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Action Plan on Adult Learning : Achievements and results 2008-2010

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Action Plan on Adult Learning: Achievements and results 2008-2010

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Europe 2020 - a strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth - acknowledges the role of lifelong learning and skills development as key elements in the response to the current economic crisis and in the wider economic and social strategy of the European Union. Given Europe's demographic profile, adult Learning, in its many forms – formal, non-formal and informal - has a major role to play in addressing the EU's economic and social challenges. This Staff Working Document presents a review of the progress made since September 2007 when the Action Plan on Adult Learning: *It is always a good time to learn*¹ was adopted by the European Commission. The Action Plan defined five concrete actions which the European Commission and Member States should seek to implement in order to increase participation in and quality of adult learning and develop efficient systems that reach all adults and involve all relevant stakeholders. The document assesses the achievements and results attained through the Action Plan, in relation to the key elements targeted for action by the Commission, and developments at national level that support implementation of each priority.

Structured EU level cooperation on adult learning

The Action Plan on Adult Learning provided for the first time a set of common priorities to be encouraged in the adult learning sector and initiated intensified European cooperation between its diverse actors within the framework of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC).

Both the Action Plan and the Council Conclusions that endorsed it focused on disadvantaged groups such as low skilled, early school leavers and migrants. In fact their adult learning needs analysis was very far-sighted and highly relevant for today's Europe 2020 strategy.

A range of actions has taken place at EU level to support development in the areas identified for action, including Europe-wide surveys, studies, conferences, meetings, and workshops. To steer the process, the Adult Learning Working Group (ALWG) was established. Inter-regional activity mobilising actors at national, regional and local levels to participate in European cooperation and exchange, e.g. via study visits and regional meetings have been used to complement it. The Action Plan has been instrumental in cultivating transnational cooperation around topics of common concern. The main vehicle was a series of Peer Learning Activities (PLAs) which provided an opportunity for participating countries to discuss challenges and successes, contrast approaches, compare progress and exchange good practice on a range of topics, with a view to developing or enhancing their own initiatives. The combined results have generated a wealth of knowledge to be shared by countries.

Grundtvig, and the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) more generally, provides direct support. Grundtvig is a test-bed for innovative solutions in some priority

¹ COM (2007) 558 final: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2007:0558:FIN:EN:PDF>

areas: improving quality of provision both formal and non-formal; developing teaching and learning methods, enabling staff mobility; enhancing learning for disadvantaged groups, including skills development, social inclusion, active citizenship and active ageing. Leonardo da Vinci provides a similar service with regard to work-based learning and continuing vocational training (C-VET).

The Action Plan has been helpful in raising awareness of adult learning and giving it visibility and priority as part of education policy. Consensus building, policy learning and exchange of good practices have been the Action Plan's main contribution to adult learning in Europe so far. Hence it provides a useful reference for the definition of national strategies. Depending on national situations, it has been used so far: to compare national policy, to make strong arguments to politicians; to provide inspiration and good models of practice to policy makers; to set national goals; to influence specific policy and practice developments; to develop a national plan on adult education and to develop national legislation or lifelong learning strategy and systems.

The following summarises progress achieved on each priority:

Analyse the effects of reforms in all sectors of education and training in Member States on adult learning

Studies undertaken on this priority show that policy reforms are being driven by lifelong learning strategies that include adult learning, but their implementation remains a critical challenge. Coherent and comprehensive strategies covering the full life-course are still not the norm, with some still focusing on specific sectors or groups; hence access for adults throughout life is still not a reality. Adult participation in learning in the majority of countries remains low, and in fact since 2005 there has been a slight annual decrease in overall EU participation. One of the main obstacles is funding and, so far, despite the fact that it was identified by the Action Plan and the Council as a high priority, analysis of the distribution of resources or of the cost/benefits of adult learning has not yet been done at European level.

VET reforms associated with the Copenhagen process impact on adult learning in that they cover continuing training for work purposes. Moreover, changes to enable more adult participation in higher education are supported by the Bologna process and the Commission's modernisation of higher education agenda, but progress remains slow. However, more opening of systems, in particular to young adults, would contribute to meeting the *Europe 2020* benchmark of 40% attainment in tertiary education of 30-34 year olds.

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the development of national qualifications frameworks and systems (NQFs) provide an opportunity for redesigning systems, and place qualifications available through adult learning, including validation of non-formal and informal learning, in a common qualification structure, on a par with other qualifications. NQFs and EQF

encourage the use of other common tools, like key competences, quality assurance, credit transfer systems, etc. also in adult learning, as well as stimulating intensive dialogue and consensus building between national stakeholders. It is work in progress that needs to be continued, especially to ensure that non-formal and non-regulated education, which often characterises adult learning, is included in national frameworks.

Lack of monitoring and impact assessment deprives adult learning of a strong evidence base. There is a need for a results-oriented approach, supporting and promoting impact evaluation as part of reforms and to inform future policies. A feedback loop from practice to policy would support policy development and transfer of effective practices at national level, but also on a transnational basis thus enriching the OMC.

Improve the quality of provision in the adult learning sector

The completed research shows that the status of the adult learning professional as an independent profession has not yet been established in most countries. However, training of teachers and trainers, including adult learning professionals is high on the agenda at national level. Though provision still varies greatly between initial, continuing and in-service training, there is progressive expansion of the number of qualified staff in this sector. It should extend to all countries. A study on key competences for adult learning professionals proposes a set of competences for staff, both professionals and managerial, which could serve as a useful reference for Member States and stakeholders alike, in developing their staff.

In a number of countries, good practice in accrediting and assuring quality of providers has been identified. Further research required on standards and quality criteria for providers remains to be done. Gradually, EQAVET will be implemented in the adult vocational education sector. Work is also being undertaken to see how this fits with the European Standards and Guidelines on quality assurance in higher education. The question remains how best to exploit these tools to support quality in the remaining area of non-vocational adult learning, which is often characterised by many small organisations providing non-formal learning. Such bodies would benefit from an overarching quality framework for LLL, which might incorporate simple guidelines to raise quality standards.

To date, work has involved mainly researchers and policy makers. This could usefully be complemented with a bottom up element involving the opinion of three critical players – practitioners, providers and the learners themselves. Quality of providers is still work in progress and another issue still to be addressed is quality of distance learning and use of ICT to widen access. ET 2020 has concretised "improving the quality and efficiency of education and training" as a strategic objective for all sectors of education and training to 2020.

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

The Action Plan required a number of products and these have been achieved, resulting in a study, an inventory of good practices and several PLA reports which provide a strong data resource to support the continued development of basic skills and second chance provision.

Countries have started to develop outreach and effective solutions to the challenge of up-skilling, providing much effective practice and knowhow to share. It shows that they are aware of the importance of basic skills, starting with literacy and numeracy. The most urgent problem is that the initiatives are only touching the tip of the iceberg. Improving the skills and competences of the 76 million low skilled who are in most need of taking their qualifications "one step up" calls for outreach and opportunities for much larger numbers and target groups. The study recommends that countries develop their own action plans on basic skills at local and regional level, taking the current situation as a starting point and enabling the differentiated target groups to progress to a minimum EQF level 2 (equivalent to lower secondary education), with an option to continue to level three, which is the desired level in the Recommendation on Key Competences.

To reach low-skilled adults it is essential to transform their life and work environments into places of learning; embedding learning of basic skills at the workplace is a successful approach to reaching and engaging low-skilled workers. Furthermore, the pathway of low-skilled (qualified) adults is one of dipping in and dipping out. Guidance and the very best teachers should accompany every stage of the learning journey to help them persist and eventually reach their goal. This cooperative formula needs to be developed together with new didactical forms and assessment to reach a critical mass of the low skilled population. Second chance is more critical than ever as significant flows of early school leavers continue to join the ranks of the low skilled.

Projects and networks have been developed as a consequence of this priority as well as guidelines for policy-makers and practitioners that could contribute to the development of effective policy and practice in adult basic skills provision in the Member States. While literacy and numeracy provide a foundation for new skills for jobs, developing new skills needed by adults in modern society: digital skills, economic and financial literacy, civic, cultural and environmental awareness, healthy living, etc. also merit significant attention.

Speed up the process of assessing and recognising non-formal and informal learning for the disadvantaged groups

The Action Plan's objective to identify and exchange good practices has been achieved and the results are being disseminated and exploited extensively. Validation of prior learning can and does work in developing the qualifications of disadvantaged groups, but it is not often part of the learning opportunity given them. The European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning shows that while great strides are being made in developing validation processes, overall take up is low and the low skilled, older workers and migrants targeted by the Action Plan are not their primary beneficiaries. It is only in France, the Netherlands, Portugal and some Nordic countries that it is a more widely accessible option.

Validation towards certification is also developing in companies and in the voluntary and youth sectors, as well as for access to universities and higher education. The learning culture needs to change to achieve acceptance of and trust in validation as the norm, and on an equal footing with formal learning in the years to come. Local information, guidance and employment services must be more proactive in promoting validation. The importance of non-formal and informal learning in the case of adult participation is supported by empirical evidence from the Adult Education Survey (AES). Multiple career transitions and changes will increase the need for employees to document their "current" employment-related competences and have them validated regularly. Social competences are less often the object of validation except for some good practices in the youth and volunteering fields.

The Commission in its Communication on an Agenda for new skills and jobs² makes a case for continuing work on validation, supported by a Council Recommendation. A proposal for a recommendation is currently being prepared which will give direction to future work on validation. The Commission monitors systemic developments through the European Inventory. Data on flows of candidates through validation systems are weak and data collection at national level should be encouraged.

Improve the monitoring of the adult learning sector

² COM (2010) 682 final, Strasbourg, 23.11.2010

The deliverables requested by the Action plan were furnished in the form of a glossary and study that identified core data required to monitor the sector effectively, and these are providing valuable input to debate and further planning. Some progress has been achieved at European level but national, regional and micro data are necessary. We do not have enough information to enable evidence-based policy making to grow at national level, alongside a reliable system of comparable data at EU level. Data are required on: the amount of the education budget spent on adult learning and who invests, who learns and for how long and with what results, and the type of learning undertaken - proportions of second chance versus skills and knowledge development; and on the benefits and impact of adult learning in order to feed this information back into reforms. Much of the good practice being exchanged in the Open Method of Coordination is more innovative practice that has not yet been through impact assessment, which would enhance the already useful learning that this process stimulates.

Further result at European level will be coming on stream with the first complete Adult Education Survey to be carried out in 2011, and the OECD's PIAAC will provide a wealth of new data on adults' skills to help countries address the gaps and deficits in their adult learning policies.

1. INTRODUCTION

Lifelong learning (LLL) helps the individual prepare for the many transitions and changes in life - school to work, work to retirement, new country or living environment, social changes, technological changes, etc. Lifelong learning is key to ensuring good transitions between jobs and occupations and to avoiding long-term unemployment leading to loss of human capital³. The Commission is fully aware that an effective adult learning sector is vital to our economy and society for the next decade. Over the past ten years it has taken a strong lead in encouraging Member States to make lifelong learning the basic principle underlying education and training. Progress has been made in providing high-quality education and training for our youth, which will remain a key to Europe's economic success and social cohesion. However, given demographic patterns in Europe, this must be complemented by extending learning opportunities over the adult life-course, offering all adults possibilities to renew their skills and competences for life and work as the need arises.

Europe 2020 - a strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth - acknowledges the role of lifelong learning and skills development as key elements in the response to the current economic crisis and in the wider economic and social strategy of the European Union (EU). Adult Learning, in its many forms, has a major role to play in addressing the EU's economic and social challenges, notably through:

- Contributing to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth by enabling workers to move from jobs in low growth sectors to high growth sectors by developing their knowledge, skills and competence;
- Meeting future skills needs by investing in human capital – in particular re-skilling about 76⁴ million low-skilled 25-64 year olds in the EU who have at most finished lower secondary education. 21.5 million Europeans (representing all skills levels and ages) were unemployed in 2009 and especially the long-term unemployed among them (33.2%) need new training and skills to find new jobs and help Europe out of recession;
- Providing alternatives for over 14% of 18-24 year olds who leave education prematurely without more than a lower secondary qualification, giving them a second chance to gain a qualification and success in life, and contributing to the 10% headline target in the Europe 2020 strategy;
- Promoting active ageing and lifelong learning: only 9.3% of 25-64 year olds participate in learning, and only 4.8% of 50-64 year olds, while the EU target under the Education and Training strategy is 15% by 2020. Yet, from 2013/2014 the EU's working population will start to shrink, making it ever more vital to constantly update and upgrade adults' competences and skills in preparation for a prolonged working life;

³ Post-Lisbon Reflection (COM2009 647).

