway – 65.4%; Italy – 60%). Other local figures are more

than 15 percentage points lower (Croatia - 41.7%; Greece - 47.8%). Estonians have a similar opinion (76.5%). Accordingly, there is a percentage (23%) who believe that there are weaknesses in this regard. At European level the figure is 39.1% (16.1 percentage points higher). Respondents from other territories have a more pessimistic view: Greece (52.2%) and Croatia (58.3%). This is also confirmed by evaluations of the ability of AEOs to offer relevant learning opportunities also for employers: 69.2% responded in the affirmative way (against 48% at European level, 21.2 percentage points of difference).

“Absolutely, and we do work with employers to offer training. However, this is not necessarily promoted on a policy level.”

The development of networks of relationships and cooperation is a general area for improvement in the opinion of a large majority of respondents: *“While there is a high level of engagement on the level of the local authority, the State-level policies that have an impact do not sufficiently engage social partners, and thus limit local potential”*.

Enhancement needs are expressed concerning each type of stakeholder or partner. In particular, for 58.3% of respondents, collaborative relations with government institutions at a regional and local level must be strengthened. At European level the figure is 73.7% (the difference is 15.4 percentage points). Compared to other partners, areas that require more attention emerge:

- Private and social enterprises (81.8% against 78.9 at European level).

- Social partners (63.6% against 74.4% at European level).

- Social and cultural organisations and services (66.7% against 63.5% at European level).

- Other AEOs (41.7% against 63.7% at European level).

Expectations for the future were expressed for a 10-year outlook.

Among German respondents, the expectation prevails significantly (100%) that by 2030 adult education organisations in their region and local community will probably or certainly be fewer in number. This forecast is accompanied by the expectation - shared by 41.7% of the German respondents - that the AEOs that will operate at that date will probably or certainly be more effective and will probably or certainly be able to make use of a more qualified workforce (50% of respondents against 51.6% at European level).

The risk for AEOs of lacking public funding is there: *“we usually apply for additional funding to provide some adult education activities like outreach. This creates much uncertainty, which is set to increase due to financial constraints on the public purse following the pandemic. Combined with uncertainty about post-pandemic uptake of education courses, I fear that rather than being strengthened, adult education and the organisations providing it will be massively weakened in the future.”*

Challenges

The main challenges for AEOs seem to be as follows:

- The risk of not making use of the European financial resources available and enlarge the possibility to reinforce adult learning and education sector.
- The weak forms of cooperation and coordination with other stakeholders.
- Insufficient types of strategic activities and services of common interest that are not widely available today and that reduce the impact of activities and increase their costs (outreach, guidance, career management, etc.).

Opportunities

The survey shows that there is a strong tendency to work towards:

- Intentional change management of organisational strategies.
- Diversification of financing sources.
- The development of a more professional adult learning and education workforce.

5.2. Adult learning and education offer and workforce

5.2.1. Adult learning and education offer

Survey results

In Germany the offer of adult learning and education activities and services covers a lot of fields (i.e. education, cultural activities, health) as in all the surveyed countries. Nonetheless it is considered insufficient to cover the potential demand of the different groups of the population.

The training of basic skills for work, life, and citizenship is considered an improving trend by respondents. The discrepancy between the adult learning and education provision and the demand is caused by the lack of knowledge of current and future learning demands by public and private stakeholders, according to the majority of responses: *“There are no local and regional needs assessments”*; *“There is a mismatch between skills forecast and education provided.”* German respondents think that labour market skills needs are not forecasted (46.2%). At European level the figure is higher (62.2%). Other local figures are much higher (i.e. Greece – 86.4%).

According to the survey results, the mismatch between adult learning and education supply and demand is an issue in Germany as well as in other countries that were surveyed. The most disadvantaged groups do not have learning opportunities that can meet their specific problems and needs.

Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges and opportunities connected to the adult learning and education offer are represented by the set of challenges and opportunities on adult learning and education policies. This is because the offer in this field is the outcome of political decisions related to adult learning and education financing, organisation, services, workforce.

5.2.2. Adult learning and education workforce: professions, quantity, quality

Survey results

The quality of the supply of AEOs is related first and foremost to the quality of the skills of the adult learning and education workforce. For 30.8% of the respondents, this is an area where further action is needed, especially on the part of public policies since the training of the adult learning and education workforce in the AEOs is left to the initiative of individual organisations. At European level the figure is much higher (62.8%).

The availability of a well-qualified workforce will have a significant or crucial impact on the sustainability of the transformations that are expected from adult education organisations by 2030. This is the opinion of 83.3% of respondents. At European level the figure is 51.6%.

The professionalism of the adult learning and education workforce should be strengthened concurrently with the development of professionalisation processes. This is specifically in relation to the strengthening of their professional status, to its recognition also by means of legal instruments, the improvement of the economic conditions, the introduction of basic standards to access the profession, and to the improvement of work. In Germany some of the adult learning and education related weaknesses are:

“Remuneration is a weak point. It must be worthwhile working in the adult education

sector. This is currently not the case, leading to an aging workforce.”

“No young generation of teachers”, “high age of the teachers.”

“Part-time and contracted workforce”, “low payment of teachers.”

“Limited personnel resources in rural areas.”

“Tight funding”, “low finances by the municipality.”

“Not enough workforce (at our institution).”

“Lack of public acknowledgement.”

Challenges

The challenges correspond to the desired transformations that address three main aspects:

- Recognition of the multiplicity of professionals working in different roles in the field of adult learning and education and the quality criteria governing recruitment, access and practice of the profession.
- The assurance of adequate initial and ongoing training courses that guarantee basic and specialised skills corresponding to the variety of professional profiles.
- The guarantee of working conditions that corresponds to the importance of the performed functions.

Opportunities

Increased demand for adult learning and education should be accompanied by increased investment and a greater focus on the return-on-investment (ROI) of training. This depends heavily on the quality of the trainers.

5.3. Disadvantaged groups

Survey results

Disadvantaged groups are not the priority target audience for adult learning and education in Germany. The prevailing opinion (69.2%) is that there are no investments to adequately meet the potential demand for training disadvantaged groups. At European level the figure is 78.5%. This view is shared by all types of respondents (institutional representatives from regional and local governments and professionals from AEOs).

The access of different groups of the population to the education and learning is conditioned by some factors with strong limiting power such as:

- The economic, cultural and organisational barriers

- *“Isolated and ivory tower capacity - lacking outreach and up taking of new discourses and participant groups and minorities.”*

- *“Mobility in rural areas, multi-use educational spaces where people live to increase accessibility.”*

- The creation of a “relevant” education and learning offers in consideration of the current limitations of adult learning and education supply

- *“Lack of attractive programmes for young people.”*

- *“Virtual education programmes to be improved.”*

- *“The field of general adult education is rather weak”, “the focus is still on formal learning and qualifications. More could be*

done to promote further education.”

- The creation of support services

- *“In our specific field of adult learning and education policies, guidance and support for learners are decisively lacking.”*

- *“The importance of adult education continues to grow, but at the same time it is becoming more difficult to reach the target groups. Better funding is needed.”*

- *“There are too few funding opportunities for outreach projects.”*

- *“While we receive annual funding both from our local authority and the State, this is not sufficient to cover all our expenditure (salaries, rent, utilities) and no investment at all. For the latter, as well as any development work such as outreach, we are required to apply for additional funding.”*

- Progression pathways are being promoted to some extent

- *“But awareness raising campaigns, role models, ambassadors like a national adult learning and education week are missing.”*

Challenges

In Germany disadvantaged groups are not a priority of policies and investments aimed at adult education. Understanding how to progressively change this type of “learning exclusion equilibrium” is the most significant challenge to avoid immobility in the quantity and quality of adult learning participation. This trend was further exacerbated during the pandemic years.

Opportunities

The need to develop the capabilities and skills of the entire population, including disadvantaged groups, is at the heart of many acts of the European Union. The German National Skills Strategy has shared this need. Research has provided operational guidance on how to intervene, and several best practices provide concrete evidence. It is possible that in the medium term a new political will shall manifest itself and that public intervention will assume as its task also the correction of the unbalanced distributional effects produced by the private market of adult education and by the training systems to the disadvantage of large groups of the population.

5.4. Governance

Survey results

Among those who expressed an opinion, the prevailing ones are those who support the statement confirming that there is a good balance of power between central and local governments or a high level of autonomy (85.7%). At European level the figure is lower (61.4%). This would justify the idea of the adequacy of local governments' powers and resources to support and promote adult learning and education public policies. This percentage reaches 66.6% among those who hold public office or perform public functions. However, there is a distinct perception of weak alignment between central and local policies. This view is shared by 50% of

policy-makers and 80% of adult learning professionals.

Challenges

The challenges that emerge from the expressed opinions concern the ability of regional and local institutions to strengthen the participatory and coordinated mode of government by identifying the representative subjects of emerging and consolidated social problems, which can interpret, express and direct the process of conquest of educational spaces by eliminating risks of conflicts of interest and corruption.

Opportunities

The essential function of horizontal governance is capacity building. Fostering the implementation of complex, integrated policies requires the involvement of those who will need to implement them. Focusing on the demand for adult learning - both high- and low-skilled adults - when it is not limited to obtaining certification requires strong cooperation between multiple actors. To promote it, public institutions may use conditionality measures in the provision of funding. However, the use of horizontal governance as a mode of capacity building provides an opportunity to accelerate and increase the consistency and integration of practices promoted by different stakeholders.

5.5. Internationalisation of adult education organisations

Survey results

The opportunity to reinforce the internationalisation of adult learning stakeholders is confirmed by 4 out of 7 respondents. The remaining did not answer or considered themselves not interested, not competent in the field or not in need of internationalisation:

“In Germany the international and the European work of the adult education active citizenship field is a catastrophe. The difficulty is that all providers sit on the pond of well supported further education laws and of the federal agency for civic education. Financially there is no need for any European cooperation, and more difficult - the field is saturated on its own discourse. There is a handful of organisations, most in the field of classic Volkshochschulen and DVV international, that do it differently. But the field as such is not adequately taking over the responsibility, because we are a country with a well-established and well-funded adult education system.” Some international activities that are being carried out would need more recognition: *“learning and training mobility, adequate support and recognition of staff organising European activities and partnerships, adequate support, recognition and specific time for adult educators and staff in adult education to participate in mobilities and exchanges.”*

Internationalisation is seen also in relation to the mobility of citizens having different backgrounds: *“international qualifications*

are not sufficiently accepted.”

Respondents indicated that internationalisation can produce the following benefits (in order of importance):

- Develop and innovate through mutual learning processes (47.6% against 67% at European level).
- Access to international financing (33.3% against 50.6% at European level).
- Influence international policies (28.6% against 46.8% at European level).
- Globalise organisations and activities (28.6% against 45.5% at European level).

Challenges

In Germany European funds are not considered a source of sustenance for AEOs due to the existing strong financial support on a national and regional level. At the same time, there are AEOs that do search for European funding opportunities to fund additional relevant activities that are not covered by German financial resources (i.e. outreach, guidance). Nonetheless not all AEOs can easily access European funds due to the administrative and bureaucratic burden associated with their management.

Opportunities

The implementation of the Next Generation Europe implementation programmes will provide an opportunity for many organisations to learn about and use funds. For many ALE providers it will be an opportunity to access international funds and manage aspects or problems of adult education (migration, detention,

gender). Then there is the fact that, as the survey shows, those in political and institutional positions consider European funds not as an alternative but as complementary to the investment capacity of States and regions. This can prompt access to European funds by AEOs in a complementary capacity.

6. Adult learning policies in Greece. Regional and local stakeholders' insights³⁰

6.1. Public policies, systems, investments, organisations

6.1.1. Public policies

Survey results

The RegALE survey on Greece³¹ examined both elements of perception and prospectation related to the current decade and elements of desirability and rationality in the construction of policies. This latter one is the starting point for our analysis of data from Greece: the construction of political choices and measures based on expected changes is defined on the basis of results produced by previous implementations and documented by research, monitoring and evaluation. It is a crucial aspect that is related to the quality of policy making processes and motivates international cooperation in the field of adult learning and education policies.

