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Achievements under the Renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning

Report of the ET 2020 Working Group on Adult Learning (2018-2020)

Employment,
Social Affairs and
Inclusion

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Summary

Adult learning, as understood in the EU, covers the entire range of formal, non-formal and informal learning activities - both general and vocational - undertaken by adults after leaving initial education (e.g. high school or college). Adult learning brings considerable benefits for learners themselves, for employers and for the wider community. Furthermore, adult learning contributes to all policy areas (e.g. economy, innovation, environment, democratic values) covered by the European Commission as all depend to some degree on the skills of people.

In 2011 the Council of the European Union adopted a renewed European Agenda on Adult Learning (EAAL) as part of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020). In 2015, the EAAL defined the following four priorities for the Member States and the European Commission to work on until 2020:



Governance: coherence with other policy areas, better coordination, effectiveness, relevance to needs of society and the economy, and more investment;



More **flexible and wider access** through more workplace learning and use of ICT, skills assessments, and second-chance opportunities leading to a recognised qualification;



Significantly increasing **supply and take up** of high-quality provision, especially in literacy, numeracy and digital skills. More effective outreach, guidance and motivation strategies;



Better **quality** assurance, policy monitoring, education of adult educators, better data on needs to target and design provision.

This report takes stock of the achievements under the Renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning (2011-2018) and identifies emerging topics and priorities that could be taken into account in the post-2020 period. The stocktaking is based on existing documentation and the expertise of the members of the Working Group on Adult Learning.

Taking stock

At EU level, the European Commission is responsible for a number of initiatives that supported Member States working on the EAAL priorities:



Governance of adult learning (EAAL priority 1):

In line with the EAAL priority, the European Commission has published guidance materials (studies etc.) to support improvements in the governance of adult learning.¹ Furthermore, all the ET 2020 Working Groups on Adult Learning have addressed governance and financing issues in their recommendations.



Supply and take up of provision in adult learning (EAAL priority 2):

In recent years this EAAL priority was specifically addressed, in particular by the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways². In order to help them achieve increased levels of basic skill (literacy, numeracy and digital), low educated /low qualified are to be offered a skills assessment which should be the basis of a tailored offer of learning; skills acquired should be validated; adequate guidance and support to learners should be made available. The main findings of the European Commission's stock taking of the Member States proposed measures are that

- 1) still more action is needed by Member States and all stakeholders to increase the volume of the upskilling offer to match the scale of the challenge;
- 2) basic skills need to be addressed more explicitly;
- 3) attention to assessment of existing skills and prior learning as a basis for developing tailored learning pathways is required;
- 4) plans to coordinate and join up current and new opportunities need to be intensified; and finally,
- 5) future funding for Upskilling Pathways needs close monitoring to ensure that it leads to sustainable systems to develop lifelong learning for all in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights.



Access to adult learning (EAAL priority 3):

In line with this EAAL priority, the European Commission through Erasmus+ projects encourages further flexibilisation not only of adult learning, but also of vocational education and training (VET) and higher education programmes to increase adult participation (e.g. 2015-217 project on work-based training in the school-to-work transition process³). Furthermore, the European Commission and its agencies have conducted studies on adult learning in VET and higher education. Using digital tools to improve access to adult learning has been the topic of the 2015-2017 Working Group on Adult learning. The group provided recommendations about how better use could be made of digital resources for adult learning. The topic has also been the subject of studies.⁴ Moreover adult learning at the workplace was a key focus of the 2016-2018 Working Group on Adult Learning. Finally, recognition of prior learning plays an important role in many policy developments (for instance Upskilling Pathways) and analytical work (see for instance the regular Cedefop monitoring reports the use of validation of non-formal and informal learning). The 2012 Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning is due to be implemented by 2018)



Quality assurance for adult learning (EAAL priority 4):

In line with the EAAL priority, the European Commission devoted one of the thematic Working Groups to quality in adult learning (ET2 020 Working Group 2011-2013) and devoted a study on quality in adult learning⁵. Furthermore, the EQAVET framework provides a relevant framework for adult learning providers and systems, and EPAL is a major initiative to professionalise the sector. Finally, Erasmus+ supports the continuous professional development of adult educators.

Although Member States texts do not refer explicitly to the EAAL priorities, in the period 2011-2018, several policies have been developed and implemented that are in line with them:



In the area of **governance (EAAL priority 1)**, Member States updated and improved their VET and adult learning legislation and established better coordination mechanisms. Furthermore, adult learning is now being understood more holistically as any 'learning by adults', and not being confined to specific sectors or systems, thus challenging traditional coordination and governance models. Based on a survey of experts⁶, asking them how public funding for adult learning has evolved since 2010, almost half of the country experts indicated that public funding for adult learning has increased between 2011 and 2018. This is partly the case due to a broader conception of adult learning spanning ministerial responsibilities. European funding still plays an important role in the funding of adult learning in many countries, which has implications for the long-term sustainability and development of the sector. There seems to be a renewed impetus for individual learning accounts as a strategy to encourage adults back into learning. The governance and policy frameworks also show that adult learning might sometimes be 'hidden' under other policies and frameworks, making it difficult to recognise it as a specific sector. Policy frameworks for adult learning still show signs of fragmentation and are not always well aligned between sectors, policy areas and legal frameworks related with adult learning. Despite the level of fragmentation, multi-governance working is a key strength of adult learning systems in the EU 28 as there is a notable increase in partnership working in this policy field across different agencies and levels, particularly over the last 3-5 years.



In the area of **supply and take up of provision (EAAL priority 2)**, Member States implemented different strategies, types of provision and supporting measures to improve chances for adults, especially specific vulnerable groups, to participate in learning. The current migration situation has led countries to develop programmes specifically

tailored towards those in need of language courses, although general citizenship courses were found to be implemented as well. Several initiatives focussed on digital skills and workplace learning and guidance and outreach initiatives have gained ground in several countries. Furthermore, Member States that see the need to expand guidance structures within existing structures as many countries acknowledge the need for improvements in the areas of outreach and guidance.