⁴ This and the following figures are taken from the Labour Force Survey 2009

- Enabling older citizens to remain actively involved in the fast changing knowledge society. The number of people aged 60 will increase to 25% of the population by 2013 and to 30% by 2027. Senior citizens need to continue learning in order to master social changes, to prevent an ever growing gap between generations and to remain active citizens. Improving their computer literacy will be necessary to prepare them to use the technologies foreseen in the Flagship initiative: "Innovation Union" "to allow older people to live independently and be active in society";
- Integrating migrants by providing them with instruction in the language of their host country and adequate social and cultural knowledge and competence to integrate smoothly in local life and work;
- Promoting active participation in democratic life and fostering tolerance in our increasingly pluralist communities.

Thus Adult Learning can contribute to reaching the Europe 2020 headline targets by:

- offering alternative pathways and compensatory second chance education to help reduce early school leaving, as well as alleviate its negative consequences;
- Improving access to higher education for non-traditional learners and young adults thus increasing tertiary level attainment, and
- assisting many citizens out of poverty by imparting knowledge and skills to raise their employability and help them better manage their finances and households.

This Staff Working Document presents a review of the progress made since September 2007 when the Action Plan on Adult Learning: *It is always a good time to learn*⁵ was adopted by the European Commission, and its endorsement by the Education Council in its conclusions of May 2008⁶.

2. THE ACTION PLAN – RAISING THE PROFILE OF THE ADULT LEARNING AT EU AND NATIONAL LEVELS

2.1 Structured EU level cooperation on adult learning and working methods achieved

The Action Plan on Adult Learning provided for the first time a set of common priorities to be encouraged in the adult learning sector, introduced the sector to the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) and thus initiated intensified European cooperation between its diverse actors. It defined five concrete actions which the European Commission and Member States should seek to implement in order to increase participation in and quality of adult learning and develop efficient systems that reach all adults and involve all relevant stakeholders. The actions are as follows:

⁵ COM (2007) 558 final: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2007:0558:FIN:EN:PDF>

⁶ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:140:0010:0013:EN:PDF>

- Analyse the effects of reforms in all sectors of education and training in Member States on adult learning
- Improve the quality of provision in the adult learning sector
- Increase the possibilities for adults to achieve a qualification at least one level higher ('go one-step-up')
- Speed up the process of assessing and recognising non-formal and informal learning for the disadvantaged groups
- Improve the monitoring of the adult learning sector.

Both the Action Plan and the Council Conclusions focused on disadvantaged groups such as low skilled, early school leavers and migrants. In fact their adult learning needs analysis was very far-sighted and highly relevant for today's Europe 2020 strategy. The priorities were also reflected in Confintea VI⁷, Unesco's World Conference – governance, financing, quality, targeting the low skilled particularly their basic skills and validation, monitoring, boosting participation and equality.

Consultation with stakeholders prior to the Action Plan flagged up these common challenges and concern that the contribution and benefits of the adult learning sector were not well researched, debated and published. To date a range of actions has taken place at EU level to support development in the areas identified for action, including Europe-wide surveys, studies, group meetings, and workshops. Peer learning activities (PLAs) provided an opportunity for participating countries to discuss challenges and successes, compare progress and exchange good practice on a range of topics. To steer the process, the Adult Learning Working Group (ALWG) was established (see Annex 1). This ad hoc Working Group, met three times a year to assess progress and agree on further steps to be taken. It has proven difficult, however, to ensure a homogeneous representation and equal commitment of all participating countries in the group. Inter-regional activity mobilising actors at national, regional and local levels to participate in European cooperation and exchange, e.g. study visits and regional meetings has been used to complement it. An alternative approach - based on expert groups with a more limited remit and clearly defined outputs - could be contemplated for the future.

The Action Plan helps countries become pro-active in giving adult learning visibility and policy priority and promoting its contribution to employability, social cohesion and personal development. Mutual learning, communication and sharing of knowledge through the Open Method of Coordination is highly valued by the key adult learning stakeholders. In particular, inter-regional activity mobilising actors at national, regional and local levels to participate in European cooperation and exchange, e.g. via study visits and regional meetings has proven particularly valuable.

⁷ <http://www.unesco.org/en/confintevi/>

2.2. Useful tool for the identification and exchange of good practices between participating countries established

The Action Plan has been instrumental in cultivating transnational cooperation around topics of common concern. The main vehicle was a series of peer learning activities which enabled countries with a particular issue of common concern to meet in a country where good practices and solutions had been identified and exchange views on contrasting approaches. Participants prepared background descriptions on the situations in their country and detailed reports and conclusions from each PLA were published, providing a rich source of information. They also fed into the numerous studies and meetings, which generated a wealth of knowledge to be shared by participating countries. In 2009, meetings were organised which cluster countries into four regions with largely comparable policy concerns.

Four regional meetings organised in October and November 2009:

- Germany, 7-9 October – a cluster of eight Western European countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom);
- Norway, 14-16 October – a cluster of eight Nordic and Baltic countries (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden);
- Spain 26-28 October – a cluster of seven Southern European countries (Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain and Turkey);
- Slovenia, 4-6 November – a cluster of nine Central and Eastern European countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia).

The meetings attempted to mobilise interest and action at national level, and to stimulate countries with similar levels of development and common priorities to work together on the further implementation of effective practices and development of new approaches to increasing participation in adult learning. This proved to be a very effective way to deepen the mutual learning process among fewer countries with similar concerns. Consequently, countries have been working together bilaterally and exchanging successful practices and reforms at national events, thus promoting transfer of innovations, etc.

Grundtvig, and the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) more generally, provide direct policy support. Grundtvig is a test-bed for innovative solutions in some priority areas: improving quality of provision both formal and non-formal; developing teaching and learning methods, enabling staff mobility; enhancing learning for disadvantaged groups, including skills development, social inclusion and active citizenship, and active ageing. Leonardo da Vinci provides a similar service with regard to work-based learning and continuing vocational training (C-VET). Both sub-programmes are providing financial support to groups of countries stimulated to take forward Action Plan priorities through pilot projects, partnerships and networks. Equally the priorities have given a policy focus to the LLP. Also the Seventh Research

Framework Programme which supports socio-economic research in EU policies, such as in the area of education, work and lifelong learning, is a significant resource.

A series of documents testifying to the wealth of activities carried out to implement the Action Plan is available on the KMLLL⁸ website which hosts the results from all OMC activities. This will soon be enhanced by a report from the Adult Learning Working group and a series of country reports. Following the conference in Budapest on 7-9 March 2011, the conference report and all these related documents on the Action Plan will be accessible through DG EAC home page.

2.3 EU Action Plan as a useful reference for the definition of national strategies

During their meeting in Copenhagen on 22 September 2010, senior national officials responsible for adult learning agreed that an important function of the Action Plan is that it keeps adult learning on the agenda both at EU and national levels, especially in these times of economic crisis. They stated clearly that a similar document was needed going forward. From their point of view, it is important to have common guidelines as a basis for cooperation and exchange, which they could use as a lever or instrument for getting things done, when all 27 Member States and associated countries are behind it.

To date the Action Plan has been helpful in raising awareness of adult learning. The mutual learning, communication and sharing of knowledge that it promotes is necessary and useful. Consensus building, policy learning and exchange of good practices have been the Action Plan's main contribution to adult learning in Europe so far. Hence it provides a useful reference for the definition of national strategies. Depending on national situations, it has been used: to compare national policy, to make strong arguments to politicians; to provide inspiration and good models of practice to policy makers; to set national goals; to influence specific policy and practice developments; to develop a national plan on adult education and to develop national legislation or lifelong learning strategy and systems.

Bigger Member States and those with a long tradition in adult learning use the Action Plan as a reference framework against which to gauge how their policies compare with European priorities. Being part of the European cooperation and exchange of practices and ideas is of importance to them. Being part of that process is also valued by candidate countries. In many new Member States and smaller countries, the Action Plan was influential and used as an instrument to steer their reforms. For some of these countries, coming at a time when LLL strategies are being developed (also in older Member States), it has been used as a guide to help shape and develop national systems and policies and sometimes provided concrete input, while in others it has been instrumental in developing or revising adult learning acts and legislation. Based on the 2006 Communication, countries themselves were consulted on what action they felt were key to developing the adult learning sector. It is not surprising therefore that

⁸ <http://www.ksll.net/PeerLearningClusters/clusterDetails.cfm?id=7>

what emerged is a strong correlation between the Action Plan and developments on the ground in participating countries.

The Action Plan has given concrete input for the development of lifelong learning strategies in several countries:

- In **Austria** and **Spain** the Action Plan helped shape the strategies, both of which are nearing completion.
- Lithuania and **Turkey** developed their lifelong strategy in 2008 primarily focused on adult learning.
- A new Adult Education Act was adopted in **Iceland** on 31 March 2010 as part of a larger ongoing reform in the context of building a lifelong learning strategy. The Act covers short formal adult education organised by education and training providers that receive accreditation based on the Act, and public funding for its implementation.
- The Development Plan for **Estonian** Adult Education 2009-2013, introduced in September 2009, sets a goal to raise adult participation in learning to 13,5% by the end of the year 2013.
- Raising literacy and basic skills levels are a priority in the Strategy of development of **Slovenia** 2007-2013. The National Master Plan on Adult Education to 2010 pays special attention to those with low formal education.

Emerging from work over the past three years, the following elements appear as essential for the organisation of an efficient adult learning sector across all countries of the Union:

- adequately financed, pro-active measures to facilitate access to learning opportunities, including outreach to the low skilled and early school leavers;
- improving the governance structure of adult learning by joining up the fragmented segments in the integrated approach which lifelong learning strategies can provide;
- enhancing the quality, efficiency and accountability of delivery systems, while involving a wide group of providers with complementing roles and shared responsibilities;
- boosting the advice and support available to adult learners;
- developing operational systems for the recognition of learning outcomes regardless of where they are required;

- supporting a virtuous circle of monitoring, impact assessment and evidence-based development of policy and practice;
- developing the role of employers both as provider of learning and client.

3. ASSESSING PROGRESS ON EACH PRIORITY ACTION

This Chapter outlines key elements targeted under each of the five priorities of the Commission's 2007 Action Plan, all of which were endorsed and reinforced by the Council Conclusions of May 2008. Each priority is addressed under the headings: background and objectives; EU support, which includes initiatives taken at EU level as requested by the Action Plan, and the outcome of the cooperation with the Member States in the framework of the OMC and developments at national level. Monitoring the progress made at national level in implementing the priorities actions and reforms is central to encouraging sustained knowledge sharing and cooperation among countries.

3.1 Analyse the effects of reforms in all sectors of education and training in Member States on adult learning

3.1.1 Background and objectives

The lifelong learning perspective which has been actively promoted in EU policy over the last decade has put the spotlight on learning over the life course and the joined up approach to education and training, allowing flexible progression. Hence, all sectors should be inter-linking. The Action Plan takes a holistic view of adult learning, the scope of which covers all learning after completion of initial education or training, including general and vocational and combinations of both. In reality, the tendency is towards a blurring of formal, non-formal and informal learning, given the increasing emphasis on blended and embedded learning, and between vocational and non-vocational adult learning. Nevertheless, the Action Plan concentrated on areas that were not encroaching on activities already well developed as part of the Copenhagen process. Support for the lower skilled and second chance initiatives for young adults and dropouts from initial education are, therefore, important elements.

The Action Plan holds that: *The adult learning sector touches all the other education sectors. So it is important to analyse the effects of developments in other educational areas, both formal and non-formal, and their interaction with the developments in adult learning. Development in the adult learning sector must be mainstreamed into the ongoing process of modernisation in education and training.*

Action required under the Action Plan included:

- analysis of the implication of national reforms for the adult learning sector
- analysis of the cost/benefits of these reforms.

The Council conclusions specifically call for the analysis of reforms to cover the development of national qualifications systems in relation to the EQF and of credit transfer systems relating to formal, non-formal and informal learning, with a view to improving adult access to qualifications. The distribution of financial resources across the various age groups, in line with a lifelong learning approach, and support for campaigns aimed at raising awareness and motivation among potential learners were underlined.

Underlying the priority is the fact that most Member States are developing a National Qualification Framework (NQF) that will be linked to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), and discussions on credit transfer are advancing. Since these developments are focussed on how to facilitate access to, progress in, and transfer between learning activities, they are rightly considered as potentially important for opening up qualification systems to adults. The impact of the EQF on adult learning is expected to be far-reaching. By establishing a common European reference point, it will be easier to combine what has been learned in diverse settings, such as different countries, sectoral education systems or non-formal learning environments.