In Greece, as well as in all the surveyed countries, improvement of public policies is believed to depend on the construction of evidence-based policies. The need to move towards evidence-based policies, especially at the local level, is perceived as weak by 87% of respondents from Greece (against 72.9% at European level, equal to 14.1 percentage points higher compared to the European figure³²).

Generally speaking, the adult learning and education is considered by some of the Greek respondents a field where “many reforms need to be done: 1) needs assessment (not temporarily but permanently); 2) huge investments in adult learning and lifelong learning; 3) powerful connection to the labour market; 4) more investments in pedagogical skills of adult learning; 5) deep changes in general culture of educational system³³”. Also the certification and qualification processes are an issue: “The National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications & Vocational Guidance (EOPPEP) is inadequate.”

Providing learning opportunities that are relevant also for employers is a challenge for the European strategies. To this regard, most of the Greek respondents believe that the third sector do not play an important role (65.2%, against 48% at European level). The opposite opinion is widespread among politicians involved in the governance of the local and regional adult education system (33.3%), as well as, but to a higher degree, among professionals

³⁰ Written by Francesca Torlone, data processing by Francesco De Maria, data management by Tina Mavrič, validation by George Koulaouzides, under the supervision of Paolo Federighi.

³¹ RegALE survey on Greece is connected to the European survey on “Adult Learning and Education Policies in Europe. An Insight of Regional and Local Stakeholders”, carried out in the framework of the RegALE project (Regional capacity for adult learning and education), led by the European Association for Education of Adults (EAEA) and funded by the European Commission.

³² Comparison with average at the European level is included only when national data from Greece are above or below 10 points % except for some particularly relevant cases.

³³ Quotations from the Country respondents are reported in italics along with the English translation where needed. They report opinions expressed on the topic included in the item of the survey.

involved in the direction, management and coordination of educational organisations (35%).

Additional areas of improvement and areas for reflections are provided in the following chapters.

Challenges

At the moment the national strategies, including the National System of Vocational Education, Training and Lifelong Learning (2020) and the National Roma Integration Strategy and Action Plan (2021-2030), have not yielded significant results with regard to the preparation of implementation policies. There is a prevailing trend towards sectoral and short-term measures.

Opportunities

The new European programmes and the need to address the post-pandemic and economic crisis also through adult learning can be seen as an important and decisive opportunity to strengthen the role of public policies and their ability to promote the construction of services and incentives for the development of participation in adult learning and a more qualified offering for disadvantaged groups.

6.1.2. Systems

Survey results

The number of the Greek public systems involved in adult education is trending upward at the national and local

levels: “VET policy is under two different ministries”. This happens in all the public administration domains: health, military, education, labour, culture, justice (from magistrates to prisoners), etc. All these domains have their own education and training systems that work for the training of adults who affect the policies of the sector (as employees or as recipients of their policies: judges, prisoners, soldiers, immigrants, etc.). However, this variety constitutes a set of misaligned systems according to 87% of the Greek respondents (much higher than the European average: 72%). This problem concerns both the development of national strategic guidelines and the orientation and management of services and activities.

Each system is regarded as independent, with its own rules of operation by virtue of which it reproduces itself and prolongs its influence on the local level independently of the others. Every system operates within its cluster of sectoral organisations: one weakness of adult learning and education in Greece is seen in the “*lack of synergies among relevant stakeholders.*” Because of these rules, public systems perpetuate their dysfunctions linked to a definition of their mission that does not correlate in any way to the missions and programmes of other parts of the public administration.

Challenges

The challenge is related to the plurality of systems and sub-systems made of organisations and institutions that do not talk to each other and create inefficiencies

for the potential impact of the overall offering. This is the result (of) and reveals different cultures of education and learning. Public policy should strengthen three basic functions: setting priorities, advocating for quality, and ensuring social equity.

Opportunities

Based on the great variety of existing systems it is possible to promote their convergence and give rise to an overarching adult learning strategy. This general adult learning policy can support the development of the willingness to cooperate and promote greater attention and investment in improving the educational conditions for the most disadvantaged groups of the population.

6.1.3. Investments

Survey results

The regional and local investments in adult education are there, the problems concern rather the allocation of funds and its adequacy to respond to current and potential demand. 60.9% of Greek respondents believe that these investments are adequate to ensure a basic supply to make the system work (the figure is 3.3 points percentage lower than the European average: 64.2%).

However, these investments are considered inadequate to answer the existing demand by 95.7% of respondents (13.3 percentage points higher than the European average: 82.4%). In particular, it is believed that

investments do not meet the complex and varied demands of disadvantaged groups:

“Funding for adult education organisations is inadequate. There is no such thing as ROI [return on investment] and everyone is only interested in getting more and more certifications.”

“It goes without saying that investment, and especially stable and organised investments, is essential if we want to support and foster adult education. European and private short-term investment is of course of outmost importance as it supports initiative and out of the box thinking but it should be noted that in no way it is meant to cover for the need of systematised support of adult learning on a national level.”

“Public and employers’ investment for adult education in Greece is one of the lowest in Europe. The percentage of people who pay for their training is the highest in Europe.”

The inadequacy is also due to the funding that *“δεν είναι πάντα συνδεδεμένη με τις τοπικές ανάγκες και συνδέεται κυρίως με την εμπλοκή ιδιωτικών ΚΔΒΜ και πολύ λιγότερο με συνεκτικές πολιτικές ενός τοπικού σχεδίου δράσης. Αυτό έχει σαν αποτέλεσμα ευκαιριακές τις περισσότερες φορές συνεργασίες ανάμεσα στην τοπική αυτοδιοίκηση και οργανισμούς διά βίου μάθησης, ακόμα και αν έχει διαμορφωθεί, όπως στη συγκεκριμένη περίπτωση, θεσμικό πλαίσιο συνεργασίας και ανάδειξης με τρόπο συνεργατικό τοπικών πολιτικών στο πεδίο. [It is not always linked to local needs and is mainly linked to the involvement of private small and medium enterprises, much less to coherent policies of a local action*

consistently secure needed resources.

plan. This results in mostly opportunistic partnerships between local government and lifelong learning organisations, even if, as in this case, an institutional framework for cooperation and the cooperative promotion of local policies in the field has been established]."

Moreover, for 91.3% of the Greek respondents public investment does not seem oriented towards the real priorities (14.5 percentage points higher than the European average: 76.8%): *"Adult education policies need to prioritize and respond to local and regional level demands in the post pandemic era."*

Challenges

The adult learning system appears to be underfunded and exposed to reduced or unmodified public investment. Moreover, public spending is oriented towards unstable priorities and this reveals a lack of attention to the social impact of public investments, oriented towards the short term. This calls for an increase in spending as well as its redistribution towards new priorities to be pursued in the medium and long term.

Opportunities

Current investments allow the system to exist and provide a basic offering. Businesses and individuals show a propensity to invest in training. Strong potential demand and the growing need for skilled workers could produce a financial restructuring of public investment that would allow for redefining short-, medium-, and long-term financial needs, planning, monitoring, and managing to

6.1.4. Adult education organisations

Survey results

The ability of adult education organisations to reach a wide range of audiences (particularly disadvantaged groups) and improve equity in accessing learning opportunities is recognised by 52.1% of respondents. The figure is a bit less than the European average (60.6%) and much lower than other local figures (i.e., 68.6% for the Italian respondents and 66.7% for the Norwegians). To this regard Croatians are the ones having the worse opinions (36%).

For Greek respondents an obstacle to being committed to this direction is the lack of public funds that can be allocated to redistributive objectives, the weight of economic and financial constraints, and the barriers that inhibit the activities provided: *"Funding for adult education organisations is inadequate"; "Adult education organisations providing continuing educational opportunities for teachers should be funded as a top priority."*

AEOs are committed to providing and managing activities that are relevant to participants and society at large. This is acknowledged by 47.8% of respondents. The figure is quite similar to the Croatian one (being 6.1 percentage points higher: 41.7%) but much less than the European average (60.9%) and other local figures (i.e., 64% for the Norwegian respondents

and 60% for the Italians). Accordingly, there is a substantial percentage (52.2%) who believe that there are weaknesses in this regard. At European level the figure is 39.1% (13.1 percentage points higher). This is also confirmed by the evaluations of the ability of AEOs to offer relevant learning opportunities also for employers: 34.8% responded in the affirmative (against 48% at European level, 13.2 percentage points higher).

The development of networks of relationships and cooperation is a general area for improvement: *“Cooperation among stakeholders has to be improved”*. Enhancement needs are expressed concerning each type of stakeholder or partner. In particular, for 91.3% of respondents, collaborative relations with government institutions at a regional and local level must be strengthened. The figure is 73.7% at European level (the Greek figure is 17.6 percentage points higher). Compared to the other partners, areas that require more attention emerge:

- Private and social enterprises (95.7% against 78.9% at European level).
- Social and cultural organisations and services (87% against 63.5% at European level).
- Social partners (78.3% against 74.4% at European level).
- Other AEOs (73.9% against 63.7% at European level).

Expectations for the future were expressed for a 10-year outlook.

Among Greek respondents, the expectation prevails significantly (56.5%)

that by 2030 adult education organisations in their region and local community will probably or certainly be fewer in number. This forecast is accompanied by the expectation - shared by 43.5% of the Greek respondents - that the AEOs that will operate at that date will probably or certainly be more effective and will probably or certainly not be able to make use of a more qualified workforce (56.5% of respondents against 47.8% at European level).

Challenges

The main challenges for AEOs seem to be as follows:

- The risk of depending on public policies that cover only part of the needs, with insufficient and discontinuous funding.
- The scarcity of forms of cooperation and coordination with other stakeholders.
- Insufficient types of strategic activities and services of common interest that are not widely available today and that reduce the impact of activities and increase their costs (outreach, guidance, career management, etc.).

Opportunities

The survey shows that there is a strong tendency to work towards:

- The possibility to diversify financing sources by developing the role of AEOs towards the variety of policies aimed at the skills strategy implementation.
- The need of development of a more professional adult learning and education workforce.

6.2. Adult learning and education offer and workforce

6.2.1. Adult learning and education offer

Survey results

In Greece the offer of adult learning and education activities and services covers a lot of fields (i.e. education, cultural activities, health) as in all the surveyed countries. Nonetheless it is considered insufficient to cover the potential demand of the different groups of the population:

“Adult education should be able to adapt to new conditions to meet different needs coming from different population groups and new social changes.” The basic skills training for work, life, and citizenship is considered an improving trend by respondents. The discrepancy between the adult learning and education provision and the demand is caused by the lack of knowledge of current and future training demands by public and private stakeholders, according to the majority of responses. The majority of the Greek respondents think that labour market’ skills needs are not forecasted (86.4%): *“There is a gap in the planning of actions, between the existing needs and the programmes provided. An urgent reform in this issue is needed”*; *“Public VTIs [Vocational Training Institutes] have little if any connection with the labour market. They offer two years courses on the basis of accommodating relevant trainers than the real needs of the local economy, which they have no means of monitoring”*; *“Detection of skills deficit at regional and local level in combination with the productive system of the*

region is weak”. The figure is much higher than the European one (62.2% with a difference of 24.2 percentage points).

According to the survey results, the mismatch between adult learning and education supply and demand is an issue in Greece as well as in other countries that were surveyed. The most disadvantaged groups do not have learning opportunities that can meet their specific problems and needs.

Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges and opportunities connected to the adult learning and education offer are represented by the set of challenges and opportunities on adult learning and education policies. This is because the offer in this field is the outcome of political decisions related to adult learning and education financing, organisation, services, workforce.

6.2.2. Adult learning and education workforce: professions, quantity, quality

Survey results

The quality of the supply of AEOs is related first and foremost to the quality of the skills of the adult learning and education workforce. For 82.6% of the respondents, this is an area where further action is needed, especially on the part of public policies since the training of the adult learning and education workforce in the AEOs is left to the initiative of individual organisations. At European

level the figure is 62.8% (figure from Greece is 19.8 percentage points higher).