In the area of **access to adult learning (EAAL priority 3)**, Member States worked on equitable access to adult learning and further flexibilisation of educational pathways to increase accessibility for adults. Specific inequalities were addressed in Member States, for instance by targeting specific disadvantaged groups. In addition, countries reached out to specific economic sectors. In this context, the importance of effective guidance and information systems is mentioned. Specific attention was put on the use of digital tools to increase accessibility and to access learning while working. In this context, Member States put in place train the trainer programmes. In addition, MS continued working on policies on the recognition of prior learning.



In the area of **quality assurance for adult learning (EAAL priority 4)**, Member States implemented regulations and policies to improve quality assurance in adult learning. Also, broader reforms (such as VET reforms) touch upon quality assurance aspects. However, Member States still provide limited opportunities for the professionalisation of adult learning staff. Quality assurance and developing a quality culture in adult learning is slowly developing, partly under influence of EQAVET. Member States also worked on better data on labour market responsiveness of adult learning programmes and better monitoring and evaluation policies in adult learning.



The Key messages from the stocktaking

Attention of policy makers towards adult learning has generally increased and the policy area of adult learning is significantly broadened, being associated with more situation in which adults learn.

There is an increased felt need for functioning adult learning systems that respond to national and EU challenges in fast-changing contexts (changing nature of work; automation; demographic development).

At EU level, in the period 2011-2018, initiatives have been implemented that supported EU countries to work in line with the EAAL priorities.

In the Member States, developments have taken place in line with the EAAL priorities: changing and improving governance arrangements; implementing specific approaches to reach out to specific groups; developing more tailored and digital provision; and developing Quality Assurance mechanisms.

Still, despite efforts at EU and Member State level, the participation rate of adults in learning (as measured by the Labour Force Survey) has not significantly increased over this period. The EU Adult Education Survey and the EU Continuing Vocational Training Survey on the other hand show a more positive development in adult learning participation in Europe.

The current indicator (EU-LFS) seems not fully capable of capturing the effects of major policy reforms.

The stocktaking has identified several areas that still require further policy attention at Member State and EU level. This relates to conditions for adult learning, specific target groups, and specific focus areas.





Development areas for post 2020 as identified on the basis of the stocktaking

Development areas can be split into enabling conditions, specific focus areas, and specific target groups.

Enabling conditions: what structures and systems need improvement?

Adult learning should be seen as being of benefit for individuals, employers and society. Adult learning should be seen not as a burden (in terms of time, money), but as an investment that pays off for all: there is no learning without benefits. This requires further developing a learning culture in the economy and society, and making everyone aware of the benefits of learning. To progress in this direction, further attention post-2020 needs to be given to:

- **Financing**
- **Coordination**
- **Engagement with employers**
- **Professionalisation of adult learning staff and institutions**

Specific focus areas: what aspects in the adult learning provision need additional attention?

A future orientation of adult learning policies should pay attention to specific areas:

- **Inclusive societies:** adult learning could do more to include key competences in the learning processes and contribute to inclusive societies. This relates for instance to critical thinking to support a better understanding of fake news.
- **Digital societies:** adult learning can focus even more on the use of digital tools. This is both to educate and train adults to use digital tools but also to use more digital tools for educational purposes. This also requires adult learning professionals to further develop skills and competences in this area
- **Learning workplaces:** adult learning could further stimulate learning in the workplace, emphasising that the workplace is seen as a site of learning for all (not only for young people in an initial VET programme).

Target groups: which adults need specific attention?

Adult learning should be for all. This means that all adults will be provided with opportunities for learning under the right conditions. These conditions differ between target groups, such as those who:

- Have a migrant background
- Have long been out of education and training pathways for a long time
- Lack basic skills
- Are unemployed
- Are below or at the poverty threshold



1. Introduction to the stocktaking



1.1 Adult learning and why it matters

Adult learning, as understood in the EU, covers the entire range of formal, non-formal and informal learning activities - both general and vocational - undertaken by adults after leaving initial education (e.g. high school or college). Adult learning can have different purposes for a learner. It can be undertaken for the development of a personal business, to obtain work, to develop in a current or future role, for personal growth, or a mix of these and other reasons. Adult learning brings considerable benefits for learners themselves, for employers and for the wider community⁷.

The benefits for learners are:

- Economic: better quality work, higher income and improved employability;
- Wellbeing: improved general wellbeing and health;
- Social: improved engagement in community and civic activities.

The benefits for employers are:

- Companies improve their competitiveness, productivity, innovation and profitability;
- Higher motivation of the workforce.

The benefits for the community are:

- Economic: greater economic competitiveness and higher GDP; and
- Social: positive effects on health, the environment and community integration.

Adult learning contributes to all policy areas covered by the European Commission as all depend to some degree on the skills of people. Skills are needed to implement European strategies related to for instance jobs, growth and investment; innovation; greening Europe; making Europe more democratic; making Europe more social and just.





1.2 The European Agenda for Adult Learning and the mandate of the ET2020 Adult Learning Working Group

Actions and initiatives at a European level can increase understanding of how national systems and policies on adult learning can respond to the challenges they face. In addition, European level initiatives provide support to institutions and individuals.

The Action Plan on Adult Learning (*It is always a good time to learn*), confirmed by the Council of the European Union (Council)⁸ in 2007, provided for the first time a set of common priorities to be encouraged in the adult learning sector. It initiated intensified European cooperation between diverse actors within the framework of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). The final assessment of the implementation of the Action Plan concluded that is:

“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.”⁹

The Action Plan on Adult Learning guided the work of the European Commission and Member States from 2008 to 2010. In 2011 the Council adopted a renewed European Agenda on Adult Learning (EAAL)¹⁰ as part of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020)¹¹. The EAAL contained specific priority areas for the period 2012-14, and it set out a longer-term vision for adult learning in the period up to 2020. It aimed at focusing activities around specific priorities, improving coherence between policies on adult learning and broader socio-economic policies, stimulating active cooperation at EU level, and raising the sector’s profile in general (in line with the elements as included in the EAAL¹²). The EAAL also aimed at building-up evidence for the analysis of adult learning systems.