3.1.2 EU support

A first Study – *Assessing the impact of ongoing reforms in education and training on adult learning*⁹ – was completed in 2009. An econometrical analysis suffered from lack of adequate data, while the case study method proved useful in identifying and analysing the impacts of reform. It found a scarcity of impact assessment and that many reform agendas do not become reality because of lack of hard evidence of the effects of similar reforms elsewhere. More regular impact assessments of national reforms and their results shared with other interested Member States would enable much faster policy learning. If better use is to be made of the Open Method of Coordination, more such impact assessment of initiatives should be carried out so that peer learning and exchange are based on practices the quality of which has been proved and evaluated. Sustainability of innovative initiatives is also an issue. Many good practices and pilots rely on precarious project-based funding that leaves them at constant risk¹⁰. The study outlines guidance for planning and conducting impact assessment which is exemplified in two case studies on Sweden and Lithuania. For Lithuania the analysis of their reform was timely as the system is about to be reformed again.

Results from the second **study assessing progress in countries** in more detail shows that although adult learning is increasingly recognised as playing an important role in making the knowledge based economy and society a reality, most education and training systems are still largely focused on the education and training of young people and limited progress has been made in changing systems to reflect the need for lifelong learning throughout adulthood. Further action is therefore needed to confront the challenges facing the European Union and the Member States. Apart from in the VET sector, reforms in other areas of education and training appear not to embrace

⁹ <http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/2010/reforms.pdf>

¹⁰ This is a matter continuously raised by providers of such initiatives at PLAs and conferences. There is a need to mainstream innovation in a more systemic way and give it adequate funding

adult learning to any large extent. In fact the study concludes that to be effective adult learning policy has to be embedded in policies on other education and training fields aimed at social inclusion, employability, innovation and creativity and the learning society.

The "**Lifelong Learning 2010**" project, supported by the Commission's 6th Framework Programme for Research analysed the participation of adults in formal and non-formal adult education, in particular participation by employees of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in formal adult education. Based on 89 case studies of SMEs in 12 European countries (covering 113 employees) the researchers developed a typology of adult participation in LLL, identifying five types of participation patterns or purposes.

Progression routes and better permeability are promoted by the **Copenhagen process** on enhanced cooperation in vocational education and training and actively supported within the EU agenda on the modernisation of higher education, as well as in the Bologna process, where access to academic qualifications can be granted, through validation arrangements, to adults without the formal entry level qualification.

The European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) was adopted by the Council and Parliament in June 2009 and its implications cannot be yet assessed. ECVET is a technical tool for the transfer, recognition and, where appropriate, accumulation of individuals' (youth or adult) learning outcomes with a view to achieving a qualification. ECVET should therefore be seen in a lifelong learning perspective, relevant to adult as well as younger learners in the development of flexible and individualised pathways. **Projects testing ECVET**¹¹, financed through the Lifelong Learning Programme, show that although it was designed primarily for use in initial VET, it is fully applicable to the adult learning sector. This is illustrated by projects such as: SME MASTER Plus which includes experienced workers seeking a master craftsman qualification, CAPE SV includes adult in continuing vocational training, and RECOMFOR workers mobility.

A **peer learning seminar on critical factors for the implementation of lifelong learning strategies and policies** was held in May 2010 in Vienna and included exchange of good practices regarding partnerships and financing mechanisms for adult learning, as well as policies to attract disadvantaged low skilled adults to learning activities. In the meantime, a report entitled *Lifelong Learning Strategies: Critical factors and good practice in implementation*¹² has been published.

Mainly due to the lack of suitable data (see also 3.5), analysis of the cost-benefits of adult learning has not yet been undertaken. Regarding the distribution of financial resources, in October 2009, the work of the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education in the UK was presented to the Adult Learning Working Group as an example of how the distribution of funding can be mapped. A **workshop on financing**

¹¹ see: <http://www.ecvet-projects.eu/>

¹²http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/moreinformation139_en.htm

adult learning in times of crisis was held on 18-19 October 2010 to gather further good practices and ideas on how to take this work forward.

A **workshop on the role of higher education in developing the adult learning component of lifelong learning** was held on 27-28 September 2010. This was preceded by working meetings with the main higher education organisations and networks engaged in continuing education at European level. The Education and Training mutual learning programme and its thematic working group on modernisation of higher education organised a **peer learning on LLL in higher education, in Malta**, in October 2010.

The Commission's goal is to deliver on lifelong learning objectives as a whole, so all facets of education and training remain in the spotlight. The biennial joint progress reports monitor progress achieved by Member States. The latest 2010 report, *Key competences for a changing world*,¹³ alerts countries that implementing lifelong learning through formal, non-formal and informal learning, and increasing mobility, remain a challenge. Education and training, including universities, should become more open and relevant to the needs of the labour market and society at large. Particular attention should be given to establishing partnerships between the worlds of education and training, and of work. The renewed *Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ("ET 2020"*¹⁴), sets out four overarching objectives against which progress will continue to be measured, including LLL and mobility for all. It prioritises LLL and recognition of prior learning also in higher education. The National Reform Programmes to be agreed by Member States within the context of Europe 2020 could provide further evidence of reforms.

3.1.3 Developments at national level

The following developments can be observed in various Member States:

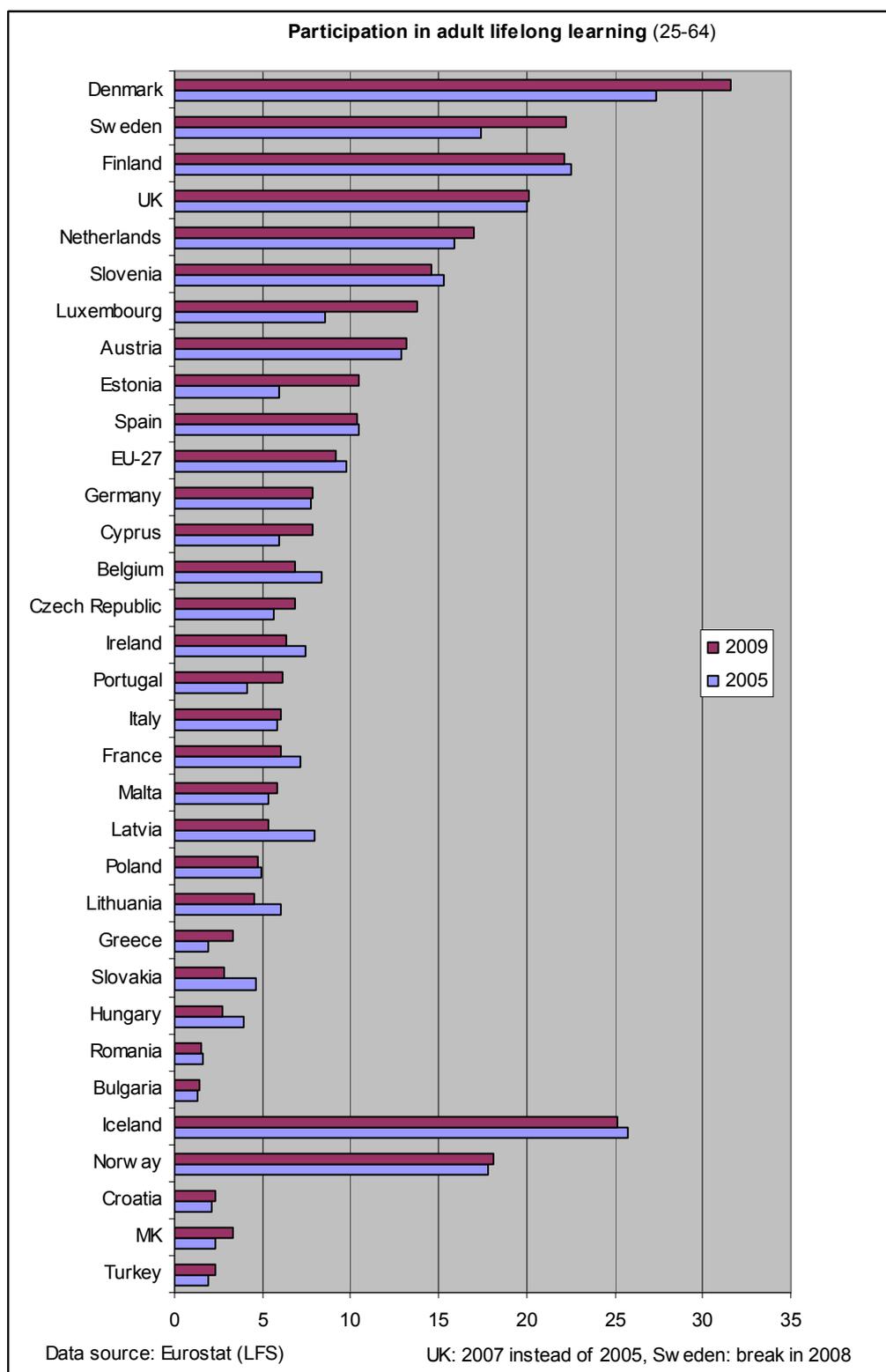
- **Increasing participation in lifelong learning (LLL)**

Reforms that introduce lifelong learning approaches or overarching strategies, as part of the Lisbon agenda for education and training, and in the E&T 2010 work programme (2002), are the biggest influence on adult learning. While most countries have adopted a lifelong learning strategy or are using LLL as their "guiding principle", implementing learning over the life course is a greater challenge and countries are still grappling with this. Lifelong learning is becoming a reality in those countries which have a long tradition and a holistic policy of formal and non-formal learning, serving both young people and adults, from early childhood onwards. This is reflected by the benchmark, with adult participation ranging from over 30% in the north to under 2% in the south (see Fig. 1).

¹³ <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/10/st05/st05394.en10.pdf>

¹⁴ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:119:0002:0010:EN:PDF>

Figure 1: Participation of adults in lifelong learning in European countries



Note: Data refer to persons aged 25-64 who stated that they received education or training in the four week period preceding the survey (numerator).

Ten countries are already achieving the 2010 target of 12.5% participation in lifelong learning (LLL). Four million extra adult learners per annum would have to participate to reach this benchmark, before we address the updated benchmark which is to raise adult participation in LLL to 15% by 2020. Seven countries – DK, FIN, ICE, NL, NO, SE, UK have attained this new benchmark. About a quarter have a comprehensive systemic approach incorporating adult learning in lifelong learning strategies, half the countries have policy and legislation on adult learning in place, while the remaining quarter still only have fragmented elements of a system. Multiple structures and political responsibilities are still common in adult learning governance. However, evidence is emerging that decentralisation, increased autonomy and partnership contribute to successful adult learning reform. Efforts to extend learning opportunities throughout adult life still need attention, in particular funding arrangements.

Slovenia in many ways served as the model which inspired the Action Plan and intense involvement with authorities there since its adoption have helped the system to be consolidated and evolve very quickly and serve almost as a laboratory of good practice.

In Slovenia, a National Plan on Adult Education was adopted already in June 2004 and its implementation is determined by the Annual Programme of Adult Education passed by the government. The development of lifelong learning practices is closely associated with the adult education field, as well as with social, political, economic, cultural and technological changes. Key features are: holistic access and the connectedness of all forms of learning; diversity and flexibility of learning offers; key competences and learning for personal growth, work and the development of society; possibilities for the recognition and validation of learning; appropriate information and guidance infrastructure. The network of fourteen lifelong learning centres in Slovenia is central in the achievement of improved quality and effectiveness of education and training systems. Their activities include counselling services to local communities, outreach, and self-directed as well as organised learning at lifelong learning points.

- **Opening access for adults to VET and higher education.**

Promotion of lifelong learning has been a priority for reforms in higher education as part of the Bologna process since 2003 and in accordance with its Leuven Communiqué (2009) indicators on widening access will be developed. The Communication on modernisation of higher education from 2006 emphasise flexible learning pathways including recognition of prior learning. National reforms taking these priorities into account are moving slowly but steadily, and alternative routes, for example through validation, open university, and new pedagogical methods including e-platforms, are gradually opening up to adults. A new Communication on modernising higher education in 2011 will give new impetus to this activity.

The Copenhagen process on VET has undergone systematic reviews every two years which show that most of the spotlight is still on initial VET but continuing vocational training has gained a higher profile in the latest revision in the Bruges Communiqué of

December 2010. Enterprises might have cut their expenditure on training, but a considerable amount of public funding and ESF went into these shorter working time and training packages. Given a growing preoccupation to upskill the existing workforce or combat (long-term) unemployment, Member States have put more emphasis on access to training linked to guidance and validation of prior learning. Validation of prior learning is most common in VET and among the employed. To alleviate the crisis, Member States devised policy measures which combined short-time work and training as well as public and private funding. As Cedefop reports indicate, there is, however, no clear message from countries on how employers' behaviour is affected by the downturn. However, a survey in 2009 showed that (http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/9017_en.pdf) first signs were positive. This was reiterated by many countries at the regional meetings on adult learning action plan in 2009.