78.3% of the Greek respondents stress this issue recognising that the availability of a well-qualified workforce will have a significant or crucial impact on the sustainability of the transformations that are expected from adult education organisations by 2030. At European level the figure is 51.6% (Greek figure is 26.7 percentage points higher). The opinion of the Greek respondents might be influenced by their concern about the difficulties to be overcome for increasing ALE workforce' quality and quantity. Moreover, Greek respondents might be aware of the long period of time that expected results require to produce effect and impact.

The professionalism of the adult learning and education workforce should be strengthened concurrently with the development of professionalisation processes. This is specifically in relation to the strengthening of their professional status, to its recognition also by means of legal instruments, the improvement of the economic conditions, the introduction of basic standards to access the profession, and to the improvement of work: *"The challenge is, on a short term to train the adult educators; on a medium term to develop the system of training and evaluating adult educators"; "Inefficient/Inadequate training of trainers"; "Educators not as a full-time employment field."*

Challenges

The challenges correspond to the desired transformations that address three main aspects:

- Recognition of the multiplicity of professionals working in different roles in the field of adult learning and education and the quality criteria governing recruitment, access and practice of the profession.
- The assurance of adequate initial and ongoing training courses that guarantee basic and specialised skills corresponding to the variety of professional profiles.
- The guarantee of working conditions that corresponds to the importance of the performed functions.

Opportunities

Increased demand for adult learning and education should be accompanied by increased investment and a greater focus on the return-on-investment (ROI) of training. This depends heavily on the quality of the trainers.

6.3. Disadvantaged groups

Survey results

Disadvantaged groups are not the priority target audience for adult learning and education in Greece. The prevailing opinion (91.3%) is that there are no investments to adequately meet the potential demand for disadvantaged groups. At European level the figure is 78.5% (the difference is 12.8 percentage points). This view is shared by all types of

respondents (institutional representatives from regional and local governments and professionals from AEOs): *“New challenges emerged which need to be highly addressed and alleviate intensified education inequalities. Disadvantaged groups education needs to be further exploited and policies have to tackle dual or triple exclusion risks.”*

The access of different groups of the population to the education and learning is conditioned by some factors with strong limiting power such as:

- The economic and organisational barriers associated with:

- The lack of public appropriate arrangements in adult learning and education: *“The public sector involvement in adult education is highly problematic. It addresses mainly the issues of technical education, rather than adult education. Although it includes a large network of public Vocational Training Institutes (VTIs) across the country, their effectiveness is doubted: obsolete infrastructure, significant delays in the payments of trainers and the lack of both administrative transparency and assessment.”*

- The weaknesses related to the knowledge of the learning demand of disadvantaged groups

- *“e-skilling of workers, especially older ones, digital skills development (soft/transversal skills development), training of trainers, [...], there is a need to take into consideration new challenges through the remote work and remote training”; “absence of a mechanism for the training needs diagnosing”; “the lack of detection of the educational needs of the*

various population groups”; “the non-focus on specific population groups in relation to professional, family, social needs.”

- The weak personalisation of adult learning supply

- *“Educational programmes and teaching methods do not correspond to the expectations, beliefs and special characteristics of adults”; “There is no participation of adults in the formation of the educational programme.”*

- The creation of a “relevant” education and learning offers that are in reality to the hands of the private ALE market

- *“In general, the so-called public sector of technical/adult education is in fact a privatised one, privatised covertly by its own administrators or local politicians, with no focus on effectiveness whatsoever. Real adult and technical education is provided solely by the private sector. A large network of private VTIs and Centres of Lifelong Learning (KDVMs) spreads across the country. Flexible and keen to investment private VTIs and KDVMs offer a wide spectrum of courses and are really well interconnected with the local economy, thus being the only trustworthy provider of skilled workforce.”*

- The distortion of adult learning and education public and private supply

- *“[...] the legal framework keeps changing all the time, depriving the private sector of adult training a stable legal environment in which to thrive. The reason for these changes is a constant pendulum of reforms and counter-reforms, that focus mainly to channel European funds towards specific institutions, thus purposefully distorting the competition*

conditions in this specific market. My opinion is that there should be a stable institutional environment that will allow anyone who wants to invest in adult education to do so, and also adult and technical education should be provided by both the private and public sector, subsidised by the government through a voucher system: beneficiaries would be eligible to a voucher for free studies, having the choice to pay with this voucher either a private or a public institution. Thus, the market would determine who is the most efficient and reliable training organisation, in complete transparency and effectiveness."

- The lack of an institutional framework and related measures and infrastructures

- *"Απουσία επαρκούς θεσμικού πλαισίου για την αξιοποίησή τους, απουσία επαγγελματοποίησης και παράλληλα ευκαιριακή λειτουργία δομών που εξαρτώνται από χρηματοδοτήσεις [The absence of an adequate institutional framework for their exploitation, the absence of professionalisation and the occasional operation of structures dependent on funding]"; "Failure to meet needs of socially vulnerable groups."*

- The possibility of freeing up time to devote to training (formal / non-formal)

- *"Provide adequate support to make it easier for adults to attend training programmes."*

Challenges

In Greece disadvantaged groups are not a priority of policies and investments aimed at adult education. Understanding how to progressively change this type

of "learning exclusion equilibrium" is the most significant challenge to avoid immobility in the quantity and quality of adult learning participation. This trend was further exacerbated during the pandemic years.

Opportunities

The need to develop the capabilities and skills of the entire population, including disadvantaged groups, is at the heart of many acts of the European Union. The Greek strategies including the National System of Vocational Education, Training and Lifelong Learning (Hellenic Parliament, 2020) and the National Roma Integration Strategy and Action Plan (2021-2030) has shared this need. Research has provided operational guidance on how to intervene, and several best practices provide concrete evidence. It is possible that in the medium term a new political will shall manifest itself and that public intervention will assume as its task also the correction of the unbalanced distributional effects produced by the private market of adult education and by the training systems to the disadvantage of large groups of the population.

6.4. Governance

Survey results

Among those who expressed an opinion, those who support the statement confirming that there is a good balance of power between central and local governments, or a high level of autonomy

are just 33.3%. At European level the figure is 61.4% (the difference is 28.1 percentage points less). This would raise an issue of inadequacy of local governments to support and promote adult learning and education public policies in terms of powers. This percentage increases to 100% among those who hold public office or perform public functions whilst at European level this figure decreases to 67.1% among the same group: *"We are facing a great paradox where funds and access are majorly centralised and targeted to many times sterile employability promise while actual adult education is happening only through local autonomous and solidary actions"; "Not enough distribution of responsibilities regarding adult learning in both central and regional government"*.

Thus, in Greece it seems there is a distinct perception of weak alignment between central and local policies. This view is shared by 33.3% of policymakers and 95% of adult learning professionals.

"Private and public investment in all areas of adult education is done without central planning, needs assessment, action plan and evaluation. These are more initiatives and decisions of organisations and organisations active in this field. There are cases where the results are significant, however there are no central guidelines for evaluation in this field."

That might be due to ongoing reforms that still are not concretely implemented and in place: *"Decentralisation and the best balance of roles are attempted with Law 4763/2020, but the effects of the changes have not yet been*

realised in the local community, possibly due to the pandemic."

"In short term, we need more coordination between local and central authorities, incentives for both employees and employers to boost adult education actions. Also, in medium term, the same need goes for municipalities and non-governmental organisations."

Challenges

The challenges that emerge from the expressed opinions concern the difficulty regional and local institutions have in strengthening the participatory and coordinated mode of government by identifying the representative subjects of emerging and consolidated social problems, which can interpret, express and direct the process of conquest of educational spaces by eliminating risks of conflicts of interest and corruption.

Opportunities

The essential function of horizontal governance is capacity building. Fostering the implementation of complex, integrated policies require the involvement of those who will need to implement them. Focusing on the demand for adult learning - both high- and low-skilled adults - when it is not limited to obtaining certification requires strong cooperation between multiple actors. To promote it, public institutions may use conditionality measures in the provision of funding. However, the use of horizontal governance as a mode of capacity building provides an opportunity to accelerate and increase the

consistency and integration of practices promoted by different stakeholders.

6.5. Internationalisation of adult education organisations

Survey results

The opportunity to reinforce the internationalisation of adult learning stakeholders is confirmed by 6 out of 7 respondents. The remaining did not answer or considered themselves not interested or not competent in the field. Respondents indicated that internationalisation can produce the following benefits (in order of importance):

- Develop and innovate through mutual learning processes (66.7% against 67% at European level).
- Access to international financing (51.9% against 50.6% at European level).
- Influence international policies (48.1% against 46.8% at European level).
- Globalise organisations and activities (48.1% against 45.5% at European level).

Challenges

Some of the Greek respondents seem to be concentrated upon the national and local level, they do not see substantial benefits from the international dimension of policies.

The lack of attention to European policies is accompanied by a scepticism of the functions of community institutions and the relevance of the results that action directed at their policies can produce. This might explain the reason why not

all the Greek sample answered this set of questions.

European funds are considered a source of sustenance for AEOs as in some other European countries: *“Funding for adult education organisations in Greece comes almost entirely from European money and not from State budget, which must change.”*

Opportunities

Increasingly strong processes are underway to create integration and dialogue between national labour markets, facilitated in part by the spread of skills classification systems. This likely accounts for the strong interest in mutual learning and benchmarking, and the existence of broad networks provides opportunities to select appropriate partners.

7. Adult Learning Policies in Italy. Regional and local stakeholders' insights³⁴

7.1. Public policies, systems, investments, organisations

7.1.1. Public policies

Survey results

The RegALE survey on Italy³⁵ examined both elements of perception and prospection related to the current decade and elements of desirability and rationality in the construction of policies. This latter one is the starting point for our analysis of data from Italy: the construction of political choices and measures based on expected changes is defined on the basis of results produced by previous implementations and documented by research, monitoring and evaluation. It is a crucial aspect that is related to the quality of policy making processes and motivates international cooperation in the field of adult learning and education policies.

In Italy it is a general opinion that the country is experiencing a favourable time for the development and adoption of plans, strategies, regulations, frameworks, and special projects on adult learning. However, it is also noted that their implementation is slow to manifest significant perceptible effects at the local level. According to the Italian respondents, this problematic issue can be

related to the inability of policies to act in the long term, to increase the propensity of companies to invest in basic training for workers. Furthermore, the belief emerges that policies focus on sectoral aspects and areas of adult learning, originating “*patchy systems*”³⁶.

Overcoming the tendency to be limited to short-term and discontinuous actions is believed to depend on the construction of evidence-based policies focused on the results and impact achieved. The need to move towards evidence-based policies, especially at the local level, is perceived as weak by 74.3% of respondents (a slight difference compared to the European data - 72.9%³⁷).

Unlike the evaluations expressed in other European countries, in Italy it is widely believed that the third sector plays a less important role in offering relevant learning opportunities for employers (54.3% vs 45.7%). The opinion is widespread among politicians involved in the governance

³⁴ Written by Francesca Torlone, data processing by Francesco De Maria, data management by Tina Mavrič, validation through workshop and seminar taken in February 2022, 25th and June 2022, 30th, under the supervision of Paolo Federighi.

³⁵ RegALE survey on Italy is connected to the European survey on “Adult Learning and Education Policies in Europe. An Insight of Regional and Local Stakeholders”, carried out in the framework of the RegALE project (Regional capacity for adult learning and education), led by the European Association for Education of Adults (EAEA) and funded by the European Commission.

³⁶ Quotations from the Country respondents are reported in italics along with the English translation where needed. They report opinions expressed on the topic included in the item of the survey.

³⁷ Comparison with average at the European level is included only when national data from Italy are above or below 10 points %, except for some particularly relevant cases.

of the local and regional adult education system (61.5%) as well as, to a lesser degree, among professionals involved in the direction, management and coordination of educational organisations (50%). This might be due to the weak connection third sector organisations have with adult learning and education of employees.

Challenges

At the moment the national strategies taken up by the National Strategic Plans for the development of the competencies of the adult population have not yielded significant results with regard to the preparation of implementation policies. There is a prevailing trend towards sectoral and short-term measures: *“Local and regional adult education and learning strategies are not actually considered”*.