As priority areas for 2012-2014 the EAAL proposed to focus on:



Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality;



Enhancing the creativity and innovation of adults and their learning environments;



Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training;



Improving the knowledge base on adult learning and monitoring the adult-learning sector.



Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship through adult learning;

In 2015, the Council and the Commission provided a revised set of more specific priorities to focus the work until 2020:



Governance: coherence with other policy areas, better coordination, effectiveness, relevance to needs of society and the economy, and more investment;



More flexible and wider access through more workplace learning and use of ICT, skills assessments, and second-chance opportunities leading to a recognised qualification;



Significantly increasing supply and take up of high-quality provision, especially in literacy, numeracy and digital skills. More effective outreach, guidance and motivation strategies;



Better quality assurance, policy monitoring, education of adult educators, better data on needs to target and design provision.

In the context of the EAAL, the Commission facilitates a network of 36 National Coordinators who promote adult learning in their countries, provide policy advice and support, and gather and disseminate best practices. They receive financial support through the Erasmus+ programme.

1.3 Objective of the stocktaking

Within the context of the EAAL and the ET 2020 strategic framework for policy cooperation in education and training, the European Commission initiated activities related to cooperation and exchange at European level between policy makers and stakeholders in the field of adult learning to contribute to further develop adult learning in Europe. Through conducting a review of the ET 2020 strategic framework and through multiple consultations, the European Commission has been gathering reflections for the design of a future strategic framework.

Given the mandate of the ET 2020 Working Group on Adult Learning, which includes identifying policy priorities in adult learning for the period after 2020, it is an opportune time to take stock of the achievement in the period since the Council adopted the EAAL, and to learn about what new priorities are emerging.

Hence, the objective of the stocktaking is to assess the achievements under the Renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning (2011-2018), and to identify emerging topics and priorities that could be taken into account in the post-2020 period. The research questions were:

1. In what context did developments take place in relation to the priority areas (2015)?
 - A. What was done at EU level¹² between 2011 and 2018?
 - B. How did participation in adult learning in Europe develop between 2011 and 2018? What trends and developments are noticeable?
2. Developments in adult learning policy between 2011-2018
 1. What overall developments took place in adult learning policy in 2011-2018?
 2. What developments took place in relation to (priority areas 2015):
 - A. **Governance of adult learning** (involving: coherence with other policy areas; better coordination, effectiveness, relevance to needs of society, economy; investment);
 - B. **Supply and take-up of provision** (especially in: literacy, numeracy and digital skills; effective outreach, guidance and motivation strategies);
 - C. **Flexible provision and widening access** (for example through: more workplace learning and use of ICT; skills assessments; second-chance opportunities leading to a recognised qualification);
 - D. **Quality mechanisms** (involving: quality assurance; policy monitoring; education of adult educators; better data on needs to target and design the provision of adult learning).
3. To what extent did actions at MS level lead to raising the sector's profile in general (in line with the elements as included in the Renewed Agenda)?
4. What challenges remain and what priorities are emerging for adult learning in Europe (at national and EU levels)?

1.4 Methodological approach and structure of the report

The stocktaking made use of existing documentation covering the state of play in Member States, and the developments that took place in relation to the EAAL priorities.

The methodological approach to drafting this report consisted mainly in an exploration of existing sources and publications. The emphasis was on reports that include cross-country analyses, and hence the work did not involve a systematic review of national documentation. It took into account both quantitative data and qualitative descriptions of adult learning systems, policies and reforms. The list of sources is presented in Annex C.

The stocktaking faced a number of challenges. The EAAL priorities cannot be clearly demarcated, and they often refer to a broad area in which developments can take place. Furthermore, EAAL priorities sometimes overlap in content. For example, 'supply and take up' and 'access to adult learning' refer to some of the same issues. Moreover, policy developments in Member States can often be linked to two or even three different EAAL priorities. There is not a systematic approach in place for reporting developments in relation to the EAAL priorities. Finally, there is no tradition of reports analysing in depth the results of the main EU adult learning surveys such as the Adult Education Survey (AES), the Continuing Vocational Training Survey (CVTS), the Labour Force Survey (LFS), and thematic reports arising from these surveys.

The stocktaking also benefitted from the expertise of the members of the Working Group on Adult Learning. A consultation was organised to address the challenges, and during the ET 2020 Adult Learning Working Group meeting of December 2018, the members were asked to identify recent reforms and policy developments in relation to the EAAL priorities. This information was analysed, and results used to elaborate this report. Furthermore, the members of the WG were asked to reflect on the draft report and provide more details on the national policies presented, and/or provide suggestions for improvement of the report.

This report consists of three further chapters:

- Chapter 2 discusses the activities conducted at EU level, and the trends and developments in terms of overall participation rates between 2010 and 2018;
- Chapter 3 discusses developments at Member State level in relation to the priorities of the EAAL;
- Chapter 4 presents key findings and identifies some emerging trends and topics that can inform further thinking on the post-2020 period.



2. European level trends and developments

2.1 Overview of initiatives at EU level in 2011-2018

Besides the EAAL, other important milestones at European level were the **New Skills Agenda**¹⁴ (adopted by the European Commission in 2016), aimed to improve skills intelligence, skills visibility and comparability and the quality and relevance of opportunities to acquire them, and the **European Pillar of Social Rights**¹⁵ (adopted by the European Parliament, Council and Commission in 2017), highlighting the importance of life-long learning, including adult learning. Furthermore, the European Commission continued to support Member States through several channels, as detailed in the sections below.

Mutual learning and policy development

Between 2011 and 2018 three rounds of 2-year **ET 2020 Adult Learning Working Groups** were implemented, with mandates agreed by Member States. The Working Groups consisted of representatives of all the Member States, EFTA and candidate countries and stakeholders. Activities included a series of meetings and peer learning activities (PLAs) to share knowledge and to discern key policy messages.