- **Getting a second chance**

Many reforms are aimed at the second-chance learners, both employed and unemployed, to facilitate their access to education through flexibility in provision and to motivate their participation through incentive financing and cost-sharing. Second chance comprises programmes developed to facilitate adults who want to return to education in a setting which matches their learning needs and fits with their life and family commitments. These can be inside or outside the formal education system and often lead to secondary level qualifications or equivalent. Most countries are offering such opportunities to adults, but there is growing awareness of the value of second chance in addressing the problem of the persistently high numbers of young people leaving school early and without a qualification. Some offer holistic learning opportunities. Greece and Cyprus have networks of dedicated second chance schools. Provision is included in the formal system in Romania and Croatia, while Portugal has widespread regional structures (New Opportunities Centres) embedded in a range of institutions throughout the country (see box p. 30). The tendency in recent years is for more integration in vocational education and training programmes, which is also aiming to provide compensatory basic education, thus providing access to both general and vocational skills. There is also a growing tendency to link second chance provision to employability and VET initiatives, e.g. AT, BE, DE, DK, HU, IRL, NL, SE, UK and as part of active labour market policies in BG, CZ, SI, SK. An **overview of second chance offers**, particularly in formal education, was produced by Eurydice.

- **National Qualification Frameworks**

The National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs) are aiming to facilitate progression routes in the education and training system, thus opening up qualification systems to adults, facilitating valuing of a broader range of learning outcomes and addressing the transparency of systems and qualifications¹⁵. NQFs are in force in FR, IE, MT, and UK (England and Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) and they have referenced their frameworks to the EQF. BE (fl), EE and PT have developed NQFs. Moreover, all EU Member States have started developing national frameworks with the explicit aim

¹⁵ Cedefop (2009) Continuity, consolidation and Change. Towards a European era of vocational education and training, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities

of linking these to the European Qualifications Framework¹⁶. While countries' ambitions as regards the new frameworks vary, there is broad agreement that they can play an important role in increasing the overall transparency of education and training systems, not least by clarifying the relationship and potential links between initial and continuing education and training and between public and private providers. Development is underway in all countries, in some as a coherent way to describe existing systems and in others as an element within a reform process¹⁷. In most countries the process of national analysis and consultation to develop the NQF and to reference national levels to the EQF are producing very encouraging results and often provoking profound national debate, as countries strive to ensure the involvement, ownership and consensus of stakeholders. The majority of countries will complete their referencing to EQF in 2011. Some countries have levels that are lower than EQF level 1 'entry level'. Iceland, Ireland and Scotland have included 'entry levels' in their NQF below level 1 of EQF as a way of incorporating basic skills.

The learning outcomes based approach underpinning NQF development is widely accepted among stakeholders in all countries. The development and implementation of NQFs based on learning outcomes is expected to facilitate both increased permeability between subsystems, such as vocational training, adult education and higher education, and a more systematic approach to the validation of learning taking place in non-formal and informal learning. The NQFs provide an opportunity to better integrate validation of non-formal and informal learning into national qualifications systems (as illustrated by debates in AT and DE).

¹⁶ The different approaches and stages of development are comprehensively reported in Cedefop (2010), *The development of national qualifications frameworks in Europe* (August 2010), Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

¹⁷ Ibidem,

Denmark exemplifies most of the above characteristics.

A comprehensive Danish NQF for LLL is being put in place, following agreement with all the main stakeholders. It consists of eight levels, each of which is defined by a description based on skills, knowledge and competence. The framework encompasses all publicly approved degrees and certificates, including certificates acquired through adult vocational education and training activities. It is closely linked to continuing reforms, particularly in VET and integrates the qualifications framework for higher education. Thus, the Danish qualifications framework operates with three types of qualification:

- Degrees - for example, Bachelor's, Master's and doctoral degrees;
- Certificates acquired e.g. in primary school, upper secondary education or VET
- Certificates for supplementary qualifications acquired in the general adult education and continuing training system.

It enables vertical and horizontal progression, regardless of prior learning, age or employment. Furthermore, information on current regulations regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning and how degrees and certificates can be acquired on the basis of such validation will be made available as part of the information on the Danish qualifications framework for lifelong learning on the website of the Ministry of Education. Work is continuing on the inclusion of certificates outside the public domain, illustrating use of a pragmatic incremental approach.

It is worth noting that the Qualification Framework for the European Higher Education Area, equally applying the learning outcomes approach is implemented in close coordination with the EQF and there is growing synergy at national level: most often NQFs for higher education are integrated in comprehensive NQFs for lifelong learning in order to ensure permeability and flexible learning pathways.

Apart from validation of prior learning for access to higher education, it is also interesting to note that some countries have developed specific qualifications/preparatory programmes for non-traditional learners, including mature students, who need additional support relating to the skills necessary for undertaking higher studies before they enter into higher education. These provisions primarily target learners who followed a short upper secondary vocational path (i.e. a programme not opening access to higher education) or who abandoned upper secondary education prior to its completion, e.g. access courses in the UK, qualification DAEU (*Le Diplôme d'Accès aux Etudes Universitaires*) in France, pre-entry "access/foundation" courses in Ireland, and in Iceland non-traditional candidates can enter into higher education after having completed a preliminary study programmes organised for individuals who do not meet the admission requirements. More details on these provisions will be provided in the study on adults in formal education (Eurydice, forthcoming).

3.1.4 Overall assessment

While policy reforms are being driven by lifelong learning (LLL) strategies that include adult learning, as indicated in the Joint Progress Report 2010, their implementation remains a critical challenge. Coherent and comprehensive strategies

covering the full life-course are still not the norm, with some still focusing on specific sectors or groups, hence access for adults throughout life is still not a reality, and participation rates in many countries remain low. Participation rates have not improved and in fact since 2005 there has been a slight annual decrease in overall EU participation. One of the main obstacles is funding and, so far, despite the fact that it was identified by the Action plan and the Council as a high priority, no analysis of the distribution of resources or of the cost/benefits of adult learning has been done at European level and data on individual countries is scarce. A clearer picture of spending – how much, who provides and how it is spent - would enhance policy making. In the current crisis, constrained budgets make it even more urgent to explore new mechanisms for sharing and distributing resources. There is still no clear evidence on how the economic crisis has impacted on continuing vocational training and adult learning more generally, though initial indications are that public support in the form of activation measures are supporting training to keep people in work and help the unemployed re-skill to new jobs.

VET reforms associated with the Copenhagen process impact on adult learning in that they cover continuing training for work purposes and changes to enable more adult participation in higher education are supported by the Bologna and modernisation agendas but progress remains slow. However, more opening of systems, in particular to young adults to would contribute to meeting the *Europe 2020* benchmark of 40% attainment in tertiary education of 30-34 year olds.

The EQF and the development of national qualifications frameworks and systems provide an opportunity for redesigning systems, and place qualifications available through adult learning, including validation of non-formal and informal learning, in a common qualification structure, on a par with other qualifications. NQFs and EQF encourage the use of other common tools, like key competences, quality assurance, credit transfer systems, etc. also in adult learning, as well as stimulating intensive dialogue and consensus building between national stakeholders. It is work in progress that needs to be continued, especially to ensure that non-formal and non-regulated education which often characterises adult learning is included in national frameworks.

Lack of monitoring and impact assessment deprives adult learning of a strong evidence base. There is a need for a results-oriented approach, supporting and promoting impact evaluation as part of reforms and to inform future policies. A feedback loop from practice to policy would influence policy development and transfer of effective practices at national level, but also on a transnational basis thus enriching the OMC.

3.2 Improve quality of provision in the adult learning sector

3.2.1 Background and objectives

Quality assurance forms an important part of the reforms in education and training. So far, the main developments in relation to the quality of education and training systems at European level have related to the vocational education and training (VET) and the higher education (HE) sectors. The 2006¹⁸ Communication on adult learning,

¹⁸ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2006:0614:FIN:EN:PDF>

emphasised that improvements in the delivery of adult learning are essential to raise participation and ensure quality learning outcomes. It urged Member States to address the interrelated challenges of ensuring quality at the same time as striving to reform governance and expand provision.

The Action Plan underlines that *quality of provision is affected by policy, resources, accommodation and a host of other factors, but the key factor is the quality of the staff involved in delivery. They have to be able to address the different needs of the specific groups.*

Action required under the Action Plan included:

- publication of the study *Adult Learning Professionals in Europe*, extraction of good practices to be disseminated and used in the Lifelong Learning Programme, e.g. in job shadowing and in PLAs;
- based on good practice, development of standards for adult learning professionals including management and guidance personnel;
- carry out research on standards for and accreditation of providers.

The Council Conclusions endorsed the actions with the aim to support the development of career opportunities, conditions and resources for those working in the field of adult learning, and to enhance the visibility and status of the profession - based on existing good practice in the Member States. They requested further research on the development of quality criteria for adult learning providers.

3.2.2 EU support

The ALPINE¹⁹ study, *Adult Learning Professions in Europe: A study of the current situation, trends and issues*, completed in 2008, identified a number of key characteristics of the adult education and training sector staff, across Europe. The sector is diverse. Providers differ in size, the type of learning they provide, the way they are funded/governed, their target groups and the learning methods used. Staff within the sector has different employment conditions, ranging from permanent, full-time contracts to more precarious, freelance contracts. They have a variety of backgrounds, work on short-term contracts or in addition to another job and tend to join the profession later in life after gaining work experience elsewhere. Volunteering is also common in some countries. This means that the provision of training to personnel within the sector needs to be particularly flexible and there is more emphasis on continuing professional development (CPD) through short courses, work-based learning and induction programmes than on initial training. Generally, the professions of teaching or training in adult learning are poorly regulated. The study characterised staff in this sector as well educated but with little profession-related training. The study has been disseminated in the Member States in the framework of PLAs and workshops, also via the Grundtvig programme. It is used as a key background document not only by policy-makers but also providers and social partners to deepen their discussion on staff development and working-conditions.

¹⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/adultprofreport_en.pdf

As follow-on from the ALPINE study, and with a view to developing standards and improving the status of the profession, with its own visible profile, the European Commission undertook a study on *Key competences for adult learning professionals*²⁰ in 2009. It proposed elements for a Competence Profile for adult learning professionals, which provides a starting point for further peer learning and a contribution to meeting the need highlighted in ET 2020 "to ensure high quality teaching, to provide adequate initial teacher education, continuous professional development for teachers and trainers, and to make teaching an attractive career-choice". The methodology to develop the profile included reference to the many Grundtvig multilateral projects on the professional development of adult learning professionals, as well as good practices in Member States. Through research and its training of trainers network (TTnet), Cedefop monitors trends affecting the roles, competences and training of vocational teachers and trainers and promotes knowledge sharing between practitioners and policy makers on key topics of interest for the training and professional development of teachers and trainers. Based on the work of the network, Cedefop has, for example, together with the Finnish National Board of Education, published a Competence framework for VET professions. It is a handbook for practitioners and decision-makers in vocational education and training that contains an inventory of the activities and competences of teachers, in-company trainers and leaders in vocational education and training.²¹

Intensified co-operation between European VET stakeholders has led to a range of tools, as part of the Copenhagen process, including EQAVET - a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training, adopted in June 2009. Quality assurance is a central issue in the EQF Recommendation²², and in the European Guidelines²³ for validating non-formal and informal learning, 2009, which built on previous Common European Principles²⁴. EQAVET is designed to promote better vocational education and training by providing authorities with common tools for the management of quality. It applies both to initial and continuing vocational training and, by extension to many organisations providing adult learning. EQAVET network, a community of practice bringing together Member States, Social Partners and the European Commission, was created to promote European collaboration in developing and improving quality assurance in VET by using the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework. It is supported through the Leonardo da Vinci programme which also supports quality assurance projects. The strategic priorities for multilateral projects for 2011 specifically target EQAVET related activities.

The **workshop²⁵ on quality in adult learning**, 30 June-1 July 2010 considered examples of good practice according to four key dimensions: relevance, equity, efficiency and effectiveness. One of the outcomes of the workshop was the recommendation of an overarching quality system applicable to LLL, which could use

²⁰ <http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/2010/keycomp.pdf>, (See chapter four, p.33&ff. for competence profile)

²¹ (http://www.oph.fi/download/111332_Competence_framework_for_VET_professions.pdf)

²² OJ 111,6/05/2008. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:111:0001:0007:EN:PDF>

²³ <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/5059.aspx>

²⁴ May 2004. http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/informal/validation2004_en.pdf

²⁵ (See workshop report at: <http://www.kslll.net/PeerLearningClusters/clusterDetails.cfm?id=7>).

EQAVET and the quality assurance system for higher education. Pending further exploration on applying and adapting existing tools, the research requested by the Action Plan on standards for adult learning providers has not yet been undertaken.