Opportunities

The new European programmes and the need to address the post-pandemic and economic crisis also through adult learning can be seen as an important and decisive opportunity to strengthen the role of public policies and their ability to promote the construction of services and incentives for the development of participation in adult learning and a more qualified offer for disadvantaged groups.

7.1.2. Systems

Survey results

The number of the diverse Italian public systems involved in adult education is

trending upward at the national and local levels. This happens in all the public administration domains: health, education, labour, culture, military, justice (from magistrates to prisoners), etc. All these domains have their adult education and training systems that work for the training of adults who affect the policies of the sector (as employees or as recipients of their policies: judges, prisoners, soldiers, immigrants, medical staff, etc.). However, this variety constitutes a set of misaligned systems according to 77.1% of Italian respondents (slightly higher compared to the European average: 72%). In Estonia and Greece data are higher being respectively 88.2% and 87% whilst data are a bit lower in Croatia (76%) and Germany (75%). In Norway the figure is the lowest (51.9%).

This problem concerns both the development of national strategic guidelines and the orientation and management of services and activities: *“there is a multitude of national, regional and local levels working in adult education. The added value that could result from integrating different priorities for action is not always evident”*; *“In Italia, l’istruzione è governata a livello centrale; la formazione a livello regionale. La struttura (la rete territoriale) creata con l’ art. 4 della legge nazionale 92/2012 per mettere in sinergia i due mondi non è stata messa in opera se non con iniziative episodiche e settoriali. Ci sono le normative, ci sono i soggetti, ma manca la volontà politica, si potrebbe dire la cultura, per dare sistematicità ad una governance programmatica [In Italy*

education is managed by the national level whilst the vocational training is managed by the regional level. The territorial network has been created by law (nr 92 dated from 2012) in order to create synergy between the two levels of governance but never implemented apart from some few sectoral initiatives. There are legal regulations, there are subjects but the political will is missing, we may say the culture of having a programmatic governance with a systematic approach].”

Each system is regarded as independent, with its own rules of operation by virtue of which it reproduces itself and prolongs its influence on the local level independently of the others. Every system operates within its clusters of sectoral organisations.

Because of these cultural and power relations, public systems perpetuate their dysfunctions linked to a definition of their mission that does not correlate in any way to the missions and programmes of other parts of the public administration.

Challenges

The challenge is related to the plurality of systems and sub-systems made of organisations and institutions that do not talk to each other and create inefficiencies for the potential impact of the overall offering. This is the result (of) and reveals different cultures of education and learning as well as profoundly different and incoherent adult learning and education strategies: *“Ongoing adult education is basically unheard of. Thanks to Lucca Learning City hopefully a network will be shaped and lifelong learning will become a*

reality.” Public policy should strengthen three basic functions: setting priorities, advocating for quality, and ensuring social equity.

Opportunities

Based on the great variety of existing systems it is possible to promote their convergence and give rise to an overarching adult learning strategy. This general adult learning policy can support the development of the willingness to cooperate and promote greater attention and investment in improving the educational conditions for the most disadvantaged groups of the population.

7.1.3. Investments

Survey results

The regional and local investments in adult education are there, the problems concern rather the destination of spending and its adequacy to current and potential demand. 59.4% of Italian respondents believe that these investments are adequate to ensure a basic supply to make the system work (this figure is 4.8 percentage points lower than the European average: 64.2%). In other surveyed countries data is much higher (Croatia – 77.3% with a difference of 17.9 percentage points and Germany – 91.7 with a difference of 32.3). Other surveyed countries expressed an opinion similar to the Italians (Estonia – 58.8%; Greece – 60.9%; Norway – 61.5%, The United Kingdom – 50%).

However, these investments are

considered inadequate to answer the existing demand by 88.2% of respondents. At European level the figure is higher (82.4%, with 5.8 percentage points of difference). In Norway data is much lower (69.2% with 19 percentage points of difference). Other data is similar to the Italian respondents (Croatia – 86.4%; Estonia – 82.4%; Germany – 83.3%; Greece – 95.7%, The United Kingdom – 100%).

In particular, it is believed that investments do not meet the complex and varied demands of disadvantaged groups: *“I consider actual investments largely insufficient”; “The outcomes are insufficient, as the extent of funding”; “We need to connect more the investments with the territory’s necessities”; “After the pandemic I have not seen any investment in adult education, it is always neglected and things should change a lot to see an improvement in the next ten years”; “Funding for organisations is not sufficient especially for the different peculiarities of vulnerable individuals who have specific needs”; “L’efficacia degli investimenti non è adeguata per mancanza di coordinamento e un reale scollamento tra livello regionale e quello territoriale delle cui esigenze, con il passaggio della programmazione formativa a livello regionale, non si tiene in debito conto [Efficacy of investments is not adequate due to the lack of coordination and the real disconnection between the regional and territorial level. Needs of the territories are not taken in consideration because of the regional competence in the adult training].”*

Moreover, public investment does not seem oriented towards the right priorities

(87.9%, 11.1 percentage points higher than the European average: 76.8%). Germany and Norway have a much lower data, respectively 58.3% (difference of 29.6 percentage points) and 57.7 (difference of 30.2 percentage points). In the other surveyed countries opinions are quite similar to the Italians (i.e., Estonia – 88.2%; Greece – 91.3%).

Challenges

The adult learning system appears to be underfunded and exposed to reduced or unmodified public investment. Moreover, public spending is oriented towards unstable priorities and this reveals a lack of attention to the social impact of public investments, oriented towards the short term. This calls for an increase in spending as well as its redistribution towards new priorities to be pursued in the medium and long term.

Opportunities

Current investments allow the system to exist and provide a basic offering. Businesses and individuals show a propensity to invest in learning. Strong potential demand and the growing need for skilled workers could produce a financial restructuring of public investment that would allow for redefining short-, medium-, and long-term financial needs, planning, monitoring, and managing to consistently secure needed resources.

7.1.4. Adult education organisations

Survey results

The ability of adult education organisations to reach a wide range of audiences (particularly disadvantaged groups) and improve equity in accessing learning opportunities is recognised by 68.6% of respondents. This percentage is higher than the European average (60.6%) and reflects the existence of heavier learning exclusion processes affecting the learning opportunities delivered by the public sector. Data from Germany and Norway is similar (66.7% in both countries). In other surveyed countries data is lower (Greece – 52.1%; Estonia – 58.8%). The lowest data is in Croatia (36%). In the United Kingdom data is much higher (90%).

In the opinion of respondents, obstacles to being committed to this direction are represented by the lack of public funds that can be allocated to redistributive objectives, by the weight of economic and financial constraints, and by the barriers that inhibit the activities provided.

AEOs are committed to providing and managing activities that are relevant to participants and society at large. This is acknowledged by 60% of respondents. Data is similar to the European figure (60.9%) and to some local figures (Norway – 65.4%). In some of the surveyed countries data is much higher (i.e. Estonia - 76.5%; Germany – 77%; The United Kingdom – 77.8%). The figure from Croatia is more than 15 percentage points lower (41.7%).

Accordingly, there is a substantial percentage (40%) who believe that there are weaknesses in this regard. At European level the figure is 39.1%. Pessimistic view is much higher from local respondents from other territories: Greece (52.2%) and Croatia (58.3%). This is also confirmed by evaluations of the ability of AEOs to offer relevant learning opportunities also for employers: 54.3% responded in the affirmative (against 48% at European level).

The development of networks of relationships and cooperation is a general area for improvement in the opinion of a large majority of respondents: “*Networking among the different institutions of all levels is weak*”. Enhancement needs are expressed concerning each type of stakeholder or partner. In particular, for 83.9% of respondents, collaborative relations with government institutions at a regional and local level must be strengthened (against 73.7% at European level). Compared to the other partners, areas that require urgent attention emerge:

- Social partners (90.6%, against 74.4% at European level).
- Private and social enterprises (80.6%, against 78.9% at European level).
- Other AEOs (80.6%, against 63.7% at European level).
- Social and cultural organisations and services (74.2%, against 63.5% at European level).

Expectations for the future were expressed for a 10-year outlook.

Among a significant group of the Italian

respondents (46.9%), there is expectation that by 2030 adult education organisations in their region and local community will probably or certainly be fewer in number. This is related to the expectation - shared by 51.6% of respondents - that the AEOs that will operate at that date will probably or certainly be more effective and will probably or certainly be able to make use of a more qualified workforce (51.6% of respondents). It is worth noting that at European level expectations and hope for changes are much higher (64.6%).

Challenges

The main challenges for AEOs seem to be as follows:

- The risk of depending on public policies that cover only part of the needs, with insufficient and discontinuous funding.
- The scarcity of forms of cooperation and coordination with other stakeholders.
- Insufficient types of strategic activities and services of common interest that are not widely available today and that reduce the impact of activities and increase their costs (outreach, guidance, career management, etc.).

Opportunities

The survey shows that there is a strong tendency to work towards:

- Intentional change management of organisational strategies.
- Diversification of financing sources.
- The development of a more professional adult learning and education workforce.

7.2. Adult learning and education offer and workforce

7.2.1. Adult learning and education offer

Survey results

In Italy the offer of adult learning and education activities and services covers a lot of fields (i.e., education, cultural activities, health, professional training, etc.) as in all the surveyed countries. Nonetheless, it is considered insufficient to cover the potential demand of the different groups of the population. The training of basic skills for work, life, and citizenship are considered an improving trend by respondents. According to the majority of Italian respondents, the discrepancy between the adult learning and education offer and demand is caused by the lack of knowledge of current and future learning demands by public and private stakeholders. Italian respondents think that labour market' skills needs are not forecasted (71.4%). The figure is higher than the European one (62.2% with a difference of 9.2 percentage points). Other local figures are much higher (i.e. Greece – 86.4%). Others are lower (i.e. Germany – 46.2%; Norway – 55.5%; The United Kingdom – 20%).

According to the survey results, the mismatch between learning and education supply and demand is an issue in Italy as well as in other countries that were surveyed. A large part of the population, and especially the most disadvantaged groups, do not have learning opportunities that can meet their specific problems and

needs: “no recognition of the voice of learners”; “[...] le analisi sulle esigenze formative o su quelle occupazionali non sono tempestive, spesso l’attuazione delle politiche è dilatata nel tempo rispetto al manifestarsi dell’esigenza. [The analysis of occupational and training needs and demands is in delay, implementation of policies is often extended over time with respect to the needs emergence]”; “the offer of adult education organisations is not able to cover all needs”; “needs analysis is a weak point”; “local politics are basically not well-grounded in good needs analysis and do not perform a fair allocation of resources.”

Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges and opportunities connected to the adult learning and education offer are represented by the set of challenges and opportunities on adult learning and education policies. This is because the offer in this field is the outcome of political decisions related to adult learning and education financing, organisation, services, workforce.

7.2.2. Adult learning and education workforce: professions, quantity, quality

Survey results

The quality of the supply of AEOs is related first and foremost to the quality of the skills of the adult learning and education workforce. For 77.1% of the Italian respondents this is an area where further action is needed, especially on the part of public policies, since the training

of the adult learning and education workforce in the AEOs is left to the initiative of individual organisations. At European level the figure is 62.8%.

Nonetheless, the availability of a well-qualified workforce will have a significant or crucial impact on the sustainability of the transformations that are expected in Italy from adult education organisations by 2030. This is the opinion of 90.6% of respondents (against 51.6% at European level with a difference of 39 percentage points). The problem is therefore perceived particularly relevant for Italy: “There is a lack of adequate resources to improve the managerial, organisational and teaching skills required at various levels.”

Only Germans have a similar opinion (83.3%). Other local figures are lower (i.e. Croatia – 40.9%; Greece – 78.3%; The United Kingdom – 66.7%).

The first issue is the random nature of recruitment processes: “Several major changes are needed in the recruitment procedure.”