In 2011-2013 the focus was on quality in adult learning, and on the financing of adult learning. The outcomes were key policy messages, and reports detailing good practices that could further support Member States in further developing their adult learning systems. The 2014-2015 Working Group mandate was; to support mutual policy learning; develop policy recommendations on addressing adult basic skills; promote the use of modern technologies and Open Educational Resources (OER) in adult learning; and enhance the effectiveness, efficiency and coherence of adult learning policies. The 2016-2018 Working Group focused on the workplace learning of adults, the main emphasis being on adults with basic and medium skills levels. It resulted in a report presenting the main building blocks of effective policies for the provision of adult learning in the workplace.¹⁶

As indicated by the members of the Adult Learning Working Groups, the mutual exchanges, peer learning activities and joint reports have supported policy development and innovation in their countries.

Besides the Adult Learning Working Groups, a network of **National Coordinators** was established for the implementation of the European Agenda for Adult Learning. Their main task has been to coordinate and guide the actions of different stakeholders for the implementation of the European Agenda for Adult learning at national and regional level. Another aim has been to promote transnational cooperation, to share examples of good practice, and raise awareness of the importance of adult learning, including widely disseminating information on policy developments. The calls for proposals that structure the work of the National Coordinators (calls 2012, 2014, 2015) were aligned with EAAL priorities, and their activities related to four areas:

1. Developing and improving promotion of adult learning and outreach.
2. Contribution to policy reforms.
3. Increased involvement of stakeholders at national, regional and local level.
4. Transnational cooperation resulting in knowledge transfer and exchange of good practice.

Building up evidence

The European Commission and its agencies published several studies related to adult learning between 2011 and 2018 (clustered according to the EAAL priorities):



Governance of adult learning (EAAL priority 1)

- Impact of ongoing reforms in education and training on the adult learning sector (2011, European Commission)¹⁷;
- Adults in Formal Education: Policies and Practice in Europe (2011, Eurydice)¹⁸;
- Financing the Adult Learning Sector (2013, European Commission)¹⁹;
- Adult and continuing education in Europe. Using public policy to secure a growth in skills (2013, European Commission)²⁰;
- Education and Training in Europe 2020: Responses from the EU Member States (2013, Eurydice)²¹;
- An in-depth analysis of adult learning policies and their effectiveness in Europe (2015, European Commission)²²;



Access to adult learning (EAAL priority 3)

- Opening Higher Education to Adults(2012, European Commission)²⁵;
- Work-based learning approaches in continuing vocational education and training in Europe: practices and policies (2013, Cedefop)²⁶;
- Adult Education and Training in Europe: Widening Access to Learning Opportunities (2015, European Commission)²⁷;
- Adult Learners in Digital Learning Environments (2015, European Commission)²⁸;
- Work-based learning approaches in continuing vocational education and training in Europe: practices and policies (2015, Cedefop)²⁹;
- Job-related adult learning and continuing vocational training in Europe: a statistical picture (2015, Cedefop)³⁰;



Supply and take up of provision in adult learning (EAAL priority 2)

- Policy handbook: Access to and participation in continuous vocational education and training (CVET) in Europe (2014, Cedefop)²³;
- Investing in skills pays off: the economic and social cost of low-skilled adults in the EU (2017, Cedefop)²⁴;



Quality assurance for adult learning (EAAL priority 4)

- Quality in the Adult Learning Sector (2013, European Commission)³¹;

Overarching

- Adult Learning policy and provision in the Member States of the EU: A synthesis of reports by country experts (2019, European Commission)³².

The studies provide an extensive knowledge base upon which countries can assess how they deal with specific aspects of adult learning and can understand the lessons learned from different approaches. The studies also focus on specific aspects of adult learning and stimulate developments in such an area: for instance, adult work-based learning.

Funding in support of adult learning development

In the period 2014-2020, the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) invested over €30 billion to support skills development, including for adults.³³ The ESF also deals with topics covered by the New Skills Agenda and, within that, the 2016 Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults. A thematic report on this topic concluded that, in terms of financial allocation, Upskilling Pathways-relevant ESF funding equates to €6.86 billion, distributed across 13 Member States and 57 Operational Programmes. This is a somewhat conservative estimate in that it only takes into account investment priorities within each Operational Programme where there was a specific objective related to Upskilling Pathways. The countries with the highest share of funding were the UK, France, Romania, Portugal, Italy and Hungary. Furthermore, estimates are that around 10 million participants with low levels of qualifications will take part in ESF interventions by 2023, particularly in Italy, Spain, the UK and France, and also significantly in Ireland, Poland and Romania.³⁴

Within the framework of the EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI)³⁵, a call for proposals designed to support Member States in the preparation and implementation of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways was devoted to awareness-raising activities on Upskilling Pathways (New Opportunities for Adults in 2017). Three projects were funded: Building Alternative Skills Innovative Schemes (*BASIC*) (Greece); *New opportunities for work-skills development for adults in Republic of Serbia (UP NOW)* (Serbia) and *Enhancing Qualification of Adult Learners through the implementation of Upskilling pathways (E.Q.U.A.L.)* (Italy).³⁶ A second call in 2018 concerned the Skills Assessment step in the Upskilling Pathways, and four applications were accepted for funding: Blueprints for Basic Skills Development in Slovakia” (BLUESS) (Slovakia); the development of an adaptive, web-based assessment tool for evaluating the literacy, numeracy and digital skills levels of low skilled/low qualified adults in Turkey (Turkey); from reinforcing basic skills to pathway engineering: revisit skills mechanisms (France); and innovative resources for disadvantaged adults skills assessment and inclusion (SKILL-ED) (Italy). A third call was launched in April 2019.