The **Grundtvig programme** which funds continuing staff development and in-service courses at an international level has been used for cross-border continuing professional development by adult educators from many countries over the past decade. Nearly 15 000 mobility grants for adult education staff have been awarded since 2001. The Lifelong Learning Programme study visits support staff working throughout education and training.

3.2.3 Developments at national level

Overall approaches to quality in education and training are along a spectrum from prescription where public authorities exert control over the quality of provision to a cooperative model where the approach is a mix of control and autonomy on the part of providers to a self-regulated model where providers are fully responsible for the quality of their provision. Elements of all three approaches are visible in relation to quality in adult learning in the Member States.

- **Regulations, qualifications requirements and profiles**

In recent years countries have been responding in different ways to the need to ensure the quality of adult learning personnel. Numerous countries including AT, BE, CY, DE, EE, EL, FR, HR, IT, PL, RO, and UK have introduced regulations defining adult learning and what adult learning practitioners should do for their professional development. Estonia is among the few European countries where adult educator is considered a specific profession; a new professional qualification standard has been created and it is based on the adult educator's competences. In the UK, more formal qualification requirements for teachers in all phases of post-school education have been introduced since the late 1990s. Regulations are set at sectoral level. Lifelong Learning UK, the sector skills council for lifelong learning, has set specific standards which adult learning teachers, trainers and tutors must meet. In Finland, the Act on Liberal Adult Education lays down specific requirements in relation to the skill sets of teachers in non-formal adult learning. The Lithuanian Lifelong Learning Strategy (2008) aims to regulate the profession of an adult educator and to create the conditions for the development of relevant competences in educational establishments. To increase equality within the adult learning sector in Portugal, the staffing requirements, qualifications, recruitment procedures and remuneration of the validation providers are clearly set out, along with the continuing professional development for staff. In Turkey, public institutions providing adult learning programmes recruit staff according to the results of the selection examination for professional posts and salaries are set by the government. In Italy legislation requires teachers in the field of adult learning to attend training sessions run by the Regional Institutes for Educational Research.

France has developed a competence profile with a focus on vocational adult learning and competence profiles also exist in Denmark, Germany and Sweden. In Romania, the Sectoral Committee for Education and Training validated and updated an occupational standard for 'trainers' in 2006. In Poland, all trainers in non-

governmental organisations must gain accreditation from the Polish association of trainers. In Austria, occupational profiles developed for educational counsellors have enabled the profession to be officially recognised and approved.

- **Initial education and training of adult learning personnel**

Investment in the quantitative and qualitative supply of teaching personnel with adequate contractual, working and professional development conditions is probably the most salient indicator of quality in adult education. Undergraduate courses in adult education exist in several countries including, AT, CZ, DE, DK, EE, FI, FR, HU, LV, LT, RO and NO and in most European countries there are general pedagogical programmes offering different specialisations, including adult learning. In Finland, there is a professorship of adult education in seven universities and a new course in social pedagogy concerned with non-formal and informal adult learning has emerged. In Sweden a supplementary course at Linköping university offers the opportunity to students who have already undertaken formal education to become a teacher, to qualify as an ‘adult education teacher’.

However, in many countries there are no specific initial qualification requirements for adult education teaching staff. In fact, outside of ‘second-chance’ general and vocational adult learning in mainstream schools and other public institutions where staff is frequently required to hold the same qualifications as school education staff, there are many educational and professional routes to becoming a teacher or a trainer in the adult education sector. In Germany, for example, the Course Teachers Academy provides a systematic range of training and retraining courses to give part-time and freelance teaching staff access to a basic teaching qualification. The variety of qualifications on offer can mean that the market for adult learning professionals is not transparent for employers. In Germany, the Institute for Adult Education has established a database to increase transparency and enable systematic research of all the training on offer. Furthermore, the Continuing Education Training Qualification Initiative brings together a working group of practitioners, providers, universities and the German Institute for Adult Education to develop a comprehensive, modular qualifications framework for adult education employees.

“As a rule, teachers and trainers delivering formal programmes to mature students must comply with the same qualification requirements as those delivering primary, lower secondary or upper secondary programmes to pupils in the system of initial education and training. However, in the majority of European countries, the initial teacher training programmes do not include any elements relating to teaching methods and approaches targeting adult learners. Only a very few exceptions can be found across Europe: In Norway, in Slovenia.... At the same time, it must be underlined that while in the majority of European countries teaching methods targeting adult learners are not included in initial teacher education, teachers in most countries can reinforce their competences related to teaching adults through the system of continuing professional development (CPD)” (Eurydice, 2011).

- **Continuing professional development (CPD) of adult learning personnel**

In a context of diverse, limited or, indeed, no specific pre-service professional training or qualifications, in-service training or continuing professional development (CPD) is

critical to ensuring the quality of adult learning provision. Such training and development may be delivered by state agencies and/or providers. In some countries, for example, Austria (see box below) and Ireland, continuing professional development can offer an in-service route to a higher education professional qualification for practitioners.

In Slovenia the Institute for Adult Education (SIAE) is the main provider of in-service teacher training programmes for adult education and the right and obligation in respect of in-service training is determined by law. In Hungary, "adult education teacher" as a higher vocational qualification is being introduced. This new qualification will provide a CPD opportunity for teachers and trainers with HE qualifications, who intend to work in the field of adult education. In Poland professional associations actively promote continuing professional development.

UK teachers and trainers are required to undertake at least 30 hours of professional development a year. Learning networks can help to encourage learning among staff within the sector. In Sweden, a CPD initiative to boost the teaching of Swedish to immigrants was introduced in 2008. In Portugal, a specialised training programme addressing the pedagogical teams of the New Opportunities Centres is implemented on an annual basis. This training was developed by a group of public universities in 2008.

In some countries, organisations have their own in-service programme. For example, in Denmark, there is a system for support and in-service education for staff in non-formal adult education, organised mainly through Adult Educational Resource Centres (VPC).

Austria, Training and validating staff and providers

Austria's Academy of Continuing Education (Weiterbildungsakademie - wba) is held up at international events, such as the regional meetings, as a show case for others. It is one of the most advanced examples of an institution engaged in the professionalising of the adult education sector. A key element of its success is the strong cooperation with all relevant stakeholders, including the social partners. It is supported by the major adult education umbrella organisations and it recognises formally acquired competences as well as competences that have been obtained in non-formal or informal ways. Therefore it brings the qualification and recognition of adult educators an important step forward. . Practical experience is a prerequisite and previously acquired qualifications are acknowledged. An adult educator's skills deficiencies are identified during the process of certification and further education programmes are proposed to overcome them. At the end of their studies and relevant examinations, adult educators obtain either a wba-certificate: certified adult educator and/or wba-diploma: graduate adult educator, both widely recognised diplomas within the profession. The Austrian Federal Institute for Adult Education and the German Institute for Adult Education, as well as universities and teacher training colleges, are involved in this development.

An Austrian framework to recognise the quality of adult education (QUEB Austria) is being developed by a task force at the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture, and with experts in the field. The initiative targets all adult education institutions in Austria. A distinction is drawn between Level 1: Q-systems without external audit and Level 2: Q-systems with external audit.

3.2.4 Overall assessment

Training of teachers and trainers, including adult learning professionals is high on the agenda both at national level. Though provision still varies greatly between initial, continuing and in-service training, there is progressive expansion of the number of qualified staff in this sector. It should extend to all countries. The status of the adult learning professional as an independent profession has not yet been established in most countries. The study on key competences for adult learning professionals proposes a set of competences for staff, both professionals and managerial, which could serve as a useful reference for Member States and stakeholders alike, in developing standards for staff.

In a number of countries, good practice in accrediting and assuring quality of providers has been identified. Further research required on standards and quality criteria for providers remains to be done. Gradually, EQAVET will be implemented in the adult VET sector. Work is also being undertaken to see how this fits with the European Standards and Guidelines on quality assurance in higher education. The question remains how best to exploit these tools to support quality in the remaining area of non-vocational adult learning, which is often characterised by many small organisations providing non-formal learning. Such bodies would benefit from an overarching quality framework for LLL, which might incorporate simple guidelines to raise quality standards.

To date, work has involved researchers and policy makers. Future activities on quality in adult learning should also have a bottom up element involving the opinion of three critical players – practitioners, providers and the learners themselves. Another issue which still has to be addressed is quality of distance learning and use of ICT to widen access and improve provision. ET 2020 has concretised "improving the quality and efficiency of education and training" as a strategic objective for all sectors of education and training to 2020.

3.3 Increase the possibilities for adults to go one step up and achieve at least a qualification one level higher

3.3.1 Background and objectives

Although all adults are concerned by this priority, it targets especially low-skilled and low-qualified adults and those with difficulties achieving a full qualification. While the educational attainment levels of adults in the Member States have improved considerably since 2000, 76 million Europeans aged 25-64 (28% of the total population) still have, at most, lower secondary education²⁶. Meanwhile, all the evidence points to the need for a highly qualified labour force to achieve the European Union's goal of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

The low skilled are the most at risk of unemployment, as evidenced since the crisis. Raising their skills levels is of paramount importance as their next employment often means a move from manual work to the service sector, which may demand higher literacy and digital skills. Cedefop research shows that in 1996 31% of the workforce required only low skills but by 2020 this figure will fall to 18%. This should be a major stimulus to act, reinforced by the fact that the low skilled are the most vulnerable to unemployment.

This issue has received renewed attention at EU level as part of the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. Council conclusions on the social dimension of education and training, 10-11 May 2010, invite Member States to "strengthen policies to enable the low-skilled, unemployed adults, and where appropriate, citizens with a migrant background to gain a qualification or take their skills a step further ("one step up"), and broaden the provision of second chance education for young adults". The new Employment Guidelines²⁷ in the context of the *Europe 2020* strategy promote effective incentives for lifelong learning of those within and outside employment, "ensuring every adult the chance to retrain or to move one step up in their qualification".

The Action Plan, given demographic projections for Europe, *emphasises the importance of investing in the human and social capital of adult learners, since the working population is continually ageing. Information and guidance have a critical role to play in reaching and motivating these groups.... The opportunity for them to*

²⁶ Commission Staff Working Document Progress Towards the Lisbon Objectives in Education and Training Indicators and Benchmarks 2009. SEC (2009)

1616

²⁷ ECOFIN 622, EDUC 171, 19 October 2010

progress and to raise their qualification levels must be real and must allow them to better integrate in all spheres of life.

Actions required under the Action Plan include:

- an inventory of good practice and projects for reaching the low skilled target groups, with a focus on key factors for reintegrating people in the labour market, in education and training, and in society (voluntary work) and exploitation of results in the Lifelong Learning Programme.

This was taken up in the Council conclusions which added that the inventory should aim at motivating particularly "hard-to-reach" groups and enhancing their self-esteem as well as their reintegration.

3.3.2 EU support

The Commission finalised an **inventory of good outreach practices** which focuses on the hardest to reach, and identifies the key success factors for reintegrating them in education and training, employment and society, in April 2010. It is accompanied by case studies and an **analytical report, *Enabling the low skilled to take their qualifications "one step up"***²⁸ that emphasises the need for an integrated approach. What works best for the low skilled is learning related to their own work or life context, combined with efficient provision in their own community, but with high reliance on guidance and support to keep them on track and help them persist with their learning, towards a qualification. These solutions are not cheap as they concentrate on individual needs. The teacher/mentor is crucial and the best teachers will have most success with these groups. Teachers should not only be trained to teach adults but also be subject specialists – numeracy requires excellent maths teachers, and not just an add-on to the work of the literacy teachers, etc. Embedding learning of basic skills in VET or at the workplace is a successful approach to reaching and engaging low-skilled workers. The results provide much evidence of what works, the question now is how to extend it to larger numbers of low skilled.

Cedefop plays an important role in revealing and highlighting the opportunities of workplace learning for adults. In its forthcoming study *Learning while working: success stories of workplace learning in Europe*, Cedefop has drawn on its previous work carried out in this field. The study shows in particular how workplace learning can contribute to adult's skills development and highlights its opportunities. The study reveals the potential of workplace learning for the acquisition of key competences and provides best-practice examples.

In their Framework Agreement on Inclusive Labour Markets²⁹, 25 March 2010, BusinessEurope, ETUC, CEEP and UEAPME consider this issue as an essential condition for inclusion, the fight against poverty, and economic success. They agreed that the measures to be taken should include cooperation with the education and training systems in order to better match the needs of the individual and those of the

²⁸ Analytical report *Enabling the low-skilled to take their qualifications "One Step Up"*, http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/moreinformation139_en.htm. See European Inventory in Annex 2.

²⁹ http://www.etuc.org/IMG/pdf_20100325155413125.pdf

labour market, including by tackling problems of basic skills (literacy and numeracy), and cooperation with the "third sector" to support those who encounter particular difficulties in relation to the labour market.