The professionalism of the adult learning and education workforce should be strengthened concurrently with the development of professionalisation processes. This is specifically in relation to the strengthening of their professional status, to its recognition also by means of legal instruments, the improvement of the economic conditions, the introduction of basic standards to access the profession, and to the improvement of work: “There is a low level of social and economic recognition for adult education professionals”; “There is a

strong need for increasing social and economic recognised and salary recognition to the adult education professionals.”

Challenges

The challenges correspond to the desired transformations that address three main aspects:

- Recognition of the multiplicity of professionals working in different roles in the field of adult learning and education and the quality criteria governing recruitment, access and practice of the profession.
- The assurance of adequate initial and ongoing training courses that guarantee basic and specialised skills corresponding to the variety of professional profiles.
- The guarantee of working conditions that corresponds to the importance of the performed functions.

Opportunities

Increased demand for adult learning and education should be accompanied by increased investment and a greater focus on the return-on-investment (ROI) of training. This depends heavily on the quality of the trainers.

7.3. Disadvantaged groups

Survey results

Disadvantaged groups are not the priority target audience for adult learning and education in Italy. The prevailing opinion (72.2%) is that there are no investments to adequately meet the potential demand for

learning and training of disadvantaged groups. At European level the figure is 78.5%. This view is shared by all types of respondents (institutional representatives from regional and local governments and professionals from AEOs).

The access of different groups of the population to the education and learning is conditioned by some factors with strong limiting power such as:

- The economic and organisational barriers associated with:
 - The poor investment in disadvantaged groups of adults and rural areas: *“le aree di svantaggio sono in crescita pertanto i finanziamenti non sempre coprono le esigenze [disadvantaged areas are increasing and funds are not always enough to meet their needs]”; “In Italy there is a great difference among national policies and local policies for adult education. While formal adult education is quite everywhere provided at a good level (even if improvements are needed in the regulations), non formal and other forms of formal education at local level varies deeply from region to region. Generally, in the south and in the centre the level is low and is not data or evidence driven, but just depending on local politicians views.”*

- The creation of a “relevant” education and learning offers: *“spesso gli interventi non sono concepiti in rete pertanto risultano dispersivi [interventions are often isolated one from the others and not part of a networking way of working].”*

- The creation of support services for promoting access to adult learning and

education, information and guidance, recognition of skills: *“still access to adult education is low”; “learning opportunities and services are not known”; “advertising is not clear”; “people do not think adult education is useful”; “a weak point is the lack of recognition of non formal learning.”*

- The possibility of freeing up time to devote to training (formal/non-formal).

Challenges

In Italy disadvantaged groups are not a priority of policies and investments aimed at adult education. Understanding how to progressively change this type of “learning exclusion equilibrium” is the most significant challenge to avoid immobility in the quantity and quality of adult learning participation. This trend was further exacerbated during the pandemic years.

Opportunities

The need to develop the capabilities and skills of the entire population, including disadvantaged groups, is at the heart of many acts of the European Union. The National Strategic Plans for Adult Population Skills Development has shared this need. Research has provided operational guidance on how to intervene, and several best practices provide concrete evidence. It is possible that in the medium term a new political will shall manifest itself and that public intervention will assume as its task also the correction of the unbalanced distributional effects produced by the private market of adult

education and by the training systems to the disadvantage of large groups of the population.

7.4. Governance

Survey results

Among those who expressed an opinion, 50% considers that in Italy there is a good balance of power between central and local governments or a high level of autonomy. This would justify the idea that local governments can have power and resources to support and promote some forms of adult learning and education public policies. This percentage increases to 61.1% among those who hold public office or perform public functions.

At European level the figure is higher (61.4%).

However, there is a distinct perception of weak alignment between central and local policies. This view is shared by 69.2% of policymakers and 81.8% of adult learning professionals.

Challenges

The challenges that emerge from the expressed opinions concern the ability of regional and local institutions to strengthen the participatory and coordinated mode of government by identifying the representative subjects of emerging and consolidated social problems, which can interpret, express and direct the process of conquest of educational spaces by eliminating risks of conflicts of interest

and corruption.

Opportunities

The essential function of horizontal governance is capacity building. Fostering the implementation of complex, integrated policies requires the involvement of those who will need to implement them. Focusing on the demand for adult learning - both high- and low-skilled adults - when it is not limited to obtaining certification requires strong cooperation between multiple actors. To promote it, public institutions may use conditionality measures in the provision of funding. However, the use of horizontal governance as a mode of capacity building provides an opportunity to accelerate and increase the consistency and integration of practices promoted by different stakeholders.

7.5. Internationalisation of adult education organisations

Survey results

The opportunity to reinforce the internationalisation of adult learning stakeholders is confirmed by 2 out of 3 respondents. The remaining ones did not answer the item or considered themselves not interested or not competent in the field. Italian respondents indicated that internationalisation can produce the following benefits (in order of importance):

- Develop and innovate through mutual learning processes (43.8%, against 67% at European level).
- Access to international financing (39.6%,

against 50.6% at European level).

- Globalise organisations and activities (33.3%, against 45.5% at European level).
- Influence international policies (31.3%, against 46.8% at European level).

Challenges

A large part of the Italian respondents seems to be concentrated upon the challenges and opportunities that are present on a national and local level; they do not see substantial benefits deriving from the international dimension of policies.

The lack of attention to European policies is accompanied by a scepticism of the functions of community institutions and the relevance of the results that action directed at their policies can produce.

European funds are considered a source of sustenance for AEOs regardless of their connection to international policies and objectives. At the same time, access to funds is discouraged by the difficulty of information regarding calls for proposals, information on European calls in preparation and the management of European funds.

Opportunities

Increasingly strong processes are underway to create integration and dialogue between national labour markets, facilitated in part by the spread of skills classification systems. This likely accounts for the strong interest in mutual learning and benchmarking, and the existence of broad networks provides opportunities to select appropriate partners.

8. Adult Learning Policies in Norway. Regional and local stakeholders' insights³⁸

8.1. Public policies, systems, investments, organisations

8.1.1. Public policies

Survey results

The RegALE survey on Norway³⁹ examined both elements of perception and prospecting related to the current decade and elements of desirability and rationality in the construction of policies. This latter one is the starting point for our analysis of data from Norway: the construction of political choices and measures based on expected changes is defined on the basis of results produced by previous implementations and documented by research, monitoring and evaluation. It is a crucial aspect that is related to the quality of policy making processes and motivates international cooperation in the field of adult learning and education policies.

In Norway, as in all the surveyed countries, improvement of public policies is believed to depend on the construction of evidence-based policies. The need to move towards evidence-based policies, especially at the local level, is perceived as weak by 66.7% of respondents from Norway.

Providing learning opportunities that are relevant also for employers is a challenge for the European strategies. To this regard

opinions of Norwegian stakeholders are perfectly divided between those who believe that the third sector plays a more important role, albeit limited to disadvantaged workers (51.9% vs. 48.1) and those who think exactly the opposite (*“Større samarbeid mellom voksenopplæring og behov i næringslivet [There is greater cooperation between adult education and needs in the business world]”*⁴⁰). A positive opinion is more widespread among politicians involved in the governance of the local and regional adult education system (60%), whilst it is more weakly held among professionals involved in the direction, management and coordination of educational organisations (50%).

Additional areas of improvement and areas for reflections are provided in the following chapters.

Challenges

At the moment the policy actions taken up by the National Strategic Plans have not yielded significant results with regard to the preparation of implementation policies (*“Mangler langsiktig plan for kompetanseutvikling i voksenopplæringen*

³⁸ Written by Francesca Torlone, data processing by Francesco De Maria, data management by Tina Mavrič, validation by Shahnaz Shefa Amin, under the supervision of Paolo Federighi.

³⁹ RegALE survey on Norway is connected to the European survey on “Adult Learning and Education Policies in Europe. An Insight of Regional and Local Stakeholders”, carried out in the framework of the RegALE project (Regional capacity for adult learning and education), led by the European Association for Education of Adults (EAEA) and funded by the European Commission.

⁴⁰ Quotations from the Country respondents are reported in italics along with the English translation where needed. They report opinions expressed on the topic included in the item of the survey.

[Lack of a long-term plan for competence development in adult education]”). There is a prevailing trend towards sectoral and short-term measures. Nonetheless more attention would be needed by public policies to the adult learning and education sector (“For liten politisk oppmerksomhet [Too little political attention]”; “Opplæringa til vaksne må ha ansvar for og vise til rett kompetanse som det er behov for i kdei ulike næringane i samfunnet [Adult education must be responsible for and demonstrate the right competence that is needed in the various industries in society]”).

Opportunities

The need to address the post-pandemic crisis and economic challenges also through adult learning can be seen as an important and decisive opportunity to strengthen the role of public policies and their ability to promote the construction of services and incentives for the development of participation in adult learning and a more qualified offering for disadvantaged groups.

8.1.2. Systems

Survey results

The number of public systems involved in adult education is trending upward at the national and local levels. This happens in all the public administration domains: the military, education, labour, cultural, justice (from magistrates to prisoners), etc. All these domains have their training systems that work for the training of adults

who affect the policies of the sector (as employees or as recipients of their policies: judges, prisoners, soldiers, immigrants, etc.). However, this variety constitutes a set of misaligned systems according to 51.9% of Norwegian respondents (against 72% at the European level⁴¹).

The Norwegian Strategy for Skills Policy 2017-2021 is under evaluation for being renewed (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). It concerns both the development of national strategic guidelines and the orientation and management of services and activities. Future strategies can promote synergies among systems and ensure that each system works independently from the others.

Challenges

The challenge is related to the plurality of systems and sub-systems that do not talk to each other and duplicate activities and services or create inefficiencies for the potential impact of the overall offering. Public policy should strengthen three basic functions: setting priorities, advocating for quality, and ensuring social equity (“Nedprioritert i offisielle kompetanseplaner [A weak point is the lower priorities in official competence plans]”).

Opportunities

Based on the great variety of existing systems it is possible to promote their

⁴¹ Comparison with average at the European level is included only when national data from Norway are above or below 10 points % except for some particularly relevant cases.

convergence and give rise to an overarching adult learning strategy. The national strategy can support the development of the willingness to cooperate and promote greater attention and investment in improving the educational conditions for the most disadvantaged groups of the population (e.g. literacy demand of immigrant prisoners).

8.1.3. Investments

Survey results

The regional and local investments in adult education are there, the problems concern rather the destination of spending and its adequacy to current and potential demand. 61.5% of respondents believe that these investments are adequate to ensure a basic supply to make the system work.

However, these investments are considered inadequate to answer the existing demand by 69.2% of respondents (*“For lite penger [Too little money]”*). This is against 82.4% at the European level (difference of 13.2 percentage points). In particular, it is believed that investments do not meet the complex and varied demands of disadvantaged groups (*“Mange kjem til Noreg utan formelle papir og det kan vere vanskeleg å finne ut kva utdanningsnivå den enkelte har. Det er svært ressurskrevjande å gjennomføre realkompetansevurderingar [Many come to Norway without formal papers and it can be difficult to find out which level of education the individual has. It is very resource-intensive to carry out practical*

competence assessments]”).

Moreover, public investment does not seem oriented towards the right priorities (57.7%, against 76.8% at the European level).

Challenges

The adult learning system appears to be considered sufficiently funded. Moreover, public spending is oriented towards priorities revealing a lack of attention to the social impact of public investments. This calls for a reorientation in spending as well as its redistribution towards new priorities to be pursued in the medium and long term (*“Vi treng fleire elever ! [We need more students!]”*).

Opportunities

Current investments allow the system to exist and ensure a basic offering. Businesses and individuals show a propensity to invest in learning. Strong potential demand and the growing need for skilled workers and citizens could produce a financial restructuring of public investment that would allow for redefining short-, medium-, and long-term financial needs, planning, monitoring, and managing to consistently secure needed resources.

8.1.4. Adult education organisations

Survey results

The ability of adult education organisations to reach a wide range of

audiences (particularly disadvantaged groups) and improve equity in accessing learning opportunities is recognised by 66.7% of respondents.

An obstacle to being committed to this direction is the scarcity of public funds that can be allocated to redistributive objectives, the weight of financial constraints, and the barriers that inhibit the activities provided.