The European Commission has also supported research and innovation in adult learning and lifelong learning through the Horizon 2020 programme. Three examples of currently running projects, under the call YOUNG 3, are:

- EduMAP 2016-2019 (Adult Education as a Means for Active Participatory Citizenship);³⁷
- ENLIVEN 2016-2019 (Encouraging Lifelong Learning for an Inclusive and Vibrant Europe);³⁸
- Young AduLLt (Policies Supporting Young People in their Life Course. A Comparative Perspective of Lifelong Learning and Inclusion in Education and Work in Europe).³⁹

The Erasmus+ programme supports, inter alia, skills development in education and training with nearly €15 billion, with 3.9% of the total budget being allocated to adult learning (Higher Education receives 33%; VET 17%).⁴⁰ This funding funds strategic partnerships of adult learning providers across countries, staff mobility, and support to policy reform (policy experimentation). The Erasmus+ funding priorities are aligned with the EAAL priorities. In the period 2014-2018, in total 1,412 coordinators and 8,187 partners received support across Europe. The country with most partners is Italy (902) and Germany is the country with most coordinators (151).⁴¹ The box below provides examples of Erasmus+ projects implemented between 2012 and 2016 related to the implementation of the EAAL.⁴²

Measures to improve adults' basic skills

- Malta- Diploma in Teaching Adults
- Slovenia: Five motivational video publications on topical adult education themes related to EAAL
- Slovenia: Promoting Adult Skills (PAS) events
- Spain – Aprende a lo largo de la vida
- United Kingdom - Self organised learning groups (EUSOL)
- United Kingdom - St Mungo's Broadway Residential College
- United Kingdom - What Employers Want

Meetings, conferences and bilateral exchanges

- Belgium (FR) - Conference " Which Identity, which structure(s) and which financing for adult education policies in the Wallonian Federation Brussels"
- Germany – Conference “Adult education digital – professionalise, network, create”

Awareness raising activities

- Estonia - Community network - main tool in supporting people return to the education system
- Romania – Awareness campaign on the importance of adult learning
- Slovenia - Learning Parade – Days of learning communities

Preparatory work leading to reforms of adult learning policies

- Finland – Teaching the VET providers to teach former drop-outs

The European Commission has published reports that highlight innovative and inspiring resources from the Erasmus+ programme on basic skills, citizenship, language learning, and digital competences.⁴³ Results of the projects are available in specific project websites and on the EPALE platform (detailed in the following section).⁴⁴

Knowledge sharing and engagement (EPALE)

The Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe (EPALE)⁴⁵ is a multilingual online community for adult learning professionals. The platform provides a space to exchange, showcase, and promote methods of good practice in adult education. Individuals involved in organising and delivering adult education can access the platform to share the latest developments and learn from each other. EPALE also includes a library of resources, a calendar of courses and events of interest for adult education professionals, as well as a partner-search tool, and collaborative groups. There is a section explaining EU policy and an EU policy tool⁴⁶, which brings together information and data on adult learning and continuing vocational education and training (CVET). It provides a central point of reference for monitoring and improving policy and performance in adult learning. EPALE has over 50,000 members across Europe.

Links to other policies (employment, social)

As articulated in many documents at European level, skills development is gaining importance in policy orientation, and is seen as a vital element of smart, sustainable, inclusive and long-term economic growth, and for the building of resilient societies. Skills development, and hence adult learning is therefore part of structural reforms needed to create more jobs and growth and boosting investment. In December 2018 the tri-partite Advisory Committee on Vocational Training (ACVT) adopted an opinion on the future of vocational education and training post-2020 which stresses the dual objectives of both initial and continuing VET for fostering social inclusion and excellence and supporting the acquisition of job specific and transversal skills. Also in this wider context, the European Commission provides, through the European Semester, Country Specific Recommendations (CSR) to support Member States in working on structural reforms. The recommendations provide policy guidance tailored to each EU country on how to boost jobs and growth, while maintaining sound public finances.⁴⁷ These recommendations can deal with a wide range of policies, including adults and their learning. They can deal, for instance, with: access to employment for job seekers and inactive people, including long term unemployed and people far from the labour market; labour mobility; combating discrimination and the active inclusion of disadvantaged groups, including marginalised communities (such as Roma); and, improving lifelong learning (adult learning) for all age groups by providing flexible learning pathways, guidance and APL. The box below provides some examples of adult learning-specific CSRs provided in 2014-2018.

Adult learning relevant CSR in 2014-2018 (examples):

- PL: Increase adult participation in lifelong learning in order to adjust skills supply to skills demand (2014)
- RO: Increase the quality and access of lifelong learning (2014)
- LT: Pursuing more active labour market policies and adult learning (2016)
- MT: Take measures to strengthen labour supply, notably through increased participation of low-skilled persons in lifelong learning (2016)
- SI: Intensify efforts to increase the employability of low-skilled and older workers, particularly through targeted lifelong learning and activation measures (2017)
- SK: Improve activation measures for disadvantaged groups, including by implementing the action plan for the long-term unemployed and by providing individualised services and targeted training (2017)
- PT: Increase the skills level of the adult population, including digital literacy, by strengthening and broadening the coverage of the training component in adult qualification programmes. Improve higher education uptake, namely in science and technology fields (2018)
- UK: Address skills and progression needs by setting outcome targets for the quality and the effectiveness of apprenticeships and by investing more in upskilling those already in the labour force (2018)



2.2 Trends and developments in adult participation in learning

Progress towards the ET2020 target

The EAAL supported the EU target to raise to 15% by 2020 the level of adult participation in education and training (that is: the participation of adults aged 25 to 64, in a period of 4 weeks before the survey, as defined and measured in the EU Labour Force Survey - LFS).

The European average (28 countries) in 2010 was 9.3 %; by 2018 this had increased to 11.1%.⁴⁸ With the current trend, this target will not be achieved by 2020 at the EU level.

It should be noted that other ET2020 targets, also those related to adult learning (tertiary attainment and early school leaving) are already achieved, such as those for early childhood education, early leavers from education and training, and tertiary educational attainment.