Substantial work was concentrated on this priority. The Key Competences Recommendation³⁰ provided a good backdrop. In parallel to the Inventory and using its results, **three Peer Learning Activities (PLAs)**, were organised. The Dublin PLA dealt with literacy; the London PLA addressed the broader topic of going 'one step up' in qualifications and the persistence needed to do this. This was followed up in the Peer Learning Activity in Oslo, March 2010, which concentrated on numeracy, guidance and specific teacher training in basic skills delivery. A **workshop on basic skills**, 17-18 June, in Brussels, brought together the outcomes and **Guidelines**³¹ for policy and practice have been drafted based on the learning generated through these activities. They can serve to focus and strengthen future work on basic skills provision, as a toolbox that will support the goal of taking action to the local and regional level where it has most impact on the learner and more chances of success.

The Commission is also active in supporting migrant integration policies and will present a Communication on a New European Agenda on Integration in 2011. **Council Conclusions on Integration** as a driver for development and social cohesion³² were adopted on 3-4 June 2010, emphasising the urgent need to improve the quality of education and training systems and contribute to the educational success of children, young people and adults, and equip teachers with the skills needed to work with those from a migrant background. European modules on integration (on language classes, pedagogy, effective introductory courses, incentive structures and evaluation and quality assessment) are being developed to support Member States in their development and implementation policies and practices. A conference on basic **adult education in prisons** as a way to inclusion was held in Budapest, 20-23 February 2010.

A key feature of the Grundtvig programme and within the Lifelong Learning Programme generally is its strong emphasis on promoting engagement with adult learning among the more marginalised groups in society. Almost 14 000 grants have been awarded to enable organisations to participate in **Grundtvig Learning Partnerships**, reaching over 4 000 organisations. They have also participated in 700 cooperation projects. This focus addresses one of the objectives of the Action Plan, namely 'to assist people from vulnerable social groups and in marginal social contexts...., in order to give them alternative opportunities to access adult education'.

³⁰OJ L394,30-12-2006,

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:394:0010:0018:EN:PDF>

³¹ Add reference after ALWG meeting

³² <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/10/st09/st09248.en10.pdf>

The Grundtvig programme has offered many educational opportunities to groups at risk or in situations of social exclusion. Almost two-thirds of the projects and partnerships have a social inclusion dimension. Between 2007 and 2009, for example, a majority of the 4139 partnerships supported basic skills and second chance provision, and groups such as, migrants and ethnic groups, senior citizens, illiterate or functionally illiterate people, prisoners and those with special needs. The **Grundtvig Network** – Eur-Alpha - supports adult literacy.

3.3.3 Developments at national level

Each country has its own label for them, which is sensitive to local norms and etiquette. But there is agreement on what they entail.

64 good practices³³ from 33 countries are identified in the Inventory. They range from small scale initiatives in a local museum in Sweden to early recognition and referral systems for young people entering the army in France, and to national campaigns run by the ministry of education in Turkey to raise the literacy levels of mothers and daughters, over a million of whom have been reached so far. Even if Member States are at different stages of development, it is encouraging that all countries are addressing the issue of enabling low skilled individuals to take their qualifications "one step up", and good practices are widespread. *Key competences for a changing world*, the 2010 Joint Progress Report, based on national reports, showed lack of substantial progress on the transversal key competences for adults but confirms progress on basic foundation skills.

A range of significant measures are contributing to the development of a robust, even if fragmented, provision of basic skills for low-skilled individuals in the Member States, including:

- Outreach to the learner in his/her local environment or workplace
- a focus on labour market needs and on how employers, the workplace and the community can enable low-skilled individuals to take their qualifications "one step up", including embedding basic skills in vocational education and training or work (see also second chance, p. 11);
- collaborative arrangements between key stakeholders at national, regional and local levels for the development of policy and the provision of resources for basic skills;
- a range of measures to promote basic skills for adults, including: legislation; funding; information campaigns; programmes of basic skills;
- established or emerging guidance services (and validation) to support and motivate adults seeking to develop/improve their basic skills;

³³ <http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/2010/lowskill2.pdf>

- high quality teachers and mentors and initial and continuing professional development opportunities, with specific qualifications for basic skills practitioners;
- introducing in national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) levels below EQF level 1 which enable programmes for the very low skilled to feed into the framework and receive part qualifications, and basic skills;
- including in comprehensive lifelong learning strategies a specific priority on policies for low skilled and disadvantaged groups.

The Norwegian, Basic Competence in Working Life Programme illustrates that even in countries with highly developed education systems, high participation in LLL and high-performing economies, the problem of the low skilled persist. In Norway, some 430,000 adults or 10.75% of the population have insufficient basic skills at a time when social and working life requires ever-increasing skills levels. Up to recently the main learning option for adults with low basic skills was a condensed primary school course, but many adults required a more flexible option. One such option is the Basic Competence in Working Life Programme (BCWL), a funding programme for which Vox has administrative and academic responsibility. The BCWL funds, supports and monitors basic learning projects in enterprises, organisations of working life and providers who may be working with several small and medium enterprises, or projects aimed at preparing people for employment with the overall goal of preventing exclusion from work because of insufficient basic competence. Key features of the programme include: co-operation between companies and providers; financial compensation to employers for workers' time spent on structured learning; the provision of guidance and information; and quality assurance for providers. In 2006 there were 2032 participants in 65 projects, rising to over 3000 participants in 162 projects in 2009. Since 2008 applicants are obliged to relate their proposals to the Norwegian Framework for Basic Skills for Adults. The framework comprises: competence goals in literacy, numeracy, digital competence and oral communication; guidelines for providers; mapping tools and tests; didactic models and teaching resources; and a model for teacher training.

An independent **European Basic Skills Network** was created in June 2010 following initial contacts within the adult learning working group on implementing the Action Plan. Led by Vox, Norway, many countries are buying into this bottom up venture. It promises to develop into a network that will continue cooperation started through the Action Plan and contribute to European and national policies for the enhancement of basic skills in the adult population.

3.3.4. Overall assessment

What the Action Plan required in terms of products has been achieved and the resulting study with inventory and PLAs reports provide a strong data resource to support the development of basic skills. Countries have started to develop outreach and effective solutions to the challenge of up-skilling, resulting in much effective practice and knowhow to share. It shows that they are aware of the importance of basic skills (starting with literacy and numeracy).

The most urgent problem is that the initiatives are only touching the tip of the iceberg. Improving the skills and competences of the 76 million low skilled (more or less constant since the 90s) who are in most need of taking their qualifications “one step up” calls for outreach and opportunities for much larger numbers and target groups. The study recommends that countries develop their own action plans on basic skills at local and regional level, taking the current situation as a starting point and enabling the differentiated target groups to progress to a minimum EQF level 2 (equivalent to lower secondary education), with an option to continue to level three, which is the desired level in the Recommendation on Key Competences.

To reach low-skilled adults it is essential to transform their life and work environments into places of learning; embedding learning of basic skills at the workplace is a successful approach to reaching and engaging low-skilled workers.

Furthermore, the pathway of low-skilled (qualified) adults is one of dipping in and dipping out. Guidance and the very best teachers should accompany every stage of the learning journey to help them persist and eventually reach their goal. This cooperative formula needs to be developed together with new didactical forms and assessment to reach a critical mass of the 76 million low skilled. Second chance is more critical than ever as flows of early school leavers continue to join the ranks of the low skilled.

Projects and networks have been developed as a consequence of this priority and guidelines for policy-makers and practitioners that could contribute to the development of effective policy and practice in adult basic skills provision in the Member States. While literacy and numeracy provide a foundation for new skills for jobs, developing new skills needed by adults in modern society: digital skills, economic and financial literacy, civic, cultural and environmental awareness, healthy living, etc. also merit significant attention.

3.4. Speed up the process of assessing and recognizing non-formal and informal learning for the disadvantaged groups

3.4.1 Background and objectives

Engaging with non-formal and informal learning, including validation³⁴ of prior learning and competences, is considered to be one of the main tools to increase participation in adult learning, as confirmed in the Adult Education Survey results.

The Action Plan stated that *assessment and recognition of skills and social competences, regardless of where and how they are achieved, are especially important for those who do not have basic qualifications, in order to facilitate their integration in society.*

³⁴ Validation is used in the text to describe the entire chain of identifying, documenting, assessing and recognising the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning

Actions required include:

- Identification of good practice of recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning with a special focus on social competences;
- peer learning and exchange of good practices; discussion of results with stakeholders.

The Council conclusions added identification of good practice in the assessment of learning outcomes acquired mainly outside the formal learning system, particularly those of low-skilled and older workers, and of migrants.

3.4.2 EU support

The *European Inventory³⁵ on validation of non-formal and informal learning* is being revised in 2010 to take account of the most recent developments. The overview provides an analysis of the level of progress across 32 countries and supports the process of benchmarking and mutual learning across Europe by highlighting countries and practices which can serve as examples of good practice. A **series of thematic reports** provide a more analytical cross-country overview of selected topics, for example developments aimed at disadvantaged groups, volunteers and specific arrangements for migrants, and access to higher education. It provides a **catalogue of good practices**, including **case studies**, in the area of validation for policy-makers and others to seek inspiration in. **Stakeholders** at national level have been widely involved in providing and validating data for the Inventory.

The Learning Outcomes Group³⁶ has worked intensively on the overall development of validation and produced **European Guidelines³⁷** on validation of non-formal and informal learning (2009). It organised **Peer Learning Activities** in Reykjavik on costs and benefits of validation of non-formal and informal learning, 12-13 February 2009; and on developments and updating the European guidelines in Västerås, 2010. During the Portuguese presidency of the EU in 2008 a **conference** was held on validation processes.

The Commission is now preparing a Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning for adoption in 2011, including a public consultation from November 2010 to January 2011. All the above will feed into its preparation and provide valuable background for making the Recommendation a tool that will help speed up assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning for all, including disadvantaged groups.

A number of **projects** relating to validation have been supported by EU funding, particularly **Leonardo da Vinci** and **Grundtvig**. These include *Observal (European Observatory of Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning)³⁸*, funded by the

³⁵ <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/about-cedefop/projects/validation-of-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory.aspx>

³⁶ A sub-group of the EQF Advisory Group

³⁷ <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/about-cedefop/projects/validation-of-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory-principles.aspx>

³⁸ <http://www.observal.org/observal/>

Leonardo da Vinci programme and coordinated through EUCEN (European University Continuing Education Network). The project created a database on validation of non formal and informal learning in European countries with best practices and key information on national and sectoral developments to be shared freely. Grundtvig examples include: MODEVAL – an evaluation framework to assess basic competences and REVEAL - Research and Evaluation Group for Validation, Evidencing and Assessing of Informal and Non-formal Learning. Flexi-Path is developing an instrument to facilitate the transparency and recognition of adult educator qualifications across Europe.

3.4.3 Developments at national level

Validation is a cornerstone in lifelong learning strategies, which provides a bridge or synergy between various forms of learning and enables learners to progress on a flexible individualized pathway. Validation is also important to support transfer from education to working life and to help disadvantaged groups (for example migrants) integrate in society. The shift in focus to learning outcomes more generally, applied in the EQF and the development of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs), potentially removing institutional considerations from the definition of levels, gives a higher profile and equal value to the learning taking place outside formal education and training. Countries developing NQFs are increasingly treating validation as an integrated part of national qualifications systems, potentially treating the non-formal and informal learning on an equal footing with formal learning.

A **Peer Learning Activity** was organized in Prague³⁹, 21-24 June 2009, which focused on how systems for validation could be used to attract and motivate those who are low qualified and the specific role of guidance in this. It also examined the role of employers in promoting validation among their employees and using it as a tool to assist their human resources management. With regard to the role of employers, views and experience differ greatly. Many countries mentioned the fear of employers that if they help their employees to have their learning and competences validated they risk losing them to other poaching companies.

While validation of prior learning can and does work for disadvantaged groups, information on and access to these opportunities is poorly developed in many countries. It is only in FR, NL, PT and the Nordic countries that they are anywhere near attracting the critical mass of clients necessary to make it a viable and cost effective alternative. From discussions based on good practices identified, the following issues emerge: traditions and costs are hindering acceptance of validation on a large scale; our learning culture needs to develop to accept and trust validation as the norm, and on a par with formal learning in the years to come; awareness raising is necessary and local information, guidance and employment services must be more pro-active in promoting validation, and train their staff to validate or refer their clients to the relevant bodies.

Validation and recognition towards certification is most developed in the VET sector, but is also developing in the voluntary and youth sectors, as well as for access to universities and higher education, or credit towards shorter courses. In a few countries,

³⁹ <http://www.kslll.net/PeerLearningActivities/PlaDetails.cfm?id=92>

industrial or trade sectors are a driving force behind validation, while at company level it is emerging as an integrated part of human resources development and competence measurement.