AEOs are committed to providing and managing learning activities that are relevant to participants and society at large. This is acknowledged by 65.4% of Norwegian respondents. As a result, there is a low percentage (34.6%) who believe that there are weaknesses in this regard. This proportion changes when considering evaluations of the ability of AEOs to offer relevant learning opportunities also for employers: 51.9% responded in the affirmative.

The development of networks of relationships and cooperation is a general area for improvement in the opinion of a large majority of respondents. Enhancement needs are expressed concerning each type of stakeholder or partner. In particular, for 45.5% of Norwegian respondents, collaborative relations with government institutions at a regional and local level must be strengthened. This is against 73.7% at the European level (the difference is 28.2 percentage points). Compared to the other partners, areas that require more attention emerge:

- Other AEOs (65.2%: *"Little or no connection*

between adult education organisations at regional level", with no discrepancy with the European figure at 63.7%).

- Social and cultural organisations and services (65.2%, with no discrepancy with the European figure at 63.5%).

- Private and social enterprises (60.9%: *"Auka samarbeidet og gje relevante tilbud til næringslivet [Increase cooperation and make relevant offers to the business world]"*; *"Not good enough cooperation with local companies and businesses"*. At European level the figure is 78.9%, 18 percentage points higher).

- Social partners (54.5% against 74.4% at the European level, 19.9 percentage points lower than the European figure).

Expectations for the future were expressed for a 10-year outlook.

Among respondents, the expectation prevails significantly (78.3%) that by 2030 adult education organisations in their region and local community will probably or certainly be fewer in number (*"I think they will have a less important and visible role"*). At the European level opinions to this regard are lower (64.6%). This is related to the expectation - shared by 60.9% of respondents - that the AEOs that will operate at that date will probably or certainly be more effective and will probably or certainly be able to make use of a more qualified workforce (47.8% of Norwegian respondents).

Challenges

The main challenges for AEOs in Norway seem to be as follows:

- The risk of depending on public policies that cover only part of the needs, with insufficient funding targeted to the right priorities.
- The weak cooperation and coordination with other stakeholders.
- Insufficient types of strategic activities and services of common interest that are not widely available today and that reduce the impact of activities and increase their costs (outreach, guidance, career management, etc.).

Opportunities

The survey shows that there is a strong tendency to work towards:

- Intentional change management of organisational strategies.
- Diversification of financing sources.
- The development of a more professional adult learning and education workforce.

8.2. Adult learning and education offer and workforce

8.2.1. Adult learning and education offer

Survey results

The offer of training and learning activities and services covers a lot of fields (i.e. education, cultural activities, health) but is considered insufficient to cover the potential demand of the different groups of the population (“We need to open up to creativity so that the offers

suits the participants in a better way. Less administration at top level – more money to the (regional) providers and you’ll get more activity and higher quality”).

In Norway an additional weak point is due to the learning offers that are available for people leaving in urban and non-urban areas (“*Det må vere likestilt tilbod til vaksne I sentrale strøk og ute I distrikta [There must be equal provision for adults in central areas and in the rural districts]*”). The training of basic skills for work, life, and citizenship is considered an improving trend by respondents. The discrepancy between the offer and the demand is caused by the lack of knowledge of current and future learning demands by public and private stakeholders, according to the responses (55.5%) (“*Usikkerheit I forhold til deltakarmasse [Uncertainty in relation to the number of participants]*”). The majority of Norwegian respondents think that labour market’ skills needs are not forecasted. The figure is a bit less than the European one (62.2% with a difference of 6.7 percentage points).

According to the survey results, the mismatch between supply and demand is common in most of the participating countries. The most disadvantaged groups do not have adequate learning opportunities that can meet their specific problems and needs.

Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges and opportunities connected to the adult learning and education offer are represented by the set of challenges

and opportunities on adult learning and education policies. This is because the offer in this field is the outcome of political decisions related to adult learning and education financing, organisation, services, workforce.

8.2.2. Adult learning and education workforce: professions, quantity, quality

Survey results

The availability of a well-qualified adult learning and education workforce will have a significant impact on the sustainability of the transformations that are expected from adult education organisations by 2030 in Norway. This is the opinion of 95.5% of respondents (against 75.3% at the European level being 20.2 percentage points higher).

Nonetheless Norwegian stakeholders do not expect ALE professionals to increase in number (78.2%) but they expect them to be more effective (60.8%) and more qualified albeit in a lower percentage (47.8%). Thus, the trend among Norwegian stakeholders is that issues on status, role and professionalisation of ALE workforce are not considered a very weak matter. This is confirmed by the fact that only for 37% of the respondents, this is an area where further action is needed, especially on the part of public policies. At European level the figure is much higher (62.8%). This insight is based upon the positive assessment by Norwegian stakeholders of ALE workforce in the AEOs and measures

adopted for the quality of their training (*“Behalda kompetansen sjølv i periodar med lite deltakarakar. Vaksenopplæring e ter skule med store variasjonar i elevmassen, men e ter viktig å fortsatt halde på kompetansen i personalgruppa [Maintain competence even in periods with few participants. Adult education is at school with large variations in the student population, but it is important to keep the competence of the teaching staff high]”*).

Nonetheless this as a critical issue for 2 respondents out of 5: *“Kompetanse om behov i næringslivet og kompetanse av lærarar i vaksenopplæringa [Competence about the needs of the business world and competence of teachers in adult education is a challenge]”*; *“Lokale tilbod til vaksne kan vere lettare å få til pga. Lokal kjennskap til behovet inæringslivet [Local adult learning and education provision might be easier to get if knowledge of needs of local industry is well known].”*

The professionalism of the adult learning and education workforce should be strengthened concurrently with the development of professionalisation processes. This is specifically in relation to the strengthening of their professional status, to its recognition also by means of legal instruments, the improvement of the economic conditions, the introduction of basic standards to access the profession, and to the improvement of work.

Challenges

The challenges correspond to the desired transformations that address three main aspects:

- Recognition of the multiplicity of

professionals working in different roles in the field of adult learning and education and the quality criteria governing recruitment, access and practice of the profession.

- The assurance of adequate initial and ongoing training courses that guarantee basic and specialised skills corresponding to the variety of professional profiles.
- The guarantee of working conditions that corresponds to the importance of the performed functions.

Opportunities

Increased demand for adult learning and education should be accompanied by increased investment (“*Det er for lite satsing på opplæring, det MÅ komme med midlar* [There is little investment in adult learning and education, there MUST be funds]”) and a greater focus on the return-on-investment (ROI) of training.

8.3. Disadvantaged groups

Survey results

Disadvantaged groups are not the priority target audience for adult learning and education in Norway. The prevailing opinion (80.8%) is that there are no investments to adequately meet the potential demand for training disadvantaged groups. This view is shared by all types of respondents (institutional representatives from regional and local governments and professionals from AEOs).

The access of different groups of the population to the education and learning is conditioned by some factors with strong limiting power such as:

- The economic and organisational barriers associated with:

- The poor investment in disadvantaged groups of adults and the lack of support services for them: “*Kunnskap om behov og muligheter for sårbare grupper og hvordan opplæringen kan tilpasses den enkeltes faglige nivå og læringsmuligheter er avgjørende for å oppnå god, fleksible opplæring. Her kan det være behov for mer kompetanse. [A weak point of the lack of knowledge of the needs and opportunities for vulnerable groups, and how training can be adapted to the individual’s professional level and learning opportunities is crucial to achieving good and flexible learning opportunity. Here we may need more expertise]*”; “*Til tider dårleg kommuneøkonomi. [Sometimes bad financing by the municipality].*”

- Logistic barriers: “*Distance between home and school.*”

- The creation of a “relevant” education and learning offers: “*Spesielle opplæringsmodellar har fungert bra i distriktet pga lokal kjennskap i samfunnet. [Special training models have worked well in the district due to local knowledge in the community]*”; “*Vanskeleg med differansiering. [Difficulty with differentiation].*”

- The creation of support services for “*skreddesydd opplegg for den einskiled. [tailored plans for individuals].*”

- The possibility of freeing up time to

devote to training (formal/non-formal): *“Integreringspakkar, mulighet til utvida tid for oppl ring og auka tilskot for oppl ring i norsk for elevar som har f tt oppl ring i COVID-19 perioden. [Integration packages, possibility to extend the time for training and increase subsidies for training in Norwegian for pupils who have received training during the COVID-19 period].”*

Challenges

Disadvantaged groups are not a priority of policies and investments aimed at adult education. Understanding how to progressively change this type of “learning exclusion equilibrium” is the most significant challenge to avoid immobility in the quantity and quality of adult learning participation. This trend was further exacerbated during the pandemic years.

Opportunities

The need to develop the capabilities and skills of the entire population, including disadvantaged groups, is at the heart of many acts of the European Union. The National Strategic Plans for Adult Population Skills Development has shared this need. Research has provided operational guidance on how to intervene, and several best practices provide concrete evidence. It is possible that in the medium term a new political will shall manifest itself and that public intervention will assume as its task also the correction of the unbalanced distributional effects produced by the private market of adult

education and by the training systems to the disadvantage of large groups of the population.

8.4. Governance

Survey results

Among those who expressed an opinion, the prevailing ones (77.3% against 61.4% at the European level) are those who support the statement confirming that there is a good balance of power between central and local governments (50%) or a high level of autonomy (27.3%). This would justify the idea that local governments’ powers and resources are adequate to support and promote adult learning and education public policies. This opinion prevails also among those who hold public office or perform public functions (70%).

However, there is a distinct perception of weak alignment between central and local policies (*“Local and regional adult education and learning strategies are not actually considered”; “Bedre koordinering, styring mellom kommune og fylket sitt ansvarsomr de [Better coordination, management between the municipality and the county’s area of responsibility]”*). This view is shared by 60% of policymakers and 50% of adult learning professionals.

Challenges

The challenges that emerge from the expressed opinions concern the ability of regional and local institutions to strengthen the participatory and coordinated mode of government by

identifying the appropriate local strategies that are financially sustainable and able to activate human and financial resources on a local scale (*“Local and regional adult education and learning strategies [...] do not seem to be appropriate”*).

Opportunities

The essential function of horizontal governance is capacity building. Fostering the implementation of complex, integrated policies requires the involvement of those who will need to implement them. Focusing on the demand for adult learning - both high- and low-skilled adults - when it is not limited to obtaining certification requires strong cooperation between multiple actors. However, the use of horizontal governance as a mode of capacity building provides an opportunity to accelerate and increase the consistency and integration of practices promoted by different stakeholders.

8.5. Internationalisation of adult education organisations

Survey results

The opportunity to reinforce the internationalisation of adult learning stakeholders is confirmed by 1 out of 2 respondents. The remaining did not answer or considered themselves not interested or not competent in the field. Respondents indicated that internationalisation can produce the following benefits (in order of importance):

- Develop and innovate through mutual

learning processes (36.4% against 67% at the European level).

Influence international policies (25% against 46.8% at the European level).

- Globalise organisations and activities (13.6% against 45.5% at the European level).

- Access to international financing (9.1% against 50.6% at the European level).

Challenges

Highly differentiated national models prevail in adult education, particularly in the public sector, resulting in different cultures of adult education. Cooperation in this field is discontinuous and is not linked to processes of policy learning and policy transfer with an international dimension.

The weak attention to European policies, likely accompanied by a limited understanding of their tools and role, reveals an approach to adult learning and education work that considers the international political contexts scarcely relevant and weakly influencing the national ALE policies.

This is probably accompanied by a scepticism of the functions of community institutions and the relevance of the results that action directed at their policies can produce.

Opportunities

Increasingly strong processes are underway to create integration and dialogue between national labour markets. This likely accounts for the

strong interest in mutual learning and benchmarking, and the existence of broad networks provides opportunities to select appropriate partners.

The intensification of European action in the adult learning and education's territory creates new opportunities to understand its role and relevance. Think of the amount of investment in adult learning promoted by Next Generation Europe, the resurgence of attention in the 2016 Recommendation on adult learning and education, and finally the appearance of elements of adult education-related conditionality in the Country Specific Recommendations. The possibility of operating at the level of European policy making is favoured by the existence of specialised networks, capable of advocacy actions towards European institutions.