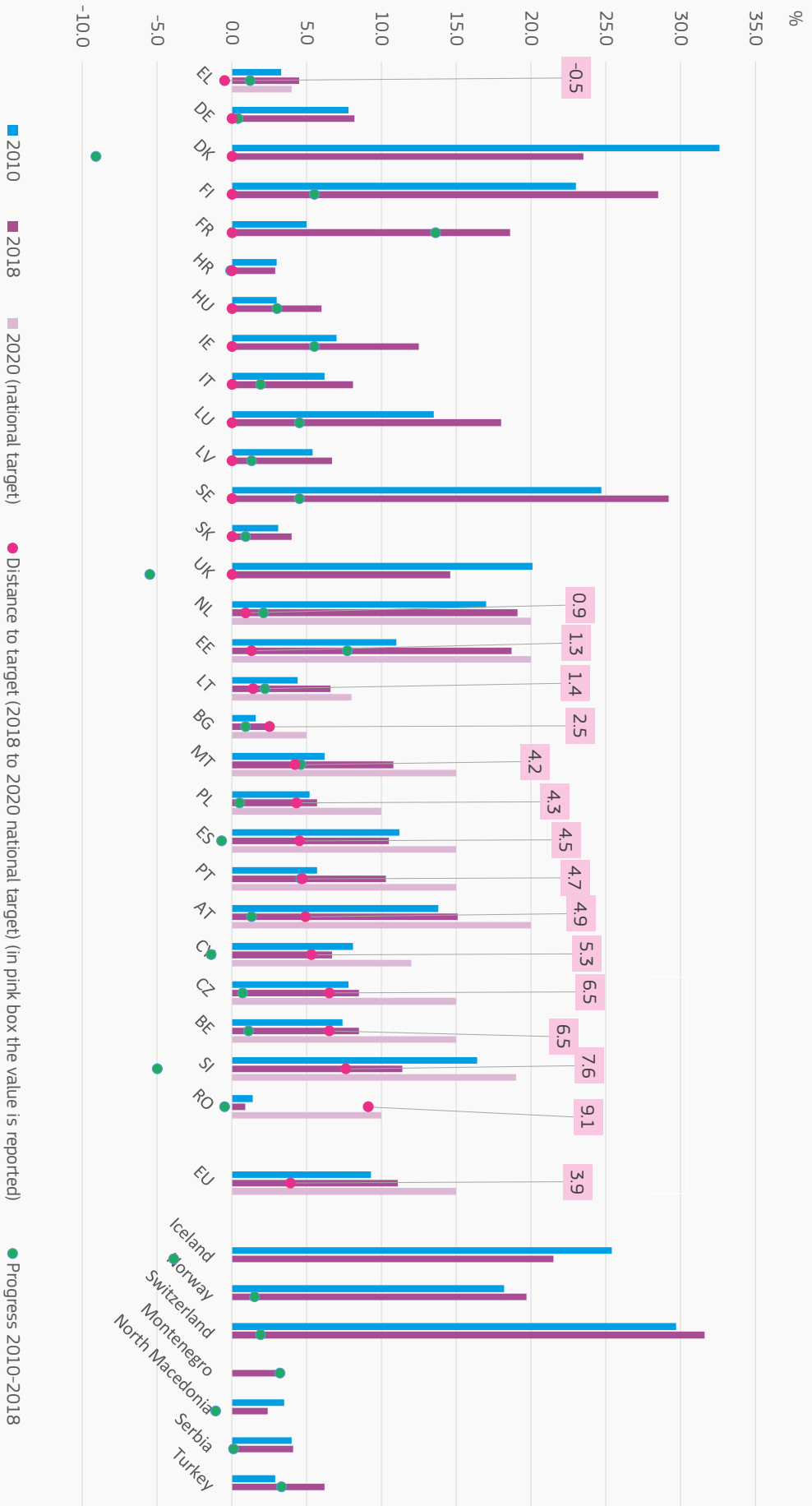
Modest progress towards the EU target for adult participation in learning has been observed since 2010, mainly thanks to rapid increases in results from one year to another in some countries, with almost two-fold increases in **Ireland, Hungary, Portugal** and an over three-fold increase in France between 2012 (5.7%) and 2013 (17.8%) (which may also be explained by changes in the methodology).

By 2018, nine Member States had achieved the European target (**Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Netherlands, Estonia, France, Luxembourg, Austria and UK**). The remainder have little or no chance of achieving the target. This situation is influenced by big differences between countries in the levels of adult participation in education and training; an example is the difference between the leaders (Sweden 29.2%, Finland 28.5%) and the last in the list (Romania 0.9%; Bulgaria 2.5% and Croatia 2.9%).

Many EU Member States also set their own national targets, adapted to the national situation and ambition; often, the national target is less ambitious than the EU target. Figure 2.1 provides an overview of the progression from 2010 to 2018 by Member State, showing progress against any national targets set for 2020.

There is a very wide range of performance, whether judged against national or EU target. Many countries will likely not reach their national targets set for 2020. Only one country (Greece) has already reached the national target; for some other Member States (**the Netherlands and Estonia** and to a lesser extent Lithuania) the targets are within reach if the current progress is continued until 2020. In **Denmark, Croatia, Romania, UK, Cyprus, Spain and Slovenia** the targets are out of reach, given progress so far.

Mapping progress towards targets on adult participation in learning



Source: Eurostat, EU-LFS and country reports as basis for the synthesis report. Calculations authors (Ecorys)

Trends in adult participation in learning according to other measures

The EU Adult Education Survey (EU-AES) was undertaken in 2007, 2011, and 2016. Compared to EU-LFS, it measures adult participation in learning over a longer period (in the 12 months before the survey) and includes a broader definition of adult learning (i.e. also covering guided on the job training) and is therefore a more comprehensive measure of adult participation in learning in the EU.⁴⁹

The EU average rate of participation in EU-AES 2016 was 45.1%; this has increased from 35.2% in 2007 and 40.3% in 2011. Comparing 2011 and 2016 rates, the Member States showing the most progress were the **UK** (from 35.8% to 52.1%), **Latvia** (from 32.3% to 47.5%), **Hungary** (from 41.1% to 55.7%) and **Greece** (from 11.7% to 16.7%). The overall best performing countries are **the Netherlands** (64.1%), **Sweden** (63.8%) and **Austria** (59.9%).⁵⁰ At the same time, relative differences between Member States are smaller than in the EU-LFS survey; in most cases we are dealing here with differences of at most two and a half times, except for the difference between **the Netherlands** (64.1%), **Sweden** (63.8%) and **Romania** (7%), **Greece** (16.7%).