Validation in specific competences/fields features in AT, EE, HU, PL. Also interesting is the application of validation in the professional development of adult learning professionals, as seen in Austria (see p. 18). The professional qualification standard for adult educators awarded in Estonia is also applying the principles of validation in the process of awarding the qualification.

Legal frameworks exist e.g. in BE, CZ, ES, FR, PT, SI and an individual right to validation e.g. DK, FR, NO (LU entitlement to skills audit). Pro-active measures have been taken to boost validation in Sweden where funding was allocated to the municipalities for adult learning on condition that the adults first go through a validation process, and in Finland since the Law on individualisation in 2007 all those entering adult learning are obliged to have their competences validated.

The European Inventory shows that policy and legislation on validation are progressing and including the low qualified and in most cases it is free. There is a focus on low-skilled groups in AT (on migrants and disadvantaged women), BE, CZ, ES, FIN, HU, ICE, IRL, NL, SLO, Scotland, and PT. It is as part of 'second chance' in DK and NO. Special measures for migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, etc. exist in AU, BE, DE, DK, EL, FR, and SE. Prisons in FR and NO are offering inmates validation with a view to using their time in prison to gain qualifications. Workers in need of upskilling are a growing target group, as well as the unemployed and job seekers, while older adults are targeted in IT and NL. The training of validation personnel is underlined in the European Guidelines. Specific training is available in NL, PT, and SI and NO. The critical link to guidance is acknowledged in many countries. At least 16 countries have used European funding, particularly ESF or EQUAL, to develop their validation systems or to run pilot projects. While good for development, dependence on such funding and time-limited or project-based budgets more generally is a problem for the future of validation systems, which like many aspects of adult learning do not have secure and sustainable funding. Moreover, the scale and take up of such systems is generally very modest.

Validation within New Opportunities Initiative, Portugal,

Portugal has really put a lot of energy into developing a comprehensive, large-scale validation system which concentrates on the low skilled and reaches impressive numbers of adults every year. The National System for the Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences (RVCC) is integrated in the National Qualification System. RVCC comprises two main processes:

- the School Process — to improve the qualification levels of adults who do not have basic or secondary education certificates, uses the Reference Framework for Key Competences in Adult Education and Training, leading to a basic education diploma (4, 6 or 9 years of schooling), or a secondary education diploma (12 years of schooling);
- the Vocational Process — for adults who do not have formal qualification in their occupational areas, aiming to improve vocational qualifications levels, which leads to one of the 254 vocational qualifications listed in the National Catalogue of Qualifications.

The National Agency for Qualifications (ANQ), created in 2007, is responsible for the coordination and design of the RVCC system in negotiation with the social partners. Responsibility for information, promotion and awareness-raising is shared with the New Opportunities Centres (NOC) and the regional structures of the ministries of education and labour. Providing counselling and guidance, and undertaking assessment, are the responsibilities of NOCs at a local level. A large range of institutions make up the network of 454 centres: national education and training organisations, such as vocational training centres, basic and secondary schools, professional schools, entrepreneurial associations, enterprises, local and regional associations, and local authorities. By April 2010, 324,370 adults had been granted a certificate through the RVCC.

A recent Commission study, *Changing patterns of working, learning and career development across Europe*⁴⁰, based on research in 10 countries, emphasised the richness and diversity of workplace learning (learning through challenging work, interaction, peer learning, etc.). One challenge highlighted is to ensure there are facilitating mechanisms like validation systems that enable such learning to be recognised for the purposes of progression in education, training or employment. Equally, however, there needs to be access to formal education programmes which can consolidate such learning and be used as platforms for further individual development (and in some cases transformation of significant aspects of their life).

⁴⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/2010/warwicksum_en.pdf

The **Adult Education Survey** (AES) shows convincing evidence that employers provide the highest percentage of non-formal learning and that learners' prime reason for learning is "to do job better and improve career prospects". Validation is likely to develop therefore through employment mobility and human resource management, as career transitions and changes – increasing due to current unemployment and restructuring - require that workers have their skills and experience gained on the job regularly documented and validated, as proof of their "current" competences when they move on.

Recognition and validation should not be seen as an alternative but rather a stage in one's learning journey or pathway - a service closely aligned with information and guidance services. As the Portuguese experience shows, for those with low levels of education it works best in combination with formal education and helps, for example, to direct early school leavers back into structured learning.

3.4.4. Overall assessment

The Action Plan's objective to identify and exchange good practices has been achieved and the results are being disseminated and exploited extensively. Validation of prior learning can and does work in developing the qualifications of disadvantaged groups, but it is not often part of the learning opportunity given them. The European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning shows that while great strides are being made in developing validation processes, overall take up is low and the low skilled, older workers and migrants targeted by the Action Plan are not their primary beneficiaries. It is only in FR, NL, PT and some Nordic countries that it is a more widely accessible option.

Validation towards certification is also developing in companies and in the voluntary and youth sectors, as well as for access to universities and higher education. The learning culture needs to change to achieve acceptance of and trust in validation as the norm, and on an equal footing with formal learning in the years to come. Local information, guidance and employment services must be more pro-active in promoting validation. The importance of non-formal and informal learning in the case of adult participation is supported by empirical evidence from the Adult Education Survey (AES). Multiple career transitions and changes will increase the need for employees to document their "current" employment-related competences and have them validated regularly. Social competences are less often the object of validation except for some good practices in the youth and volunteering fields.

The Commission monitors systemic developments through the European Inventory, and is currently preparing a proposal for a recommendation which will give direction to future work on validation. Data on flows of candidates through validation systems are weak and data collection at national level should be encouraged. The Commission

in its Communication on an Agenda for new skills and jobs⁴¹ makes a case for continuing work on validation, supported by a Recommendation.

3.5. Improve the monitoring of the adult learning sector

3.5.1 Background and objectives

Until recently, the only data collected at EU level on adult learning was through the Labour Force Survey which provides data on the EU adult population aged 25-64 in learning in a four-week reference period. It is the source of data for the benchmark on adults' participation in LLL - introduced as part of the Lisbon strategy and in the Education and Training 2010 work programme. It has been renewed and raised from 12.5% to 15% in the ET2020 strategy, and will integrate the relevant elements of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy in order to ensure overall coherence. In 2009, the EU average participation was 9.3%, up from 8.5% in 2003 but has gone down annually since 2005 when it peaked at 9.8%.

The Action Plan underlined the *lack of comparable data on adult learning and the need for a minimum set of core data. It also saw the need for consistent terminology to be agreed by Member States and called for a common language to overcome the misunderstandings in the sector.*

Actions required include:

- a study proposing consistent terminology and a set of core data;
- a glossary agreed by Member States;
- results to be reported in the Joint Progress Report 2010.

The Council Conclusions endorsed production of a glossary and a set of European level comparable core data required to facilitate monitoring.

3.5.2 EU support

The **Adult Education Survey (AES)** is an addition to EU Statistics on lifelong learning. Pilot surveys were carried out by 29 EU, EFTA and candidate countries between 2005 and 2008. The survey⁴² covers participation in education and lifelong learning activities (formal, non-formal and informal learning). It gives a lot of new and useful information, particularly about motivation and obstacles – issues crucial to boosting participation. As the survey covers learning undertaken in the year prior to the survey instead of the previous four weeks, as is the case in the Labour Force Survey, the results give a more complete picture of participation in LLL. The AES results indicate that more than one-third (35.7%) of the EU's population aged 25-64

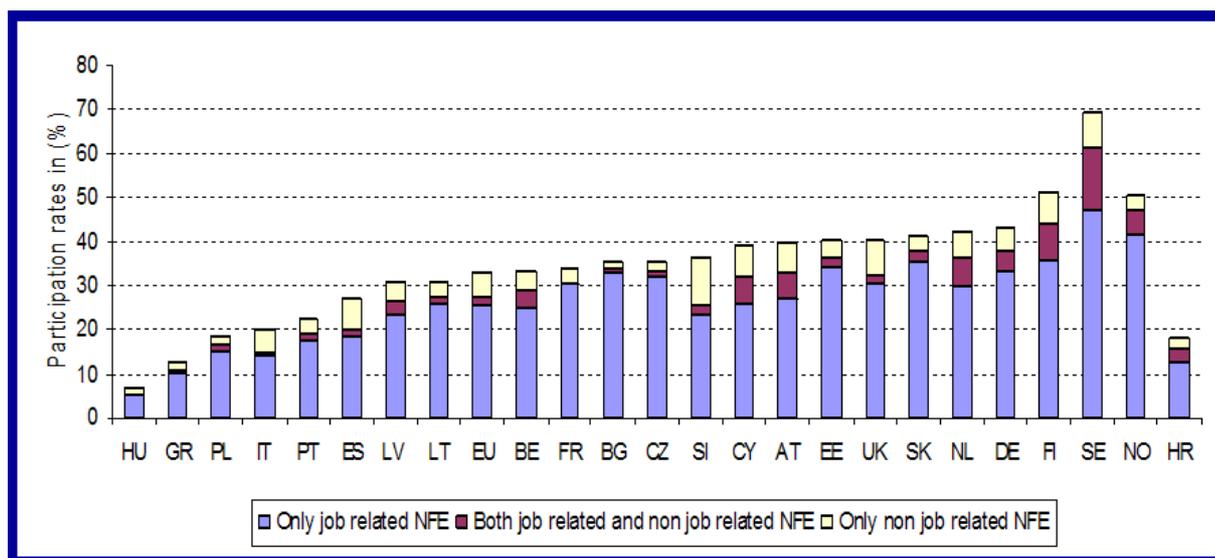
⁴¹ COM (2010) 682 final, Strasbourg, 23.11.2010

⁴² http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/product_details/publication?p_product_code=KS-SF-09-044

participated in formal or non-formal learning in the 12 months preceding the survey⁴³, compared with 6.3% in formal education. The majority of adults participate in job-related non-formal learning and participation rates decrease with age. About 60% of employed participants are sponsored fully or partly by the employers. The survey reveals significant country differences. The overall figures are higher for all countries, the country ranking also shows differences when compared with LSF ranking (see Figure 2), e.g. Germany, Slovakia and Cyprus perform substantially better in AES.

Figure 2: AES data on participation in non-formal education and training

Source: Eurostat



The Adult Education Survey is seen as a significant step forward in improving data on adult learning and may prove to have positive impact on future data collection. The Adult Learning Working Group considered it a big advance, with one drawback that it will only be repeated at intervals of five years. It strongly recommended that in light of demographic change future surveys should include the older age group, 64+. Given the cost implications, Member States only agreed to make it an option in the regulation for the next round (due in 2011-2012).

Together with the forthcoming Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competences (**PIAAC**) from **OECD** it will provide a robust picture of adult participation, access and barriers, and adult skills. The field trial data from the current preparatory phase of PIAAC are currently being analysed. This followed the successful leverage of countries' participation through **financial support** by the Commission, including support for oversampling to deal with **migrants' skill levels**. It will provide a detailed profile of adults' skills, including literacy and reading components, numeracy, problem solving in a technology rich environment and skills used in the workplace. The last time a similar survey took place (International Adult Literacy Survey) it had significant impact on raising awareness of adults' skills deficits, particularly literacy, and gave rise to national campaigns and initiatives. PIAAC also provides a supplementary check on school outcomes some years after

⁴³ Boateng, S. K. (2009) Significant country differences in adult learning. Eurostat Statistics in Focus. 44/2009.

leaving school, and that although focusing on basic competences, provides information on the distribution of these competences to various levels across the whole population.

An up-to-date common language is prerequisite to overcoming the misunderstandings and lack of comparable data which currently impede monitoring of the adult learning sector across the EU. A **Study**, *European terminology in adult learning for a common language and common understanding of the sector*, was organised to provide a glossary of terminology and a set of core data to facilitate biennial monitoring of adult learning in Europe. **Two glossaries on key adult learning terminology** were produced by this study: a shorter glossary of essential terms conceived of as a handy reference tool for policy- and decision-makers (includes terms and definitions in English and translations of each term into the 28 national languages of EU27+); and a longer glossary aimed at adult learning specialists. The **glossary of essential terms** is being validated nationally by members of the working group on adult learning. These glossaries build on Cedefop's *Terminology of European education and training policy*, published in 2008.

In a number of fields in adult learning, sufficient baseline data have not yet been gathered and in these fields the lack of clarity in definitions and terminology is particularly apparent. As part of the study, representatives from 17 countries responding to the online survey to assess the quality of national learning data illustrate the problem. Their evidence supports the choice of a limited number of **four core data fields**: adult skills, participation in adult learning, professional development of teachers and financing of adult learning. A set of indicators that might be developed to accompany these data are suggested. It identifies fields in which Member States could prioritise the collection of comparable data to enable indicators to be developed in the mid- to long term. The study considers that the European Union is not yet at the stage when it is possible to propose a coherent set of indicators, based on comparable data, which can cover the whole of the adult learning system.