9. Adult Learning Policies in the United Kingdom. Regional and local stakeholders' insights⁴²

9.1. Public policies, systems, investments, organisations

9.1.1. Public policies

Survey results

The RegALE survey on the United Kingdom⁴³ examined both elements of perception and projection related to the current decade and elements of desirability and rationality in the construction of policies. This latter one is the starting point for our analysis of data from the United Kingdom: the construction of political choices and measures based on expected changes is defined on the basis of results produced by previous implementations and documented by research, monitoring and evaluation. It is a crucial aspect that is related to the quality of policy making processes and motivates international cooperation in the field of adult learning and education policies.

It is worth to mention that in the United Kingdom adult education and skills policy is a devolved responsibility of the administrations in the four nations being England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland. Each of these territories has different adult education policies.

In the United Kingdom, as well as in all the surveyed countries, improvement of public policies is believed to depend on the construction of evidence-based policies. The need to move towards evidence-based policies, especially at the local level, is perceived as weak by 70% of the survey sample of the United Kingdom as meant in this Report⁴⁴ (against 72.9% at European level⁴⁵).

Providing learning opportunities that are relevant also for employers is a challenge for the European strategies. To this regard, the English respondents believe that the third sector organisations play an important role in providing learning opportunities relevant for employers (70%): *“more needs to be done with employers about the importance of training the current (or future/potential) workforce. Many big employers understand this but work needs to be done with SMEs to recognise that investment (time and financial) in staff training brings*

⁴² Written by Francesca Torlone, data processing by Francesco De Maria, data management by Tina Mavrič, validation by Alex Stevenson, under the supervision of Paolo Federighi.

⁴³ RegALE survey on the United Kingdom is connected to the European survey on “Adult Learning and Education Policies in Europe. An Insight of Regional and Local Stakeholders”, carried out in the framework of the RegALE project (Regional capacity for adult learning and education), led by the European Association for Education of Adults (EAEA) and funded by the European Commission.

⁴⁴ To the purpose of this Report by the United Kingdom is meant England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. No responses were received from Wales. Moreover, responses are from adult learning and education provider representative associations rather than direct providers (i.e. national representative association for local authority adult education providers).

⁴⁵ Comparison with average at the European level is included only when national data from the United Kingdom are above or below 10 points % except for some particularly relevant cases.

*rewards to a company. Finally, funding must allow an adult to take a subsequent qualification at the same level when needing to retrain. For example, someone who did A levels (level 3) at school many years ago might have been made redundant from their job and might now need to retrain in a very different industry yet, in England, they are not funded to re-skill, only to upskill*⁴⁶. This opinion is widespread among politicians involved in the governance of the local and regional adult education system (100%) whilst diverging opinions are among professionals involved in the direction, management and coordination of educational organisations (40%).

Challenges

At the moment the national strategies taken up by the *Lifetime Skills Guarantee*⁴⁷ have not yielded significant results with regard to the preparation of implementation policies. There is a prevailing trend towards sectoral and short-term measures.

Opportunities

The need to address the post-pandemic and economic crisis also through adult learning can be seen as an important and decisive opportunity to strengthen the role of public policies and their ability to promote the construction of services and incentives for the development of participation in adult learning and a more qualified offering for disadvantaged groups. This is to be considered in the frame of the Brexit process that does not

allow the United Kingdom to participate in Erasmus+ projects and prevent the United Kingdom from benefitting of the European Social Fund (ESF) projects that are coming to an end. These are the main European programmes that would support local policies in adult learning and skills. The new United Kingdom Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) replaces the ESF investment from 2022. The full details of this investment are not yet known, but one new initiative is the UK-wide 3-year Multiply adult numeracy programme, with £560m UKSPF financing from 2022.

9.1.2. Systems

Survey results

In the United Kingdom the number of public systems involved in adult education is trending upward at the national and local levels. This happens in all the public administration domains: the military, education, labour, justice (from magistrates to prisoners), etc. All these domains have their education and training systems that work for the training of adults who affect the policies of the sector (as employees or as recipients of their policies: judges, prisoners, soldiers, immigrants, etc.). However, this variety constitutes a set of misaligned systems according

⁴⁶ Quotations from the Country respondents are reported in italics. They report opinions expressed on the topic included in the item of the survey.

⁴⁷ The Lifetime Skills Guarantee is a UK Government initiative designed to help adults develop their job prospects by gaining in-demand skills.

to 50% of the English respondents (against 72% at European level). This problem concerns both the development of national strategic guidelines and the orientation and management of services and activities. More coordination among different policies is needed as there is *“only partial coordination with employment policies”* or in other few cases: *“for example, where local planning includes an improvement in health services in a local community and increased services to facilitate this then locally plans are made to ensure adult education and training is provided to fill employment gaps”*. Nonetheless *“the issue is often any alignment of local policy with national policy”*. Local territories make the difference: *“the Mayor has a range of policies for London and adult education is co-ordinated with them”*; *“We work with London Councils to align at local level.”*

Each system is regarded as independent, with its own rules of operation by virtue of which it reproduces itself and prolongs its influence on the local level independently of the others. Every system operates within its cluster of sectoral organisations operating in specific sectors, with no coordination. Some local experiences exist: *“London has a strong ecosystem for adult education including third sector. Things are steadily improving.”*

Because of these rules, public systems perpetuate their dysfunctions linked to a definition of their mission that does not correlate in any way to the missions and programmes of other parts of the public administration.

Challenges

The challenge is related to the plurality of systems and sub-systems made of organisations and institutions that do not talk to each other and create inefficiencies for the potential impact of the overall offering. This is the result (of) and reveals different cultures of education and learning. Public policy should strengthen three basic functions: setting priorities, advocating for quality, and ensuring social equity.

Opportunities

Based on the great variety of existing systems it is possible to promote their convergence and give rise to an overarching adult learning strategy. This general adult learning policy can support the development of the willingness to cooperate and promote greater attention and investment in improving the educational conditions for the most disadvantaged groups of the population.

9.1.3. Investments

Survey results

The regional and local investments in adult education are problematic, it is a matter of consistency and destination of financial resources to meet the current and potential demand: this is the *“major risk with the end of structural funds for the UK”*; *“as the UK we won’t be receiving this [regional funds from the European Union]”*; *“this is more of a hope than a prediction of reality. Funding in England needs to be reconsidered.”*

There have been massive cuts and although there has been some investment (e.g. through the National Skills Fund), there needs to be less bureaucracy around the funding rules and reskilling, not just upskilling needs to be considered fundable". Nonetheless 50% of the English respondents believe that these investments are adequate to ensure a basic supply to make the system work. The figure is lower compared to the European average (64.2%) and to other local ones (i.e. Estonia – 58.8%; Italy – 59.4%; Norway – 61.5%; Croatia – 77.3%). However, these investments are considered inadequate to answer the existing demand by 100% of respondents: "this is not as effective as it could be"; "Government funding has reduced significantly in the last ten years, this has led to a reduction in provision, particularly part time options for adults. Providers have sought to maintain and prioritise provision, however this has not met basic need. There has been a 'market place' philosophy to community infrastructure including colleges, with unhelpful competition for inadequate resource. This has been counter-productive and challenged collaborative working". In this case figure is different from the European one (82.4%) and from other local ones like Italy (88.2%), Croatia (86.4%), Estonia (82.4%). In Greece the figure is quite close to the English one (95.7%).

Moreover, public investment does not seem oriented towards the right priorities (77.8%): "There is a focus on getting people into jobs without due recognition to 'leisure courses' which are often a first step back into education for adults, many of whom had poor

experiences of initial education. Both types of adult courses are needed."

"Obviously funding [is needed]! But also, some fundamental changes to the way that employment and skills policies need to work together, unfortunately this really requires national policy change. Regionally need to make sure that the national drive towards outcomes don't narrow down the offer to only employment-based learning."

Challenges

The adult learning system appears to be underfunded and exposed to reduced or unmodified public investment. Moreover, public spending is oriented towards unstable priorities and this reveals a lack of attention to the social impact of public investments, oriented towards the short term and limited to employment purposes. This calls for an increase in spending as well as its redistribution towards new priorities to be pursued in the medium and long term.

Opportunities

Current investments allow the system to exist and provide a basic offering. Businesses and individuals show some level of propensity to invest in training⁴⁸.

⁴⁸ Data available in the Report "Learning at Work: Employer Investment in Skills" (2021) suggest that the United Kingdom employers invest less money and less effectively in skills and training compared to other European countries. See <https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/learning-at-work-employer-investment-in-skills/>

Strong potential demand and the growing need for skilled workers and aware adults could produce a financial restructuring of public investment that would allow for redefining short-, medium-, and long-term financial needs, planning, monitoring, and managing to consistently secure needed resources.

9.1.4. Adult education organisations

Survey results

The ability of adult education organisations to reach a wide range of audiences (particularly disadvantaged groups) and improve equity in accessing learning opportunities is recognised by 90% of respondents. The figure is higher than the European one (60.6%) and other local figures (i.e. 68.6% for the Italian respondents). Compared to the Croatian figure (36%) the difference is much higher.

For English respondents an obstacle to being committed to this direction is the lack of public funds that can be allocated to redistributive objectives, the weight of economic and financial constraints, and the barriers that inhibit the activities provided.

AEOs are committed to providing and managing activities that are relevant to participants and society at large. This is acknowledged by 77.8% of respondents. The figure is similar to other countries (i.e. Germany - 77%, Estonia - 76.5%). Other figures are more than 15 percentage points lower: European figure is 60.9%, Croatia is

at 41.7%, Greece is at 47.8%, Italy is at 60%. Accordingly, there is a percentage (22.2%) who believe that there are weaknesses in this regard. At European level the figure is 39.1% (16.9 percentage points higher). Respondents from other territories that were surveyed have a more pessimistic views: Greece (52.2%) and Croatia (58.3%). This is also confirmed by evaluations of the ability of AEOs to offer relevant learning opportunities also for employers: 70% responded in the affirmative way (against 48% at European level, 22 percentage points of difference).

The development of networks of relationships and cooperation is a general area for improvement in the opinion of a large majority of respondents. Enhancement needs are expressed concerning each type of stakeholder or partner. In particular, for 55.6% of the English respondents, collaborative relations with government institutions at a regional and local level must be strengthened. At European level the figure is 73.7% (the difference is 18.1 percentage points). In Germany the figure is similar (58.3%). Compared to the other partners, areas that require more attention emerge:

- Private and social enterprises (77.8% against 78.9% at European level).
- Social partners (66.7% against 74.4% at European level).
- Other AEOs (33.3% against 63.7% at European level).
- Social and cultural organisations and services (33.3% against 63.5% at European level).

Expectations for the future were expressed for a 10-year outlook.

Among the English respondents, the expectation prevails significantly (77.8%) that by 2030 adult education organisations in their region and local community will probably or certainly be fewer in number. This forecast is accompanied by the expectation - shared by 66.7% of the English respondents - that the AEOs that will operate at that date will probably or certainly be more effective and will probably or certainly be able to make use of a more qualified workforce (55.6% of respondents against 51.6% at European level).

The risk for AEOs of lacking public funding is there: *“finance has not increased for 10 years - only funding reductions.”*

Challenges

The main challenges for AEOs seem to be as follows:

- The risk of depending on national and local public policies that cover only part of the needs, with insufficient and discontinuous funding. This is also due to the lack of the European funds not accessible any more for the United Kingdom.
- The weak forms of cooperation and coordination with other stakeholders, particularly enterprises and social partners.
- Insufficient types of strategic activities and services of common interest that are not widely available today and that reduce the impact of activities and increase their costs (outreach, guidance, career management, etc.).

Opportunities

The survey shows that there is a strong tendency to work towards:

- Intentional change management of organisational strategies.
- Diversification of financing sources.
- The development of a more professional adult learning and education workforce.