When comparing the development of adult participation in education and training over time, in around a third of EU Member States the trends differ between the two surveys. In four countries there are increases in EU-AES, and decreases in the EU-LFS (**Slovenia, Spain, Cyprus** and most notably **UK**). In six countries there are decreases in EU-AES and increases in the EU-LFS (**Luxembourg, Estonia, Sweden, Bulgaria, Finland** and **Lithuania**). Furthermore, in three countries (**France, Malta** and **Portugal**) while the trend is the same, the level of changes seems to differ, i.e. indicating only small increases in EU-AES but large increases in EU-LFS.

The EU Continuing Vocational Training Survey (EU-CVTS, undertaken 2005, 2010, and 2015) provides data on the level of companies' expenditure on training and the extent to which employees are provided with continuous vocational training in the reference year in the company. Over the years, participation of employees in CVT has increased from 33% in 2005 to 41% in 2015. The percentage of enterprises that offer CVT possibilities has also increased. The average number of hours spent in training per participant, however, shows a decrease from 27.1 in 2005 to 24.5 in 2015.⁵¹ Results of EU-CVTS 2015 demonstrate that employees who work for larger companies on average spend more time on training than those who work for small or medium enterprises.

As in the EU-AES results, EU-CVTS does not show in general such large differences between countries as are seen in the EU-LFS results. This could be another argument for the incomplete identification of non-formal education in EU-LFS. However, it should be noted that in some EU-CVTS results, there are large differences between countries. This applies mainly to less traditional training forms of learning, such as learning, quality circles and job rotation, exchanges or secondments.

The EU-AES, EU-LFS and EU-CVTS relate to participation in education and training, but do not provide data on skills levels (besides an indicated qualification level as a proxy). The OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)⁵² does provide insights into adult proficiency in key information-processing skills, covering literacy, numeracy and problem solving in technology-rich environments. As evidenced by PIAAC⁵³, many adults in Europe still lack proficiency in these skills. One outcome of the first survey round in 2011-12 was that 20% of European adults (in EU17)⁵⁴ had only basic skills in literacy, and one in four in numeracy.⁵⁵

Given the different surveys, the trends in adult learning are not so clear. While the EU-AES and EU-CVTS show extensive increase in participation, this is less the case in the EU-LFS. Also, at country level, trends do not always point in the same direction. Given that the EU-AES and EU-CVTS have a wider coverage of the adult learning forms, these surveys seem to provide a more realistic picture on the learning of adults.

2.3 Measuring adult participation in learning

Comparing measures of adult participation in learning

Adult participation in education and training depends mainly on participation in non-formal education and training. Participation in formal education is low (a little above 3% in the four weeks before the survey) for many years in EU-LFS, and almost 6% (in the 12 months before the survey) in EU-AES 2016, with a downward trend since 2007. Participation in non-formal education and training is significantly higher, and in EU-LFS it is just above 8% in the last few years (e.g. 2016–2018), and in the EU-AES 2016 it reached 42.6%, showing an upward trend since the EU-AES 2007 (31.6%) and AES 2011 (36.8%).

The difference between adult participation in formal and non-formal education and training in the EU-LFS and the EU-AES may result from a different approach to non-formal education and training. The EU-LFS has a much longer history than the EU-AES. It was implemented before the EU adopted its policy on lifelong learning (LLL) in 2000 and 2002⁵⁶. Until then, there had been a tendency towards a narrow understanding of this concept; usually, it was interpreted as continuing education, that is, formal learning, in forms similar to those realised in schools and universities. LLL also refers to the idea of life-wide learning, that is learning in different ways and in different places, especially at the workplace and in the implementation of social projects (for adults these are basic learning environments). In the EU-LFS, traces of the earlier narrow approach can still be discovered. An example of this is the exclusion of guided-on-the-job training, which is one of the most common forms of training in the workplace, and at the same time of non-formal education;⁵⁷ this form of organised learning is included in the EU-AES and the other European-level survey of learning – the EU Continuing Vocational Training Survey (EU –CVTS).

In 2003 an additional module on life-long learning was implemented in the EU-LFS, which broadened the way of looking at adult learning. At the same time, in 2002–2005, large changes in the EU-LFS results on adult participation in education and training were recorded in most Member States. Mainly as a result of this, the average rate of participation for the EU increased from 7.1 % in 2002 to 9.6 % in 2005.

Since 2004, Eurostat has been publishing the results of EU-LFS broken down into adult participation in formal and non-formal education and training. The EU average progressed further according to EU-LFS, thanks to the jumps that were noted mainly in the participation of adults in non-formal education and training. The next improvement in the EU average since 2012 was due to rapid changes in the participation of adults in non-formal education, mainly in **France** (as is mentioned above) and some other countries (e.g. Ireland, Hungary, Portugal). As a result, the EU average increased from 9.2% in 2012 to 10.7% in 2013 and 11.1% in 2018.

Besides the difference in reference period between the EU-LFS and EU-AES, a narrower approach to non-formal education in the EU-LFS may explain the differences between the EU-LFS and EU-AES. It can also explain the tendency in some Member States to more fully identify non-formal education in the EU-LFS. To interpret the modest progress of the EU average in the EU-LFS, there are possible explanations, such as that the LFS results indicate stagnation of adult participation in education and training in the EU since the 1990s, because the modest progress is mainly achieved by increases in results in some countries related to the methods of identification of non-formal education. Another possible explanation is that the EU-LFS results do not identify the entire spectrum of non-formal education in EU, as in many countries the process of this identification is not completed, and in some of them this process has not yet started. Developments in some areas in non-formal learning covered by the EU-AES are not covered in the EU-LFS.