3.5.3 Developments at national level

Participants at the **Peer Learning Activity on monitoring** held in March 2009 in Bratislava⁴⁴ agreed that failure to demonstrate the benefits of adult learning is a major weakness in the sector and that monitoring has a key role to play in this regard. They stressed the urgency of the problem and identified the following areas as important subjects/issues for monitoring:

- additional information about providers - number of enrolments; personal data in relation to adult learners, including nationality; fields of study; part-time or full-time courses; duration; provision of guidance and counselling; teacher qualifications; quality of provision.
- information about individuals - age; education and training level on entry to course; value-added in terms of qualifications achieved; qualifications vis-à-vis skills; work-related outcomes/returns on learning; non work-related outcomes

⁴⁴ <http://www.kslll.net/PeerLearningActivities/PlaDetails.cfm?id=83>

The survey⁴⁵ of national data sources, carried out as part of the study on terminology and core data, confirms that the diversity of adult learning systems across EU27+ is matched by diversity in the number, type, coverage and robustness of adult learning data sources. Some Member States collect few or no data beyond those required at European level; others have sophisticated administrative and survey data systems. Because adult learning differs from country to country in basic matters such as who learns, where they learn, what they learn, who funds their learning, and who they learn from, the number of fields in which comparable data might be achieved is limited. Nonetheless, existing data sources provide examples of good practice and illustrate how progress towards achieving the objective of comparable data might be made.

UK Inquiry into the Future of Lifelong Learning (IFLL)

The UK has invested in putting in place an infrastructure to monitor and evaluate the adult learning sector, using dedicated research facilities and institutes, such as NIACE (National Institute of Adult Continuing Education) and NRDC (National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy), to gather and exploit data. As a result, the UK now possesses valuable data on access, flows, barriers, costs, etc. Using the information these services provide, the IFLL was able to draw up an exciting future scenario.

The Inquiry surveyed participation trends over the last ten years. The persistent conclusions confirm that:

- Participation is very closely related to social class. The higher up your socio-economic position is, the more likely you are to take part in learning.
- Attachment to work also appears continually as a powerful factor.
- The younger you are, the more likely you are to participate. The age pattern is one of direct decline, far greater than could be explained by any age-related decline in individual capacity.
- Having a disability is a major barrier to participation.

The analyses of expenditure and participation were combined in order to develop a picture of how resources are distributed in initial education and training in relation to over the adult life course, in the UK. Using a four-stage model (age 18–24 25–49, 50–74, 75+) this gave an overall picture of the current distribution, and a projection of how it might be in 2020, showing that with modest adjustments in favour of adult learning, major progress is possible.

While some progress has been achieved at European level, necessary national and micro data are by and large lacking. In general, we do not have enough information to enable evidence-based policy making to grow at national level, as well as a reliable system of comparable data at EU level. From work on "one step up" and the impacts of reforms, it emerges that monitoring provides an important feedback loop from

⁴⁵ NRDC study on European terminology on Adult Learning., http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/moreinformation139_en.htm

practice to policy to practice, supporting policy making, evaluating implementation and policy-making, and enabling providers, practitioners and participants to inform and influence policy and practice.

The work and research of institutes, like NRDC – the National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy - in the UK, or Vox – The Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning, illustrate the benefits of collecting, processing and evaluating data and feeding the results back to policy and practice.

3.5.4. Overall assessment

The deliverables requested by the Action plan were furnished in the form of a glossary and study that identified core data required to monitor the sector effectively, and these are providing valuable input to debate and further planning. Some progress has been achieved at European level but national and micro data are necessary. We do not have enough information to enable evidence-based policy making to grow at national level, alongside a reliable system of comparable data at EU level. Data are required on: the amount of the education budget spent on adult learning and who invests, who learns and for how long, and the type of learning undertaken - proportions of second chance versus skills and knowledge development; and on the benefits and impact of adult learning in order to feed this information back into reforms. Much of the good practice being exchanged in the Open Method of Coordination is more innovative practice that has not yet been through impact assessment, which would enhance the already useful learning that this process stimulates.

Further result at European level will be coming on stream with the first complete Adult Education Survey to be carried out in 2011, and PIAAC will provide a wealth of new data on adults' skills to help countries address the gaps and deficits in their adult learning policies.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The Action Plan on Adult Learning has been successful in giving visibility to adult learning both at European and national level, and getting the adult perspective included in other education and training sectors and processes. It was a catalyst in stimulating cooperation and exchange among countries on adult learning issues, as part of the Open Method of Coordination. It has brought a degree of common understanding on adult learning, with a glossary to support communication and mutual learning. Most of the actions foreseen on the part of the Commission have been delivered on.

• 4.1 Overview of progress achieved

At national level, the adult learning sector is vibrant and progress has been achieved on all priority actions, albeit at different speeds in each country:

- Adult learning reforms are anchored in overall developments in education and training, notably the development of national qualifications frameworks and LLL strategies. But implementation of lifelong learning remains a challenge. The 2010 Joint Progress Report stressed that "adult education and training should give real opportunities to all adults to develop and update their key competences throughout life", underlining the development of competences as a lifelong endeavour;
- Quality assurance has been raised as an important issue in adult learning and strides are being made in developing the professional profile and training of staff and the accreditation of providers;
- Outreach and learning opportunities are being targeted at those with the lowest levels of qualifications, thus giving them better prospects of integration in work and society.
- Non-formal and informal learning, which represent much of adult learning, are increasingly being recognised and validated, albeit in project-based initiatives and predominantly in the context of vocational training. Disadvantaged groups can benefit from validation and are in modest numbers doing so, but it must take its meaningful place alongside or combined with formal education.
- The Action Plan has highlighted the difficulty to implement an adequate monitoring of the adult learning sector, for lack of sufficient statistical data and evaluation of policy measures. Data availability needs to improve to enable evidence-based policy making in adult learning.

However, there is still much to be done, and major challenges still remain to be addressed to achieve a fully developed adult learning sector and policy, able to support the Europe 2020 strategy. Topping the list are: provision of large-scale second chance initiatives to tackle the problem of too many low-skilled adults in Europe, addressing in particular the problems of early school leavers, people with literacy problems and those adults who lack the functional skills required in modern society; efficient ways to finance adult learning in a time of budgetary austerity; and a sound evidence base to inform further development and reforms.

The EU's response to the current crisis, the Europe 2020 strategy, relies heavily on education and training systems to promote a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Adult learning will be anchored in its flagship initiatives. Youth on the Move calls for a modernisation of the entire lifelong learning systems to promote excellence and equity. The Agenda for New Skills and Jobs⁴⁶ targets empowering people through the acquisition of new skills, supported by lifelong learning and flexible learning pathways. Another Flagship Initiative, the "European platform against poverty", seeks to ensure social and territorial cohesion enabling those experiencing poverty and social exclusion to live in dignity and take an active part in society, while "Innovation Europe" is encourage development of technologies "to allow older people to live independently and be active in society". Further European cooperation in the field of adult learning could play a key role in supporting all of these initiatives.

⁴⁶Commission Communication, Com (2010) final, 23.11.2011, <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/10/1541&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=fr>

4.2 Possible areas for further cooperation

The renewed Framework for European Co-operation in Education and Training (ET 2020), adopted by the Council Conclusions of May 2009, provides the platform for taking forward adult learning as part of its four broad strategic objectives:

1. Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality;
2. Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training;
3. Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship;
4. Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.

ANNEXES:

1. Adult Learning Working Group: Organisation and Working methods

In early 2008, the Adult Learning Working Group (ALWG) was established for a three-year period pursuant to the Communication of 2006 and the Action Plan on adult learning 2007-2010. The objective of the ALWG is to provide the Commission with policy advice and assistance in relation to the implementation of and follow-up to the Action Plan. The activities of the ALWG were, therefore, to be guided by the actions set out in the Action Plan itself, taking into account the Resolution of the European Parliament of 16 January 2008 and the Conclusions of the Council of May 2008.

Membership of the ALWG includes representatives of the national administrations of the 27 Member States plus, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and more recently Croatia. A number of European bodies also participate, including EU agencies, Cedefop, Eurydice and ETF (European Training Foundation), representatives of the social partners at EU level Business Europe, ETUC (European Trade Union Committee for Education), and UEAPME (European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises). Europeans associations dedicated to furthering adult learning - EAEA (European Association for the Education of Adults), EUCEN (The European Association for University Lifelong Learning),

Members of the Working Group are expected notably to:

- Propose, support and develop actions to achieve each priority of the Action Plan
- Make proposals for optimising interaction between the objectives of the Action Plan and funding opportunities within European programmes, especially the Grundtvig programme;
- Give regular updates on policy developments in their respective countries;
- Identify and present examples of good practice, but also unsuccessful practices in their country in relation to the key actions in the Action Plan;
- Propose and support the organisation of a programme of Peer Learning Activities on the Action Plan and other themes, including transnational study visits and short duration staff exchanges, and involving the relevant 'players' in learning networks at regional level.

2. Outputs of the Action Plan

Studies and inventories

- ALPINE study, *Adult Learning Professions in Europe: A study of the current situation, trends and issues*, which was published in 2008
- Study – *Assessing the impact of ongoing reforms in education and training on adult learning* (2009)
- Study on *Key competences for adult learning professionals* (2009), including a Competence Profile for adult learning professionals; discussion of the profile at four regional meetings
- *Adults in Formal Education: Policies and Practice in Europe*, Eurydice, 2011
- *Lifelong Learning Strategies: Critical factors and good practice in implementation*, 2010.
- *The development of national qualifications frameworks in Europe*⁴⁷. Information on where countries are in relation to referencing their national qualifications to EQF is updated regularly by Cedefop
- European Inventory of good outreach practices, with case studies; accompanying analytical report, *Enabling the low skilled to take their qualifications "one step up"*, 2010
- An update of the *European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning*, providing extensive examples of good practice and analysis of service to disadvantaged groups(early 2011)
- Cedefop publication on older workers (2010)
- Study on *European Terminology in Adult Learning for a common language and common understanding and monitoring of the sector*, 2010
- Glossary of essential terms (being validated); a larger glossary of technical terms, 2010
- Cedefop (forthcoming): *Learning while working: success stories of workplace learning in Europe* and *Competence Framework for VET Professions: Handbook for practitioners*, published by Cedefop and the Finnish National Board of Education (2009).
- LLL2010 project (FP6) "*Towards a Lifelong Learning Society in Europe: The Contribution of the (Formal Adult) Education System*" (2005-2011)

⁴⁷ <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/16666.aspx> (last updated August 2010)

Policy papers

- *European Guidelines on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (2009)
- Availability of new data from the pilot Adult Education Survey (2008), and preparation completed for the first complete data collection in 2011
- Joint Interim Report 2010 includes a section reporting on the development of lifelong learning strategies and key competences for adults
- the EQF Newsletter⁴⁸
- Council conclusions on social inclusion, May 2010; Basic skills provision for adults: Policy and practice guidelines (2010)
- Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning (2011)

Peer Learning Activities

- Peer Learning Activity on adult literacy, Dublin, 14 – 16 January 2008
- Peer Learning Activity on the cost benefits of validation, Reykjavik, 12-13 February 2009
- PLA on monitoring the adult learning sector, Bratislava, 22-25 March 2009
- Peer Learning Activity on one step up, London, 20 - 22 April 2009
- Peer Learning Activity on validation for the low skilled, Prague, 21 - 24 June 2009
- Peer Learning Activity on basic skills, Oslo 22-24 March 2010
- Peer learning on lifelong learning in higher education, Malta, October 2010
- Peer learning activity on developments in validation of non-formal and informal learning, Västerås, Sweden, 15-16 November 2010
- Peer Learning Activity on Critical factors for the implementation of LLL strategies, Vienna, 19-21 May 2010.

⁴⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc44_en.htm

Workshops and conference

- Presidency conference on validation processes, Portugal 2008
- Pathways to inclusion – Strengthening European Cooperation in Prison Education and Training, conference, Budapest, 22-24 February 2010
- Workshop on basic skills, Brussels, 17-18 June 2010
- Workshop on quality 30 June-1 July 2010, dealing with provider standards and accreditation
- Workshop on the role of higher education in Adult Learning, 27-28 September 2010
- Workshop on financing adult learning in times of crisis, 18-19 October 2010
- Workshop on the role of higher education for development of the adult learning component of lifelong learning, Brussels, 27-28 September 2010
- Cedefop workshop on older workers, Thessaloniki, September, 2010

Networks

- Grundtvig network on literacy (2009);
- An independent European Basic Skills Network (2010)