9.2. Adult learning and education offer and workforce

9.2.1. Adult learning and education offer

Survey results

In the United Kingdom the offer of adult learning and education activities and services covers a lot of fields (i.e. education, cultural activities, health) as in all the surveyed countries. Nonetheless it is considered insufficient to cover the potential demand of the different groups of the population: *“there is limited increased investment (because it is nationally determined) however it is regionally prioritised.”*

The training of basic skills for work, life, and citizenship is considered an improving trend by respondents. According to the majority of responses the discrepancy between the training offer and the training demand is caused by the lack of knowledge of current and future training demands by public and private stakeholders. A small percentage of the English respondents think that labour market's skills needs are not forecasted (20%). At European level

the figure is much higher (62.2%). The figure is even higher in other territories surveyed (i.e. Greece – 86.4%).

According to the survey results, the mismatch between adult learning and education supply and demand is not an issue in the United Kingdom. Nonetheless there are opinions according to which

“There has been no appropriate assessment of need across local authority areas since 1992, and the level of funding for adult and community learning is not determined by a needs base approach, but by a quasi market approach, which means that many learners’ needs are unmet,”

“There is an effective cap on non-formula funded adult education budget in England that is based upon the arbitrary levels of funding at incorporation in 1992 and which are not based on current (or future) needs.”

Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges and opportunities connected to the adult learning and education offer are represented by the set of challenges and opportunities on adult learning and education policies. This is because the offer in this field is the outcome of political decisions related to adult learning and education financing, organisation, services, workforce.

9.2.2. Adult learning and education workforce: professions, quantity, quality

Survey results

The quality of the supply of AEOs is related first and foremost to the quality of the

skills of the adult learning and education workforce. For 44.4% of the English respondents, this is an area where further action is needed, especially on the part of public policies, since the training of the adult learning and education workforce in the AEOs is left to the initiative of individual organisations: *“[skilled adult education workforce is] developed by providers but no government or regional strategy”*. At European level the figure is much higher (62.8%). Other territories surveyed have lower figure (i.e. Germany – 30.8%).

The availability of a well-qualified workforce will have a significant or crucial impact on the sustainability of the transformations that are expected from adult education organisations by 2030. This is the opinion of 66.7% of respondents. At European level the figure is 51.6%. The professionalism of the adult learning and education workforce should be strengthened concurrently with the development of professionalisation processes. This is specifically in relation to the strengthening of their professional status, to its recognition also by means of legal instruments, the improvement of the economic conditions, the introduction of basic standards to access the profession, and to the improvement of work. In the United Kingdom some of the adult learning and education related weaknesses are: *“continued professional development, adequate pay and reward”*; *“need for much greater vocational awareness of staff in organisations to better align provision for disadvantaged learners.”*

Challenges

The challenges correspond to the desired transformations that address three main aspects:

- Recognition of the multiplicity of professionals working in different roles in the field of adult learning and education and the quality criteria governing recruitment, access and practice of the profession.
- The assurance of adequate initial and ongoing training courses that guarantee basic and specialised skills corresponding to the variety of professional profiles.
- The guarantee of working conditions that corresponds to the importance of the performed functions.

Opportunities

Increased demand for adult learning and education should be accompanied by increased investment and a greater focus on the return-on-investment (ROI) of training. This depends heavily on the quality of the trainers.

9.3. Disadvantaged groups

Survey results

Disadvantaged groups are often considered a priority target audience for adult learning and education at narrative level. The issue is also on the limited financial resources that are available for them. The prevailing opinion (90%) is that there are no investments to adequately meet the potential demand for training disadvantaged groups: *“finance has*

not increased for 10 years - only funding reductions”; *“adult learners are only funded for first qualifications at a given level. They will then find it difficult to retrain in a different vocation at the same level. The focus is on upskilling rather than reskilling, when it should be both”*; *“England has seen significant cuts to adult education budgets”*. Nonetheless there are some local good practices going in a different direction: *“the Mayor has targeting provision to disadvantaged groups included low-paid workers”*; *“the Mayor now has control of adult education funds and is able to target them to London priorities.”*

At European level the figure is 78.5% (11.5 percentage points less).

The access of different groups of the population to the education and learning is conditioned by some factors with strong limiting power such as:

- The economic and organisational barriers
 - *“Some incentives but limited to apprenticeships.”*
 - *“Gaps are in funding and resourcing, we have lost between 50% and 75% of provision over the last 15 years. Meaning that the vast majority of adults don't believe that there is anything they will be interested in.”*
 - *“The majority of investment into infrastructure is through public funding often in response to ring-fenced opportunities surfaced piecemeal and require immediate response / approach.”*
 - *“Level of investment in adult education is overall very poor in England. In response to cuts in public funding, provision has been prioritised towards hard economic outcomes at*

the expense of broader opportunities tailored to individual need."

- The creation of a "relevant" education and learning offers

- The relevance is not only regarded to the labour market needs but also to the individual and social impact of ALE:

"both types of adult courses are needed [employment and leisure courses]."

- The necessity to direct public funds to ALE needs

- *"Gaps in local provision-colleges and universities have retained much of their funding but it is directed at young people. This needs to be redressed as we have an adult population."*

- The creation of support services

- Guidance is provided *"by providers but only in a very limited policy way."*

- The development of innovative ALE tools and instruments

- [the gap is the] *"delivery of online and blended learning as a primary tool for delivery rather than as an immediate response to necessity which encourages minimum acceptable rather than first-class."*

Challenges

In the United Kingdom disadvantaged groups are not a priority of policies and investments aimed at adult education. Understanding how to progressively change this type of "learning exclusion equilibrium" is the most significant challenge to avoid immobility in the quantity and quality of adult learning

participation. This trend was further exacerbated during the pandemic years.

Opportunities

The need to develop the capabilities and skills of the entire population, including disadvantaged groups, is at the heart of many acts of the European Union. The *Lifetime Skills Guarantee* has shared this need. Research has provided operational guidance on how to intervene, and several best practices provide concrete evidence. It is possible that in the medium term a new political will shall manifest itself and that public intervention will assume as its task also the correction of the unbalanced distributional effects produced by the private market of adult education and by the training systems to the disadvantage of large groups of the population.

9.4 Governance

Survey results

Among those who expressed an opinion, there are few who support the statement confirming that there is a good balance of power between central and local governments or a high level of autonomy (16.7%). At European level the figure is much higher (61.4%, 44.7 percentage points higher). The figure increases much more in other territories that were surveyed (Germany - 85.7%, 69 percentage points of difference with the UK figure). This would motivate the idea that local governments' powers and resources are not adequate to

support and promote adult learning and education public policies:

“Skilled adult education workforce is co-ordinated at national level with limited regional input.”

“Constant policy tensions with national government policies - particularly centralisation and levelling up agenda.”

“Local and regional adult education and learning strategies are not actually considered. This is also due to the policy decisions on investments.”

“Fractured system - only half country been regionalised.”

“Lack of ambition in Government strategy development.”

This percentage increases to 20% among those who hold public office or perform public functions.

Moreover, there is a distinct perception of weak alignment between central and local policies. This view is shared by 40% of policymakers and 60% of adult learning professionals.

Challenges

The challenges that emerge from the expressed opinions concern the ability of regional and local institutions to strengthen the participatory and coordinated mode of government by identifying the representative subjects of emerging and consolidated social problems, which can interpret, express and direct the process of conquest of educational spaces by eliminating risks of conflicts of interest and corruption.

Opportunities

The essential function of horizontal governance is capacity building. Fostering the implementation of complex, integrated policies requires the involvement of those who will need to implement them. Focusing on the demand for adult learning - both high- and low-skilled adults - when it is not limited to obtaining certification requires strong cooperation between multiple actors. To promote it, public institutions may use conditionality measures in the provision of funding. However, the use of horizontal governance as a mode of capacity building provides an opportunity to accelerate and increase the consistency and integration of practices promoted by different stakeholders.

9.5. Internationalisation of adult education organisations

Survey results

The opportunity to reinforce the internationalisation of adult learning stakeholders is confirmed by 5 out of 6 respondents. The remaining did not answer or considered themselves not interested or not competent in the field. Respondents indicated that internationalisation can produce the following benefits (in order of importance):

- Develop and innovate through mutual learning processes (58.3% against 67% at European level).
- Globalise organisations and activities (41.7% against 45.5% at European level).
- Influence international policies (33.3%

against 46.8% at European level).

- Access to international financing (16.7% against 50.6% at European level).

Challenges

In the United Kingdom European funds are not available as a source of financing any more due to the Brexit process. Nonetheless difficulties and problems in adult learning and education can be adequately overcome by developing mutual learning and benchmarking processes among the United Kingdom and other European countries. Highly differentiated local models prevail in adult learning and education, particularly in the public sector, resulting in different cultures in the field. Cooperation in this field is discontinuous and is not linked to processes of policy learning and policy transfer with an international dimension.

Opportunities

In spite of the current position of the United Kingdom outside the European Union there is the willingness to create dialogue between public authorities that act on a national and local level in ALE field in the United Kingdom and in other European countries.

References

- Cedefop (2021). *Germany: National Skills Strategy 2019 review*. Available at: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/germany-national-skills-strategy-2019-review> (retrieved 10.12.2022).
- Council of the European Union (2016). *Recommendation of 19 December 2016 on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults*. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ%3AJOC_2016_484_R_0001 (retrieved 10.12.2022).
- Department of Education (2020). *Lifetime Skills Guarantee*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/hundreds-of-free-qualifications-on-offer-to-boost-skills-and-jobs> (retrieved 10.12.2022).
- European Commission (2015). *An in-depth analysis of adult learning policies and their effectiveness in Europe - Final Report*. Brussels: Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=7851&type=2&furtherPubs=yes> (retrieved 10.12.2022).
- European Parliament (2021). *Next Generation EU. A European instrument to counter the impact of the coronavirus pandemic*. Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/652000/EPRS_BRI\(2020\)652000_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/652000/EPRS_BRI(2020)652000_EN.pdf) (retrieved 10.12.2022).
- Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the Federal Ministry of Education and Research Information (2019). *National Skills Strategy. Continuing education and training as a response to digital transformation*. Available at: https://www.bmas.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/EN/Topics/Initial-and-Continuing-Training/national-skills-strategy.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=1 (retrieved 10.12.2022).
- Finegold, D., & Soskice, D. (1988). The failure of training in Britain: Analysis and prescription. In «*Oxford Review of Economic Policy*», 4(3): 21–53.
- Hellenic Parliament (2020). *Vocational Education and Training and Lifelong Learning reform by Law 4763/2020*. Government Gazette 254/issue A/21-12-2020). Available at: <https://www.kodiko.gr/nomothesia/document/662267/nomos-4763-2020> (retrieved 10.12.2022).
- Hellenic Republic. Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (2021). *National Strategy and Action Plan for Roma Social Inclusion 2021–2030*. Available at: <http://www.opengov.gr/minlab/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2021/> (retrieved 10.12.2022).
- Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali (2021). *Piano Strategico Nazionale per lo Sviluppo delle Competenze della Popolazione Adulta*. Available at: <https://www.lavoro.gov.it/priorita/Pagine/Piano-strategico-nazionale-per-lo-sviluppo-delle-competenze-della-popolazione-adulta.aspx>

(retrieved 10.12.2022).

Ministry of Education and Research (2017). *Norwegian Strategy for Skills Policy 2017-2021*. Available at: <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/3c84148f2f394539a3eefdfa27f7524d/strategi-kompetanse-eng.pdf> (retrieved 10.12.2022).

Ministry of Regional Development and European Funding of Croatia (2017). *National Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia for the period 2018-2030*. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/croatia/brief/ras-croatia-2030-national-development-strategy> (retrieved 10.12.2022).

Republic of Estonia. Ministry of Education and Research (2020). *Education Strategy (2021-2035)*. Available at: <https://www.hm.ee/en/ministry/ministry/strategic-planning-2021-2035> (retrieved 10.12.2022).

Unesco (2022). *CONFINTEA VII Marrakech Framework for Action: harnessing the transformational power of adult learning and education*. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000382306> (retrieved 10.12.2022).

Note

Note

Note