Reflections on measuring adult participation in learning and measuring progress towards policy goals

As indicated by Cedefop⁵⁸ (and also in the work of Joint Research Centre, JRC),⁵⁹ there are significant methodological differences between the LFS and AES: the purpose and focus of these surveys is different; the reference period in which respondents participated in training; the use of proxy interviews; the choice of interview methods, which could affect the indicator of adult learning in LFS; and, the identification of the spectrum of non-formal education and training, especially practical learning at the workplace and in implementation of social projects. It is not only that the level of participation differs according to the data source, but also that the development over time does not always show similar trends.⁶⁰ This raises the question of which statistics provide the most accurate picture of adult participation in learning in Europe, and which can best monitor the impact of policy development. At the same time, it seems important to capture in the research the full idea of LLL, which concerns not only learning at different periods of life (lifelong), but also learning in different ways and in different places (life-wide learning). For monitoring activity in the adult learning sector there may be a need for different indicators.

Being low-skilled is not, of course, equivalent to being low-qualified (although based on PIAAC analyses there are very few high-qualified individuals who are low-skilled or vice-versa). It is possible to be medium-skilled or even highly skilled yet have a low level of formal qualification. 'Low-skilled adults' can be very skilled in some skill-sets, but apparently not in skill-sets that are measured or otherwise captured in statistics, such as cognitive skills or educational attainment.⁶¹ The EU statistics provide information on low-qualified people, but the only information on low-skilled people (in specific areas: areas – literacy, numeracy, problem solving in digital environments) comes from PIAAC as well as from the Digital Economy and Society Index in Europe (DESI) which includes information on basic digital skills. Discussions and debates often speak about low-skilled people, while the statistics used in the discussions mostly refer to low-qualified people.⁶²

Different surveys measure different things. When using surveys for benchmarking, it in any case needs to be clear that policy actions as proposed (at EU and MS level) will affect the survey results. This seems not always be the case in the EU-LFS, making it a less than perfect benchmark. Thought could be given to negotiating national targets based on national level data collections.



3. Developments in Member States since 2011

3.1 Overall developments in adult learning 2011-2018

In recent years, the overarching policy discourse seems to have received a stronger vocational focus; and the connection between adult learning and VET, and learning while working, is receiving more policy attention. As a result, the liberal adult learning tradition may seem to receive less policy attention. However, the idea that learning pathways do not end after initial education, but continue throughout life, is gaining ground and there is also an increased emphasis on key competences and transversal skills, for instance in relation to critical thinking and media literacy. These skills can be acquired while working, but also through liberal adult education. Learning initiatives helping migrants to integrate into society could also be classified under liberal or citizenship education.

The following sections discuss national developments between 2011 and 2018 in relation to the four priorities of the EAAL as agreed in 2015:



Governance: coherence with other policy areas; better coordination, effectiveness, relevance to needs of society, economy; investment.



More flexible and wider **access** through more workplace learning and use of ICT; skills assessments; second-chance opportunities leading to a recognised qualification.



Significantly increasing **supply and take up** of high-quality provision, especially in literacy, numeracy and digital skills; effective outreach, guidance and motivation strategies.



Better **quality** assurance, policy monitoring, education of adult educators, better data on needs to target and design provision.

At country level, the work on the EAAL priorities were supported by the National Coordinators. According to analyses by the European Commission of the final reports of National Coordinators, they placed most emphasis on coordination activities, resulting in stronger cooperation among main stakeholders in the participating countries at all governance levels. In a number of countries, permanent stakeholder groups were established. This enabled stakeholders to be up to date with current developments and priorities and contribute actively to the policymaking and implementation process, thereby impacting on the quality of adult education provision. These efforts led to or fed into processes of policy and legal documents being drafted or updated and implemented at the national and regional level.⁶⁵ In the following sections, the developments in relation to the four EAAL priorities are discussed.



3.2 Developments in governance of adult learning (EAAL priority 1)

As an illustration of the variety of reforms in recent years in relation to this EAAL priority, Table 3.1 provides indicative examples, covering reforms of legal frameworks, funding and coordination of adult learning. In the remaining sections, a wider set of examples is explored in more detail.

Table 3.1: Examples of country reforms in governance

Country	Name / Description of policy / programme	Year started / implemented
Belgium (French community)	The Government of the French Community has set new methods for valuing prior learning in adult education . This decree aims at harmonising valuation practices within adult educational institutions. It defines precisely the notions of formal, non-formal and informal learning. It also introduces the notion of valuation file in order to simplify a citizen's process of recognition of skills acquired in and outside of education.	2017
Bulgaria	Amendments to VET Act: broadening the access to VET and defining the procedure and stages of validation.	2014, 2015
Cyprus	National Action Plan for the establishment of mechanisms for the validation of non-formal and informal learning	2018
	Strategic Plan for the System of Technical and Vocational Education and Training 2015-2020	2015
	Cyprus National Lifelong Learning Strategy 2014-2020	2014
Estonia	Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020: aiming to increase participation in lifelong learning and the concordance of lifelong learning opportunities with the needs of the labour market.	2014
Finland	New Act on Vocational Education and Training: Creating a competence-based and customer-oriented system of IVET and CVET, with increased guided learning in the workplace.	2018
France	Creation of quadripartite organisation with social partners, region and state – following the law of March 5, 2014	2014
	Creation of France Compétence , as a confirmation of the quadripartite; following the law of September 5, 2018	2018
	The 5-year Skills Investment Plan was launched (€15bn) to support the upskilling and employability of one million low-qualified jobseekers and one million young people not in employment, education or training. €3bn are to be spent on the fight against low levels of literacy and digital skills. The Plan has a strong inclusive dimension, for instance a national call for proposals “100% inclusion” aims to finance innovative experimentation to reach out to, remobilise and upskill the most vulnerable groups.	2018
Greece	The 3879 Law – Validation of qualifications of Adult Educators: In order to participate in adult learning programmes of the Ministry of Education.	2016
Hungary	2nd VET qualification also state-funded: This 2nd qualification can be obtained in CVET or adult learning conditions. The intention was to increase the number of persons enrolled into training and led to an additional 15,000 people starting a study in 2015.	2015

Country	Name / Description of policy / programme	Year started / implemented
Ireland	Further Education and Training Strategy: consisting of five focal areas or 'strategic goals' ⁶⁴ : (1) skills for the economy, (2) active inclusion, literacy and numeracy strategy, (3) quality provision, (4) integrated planning & funding, and (5) the importance of VET.	2014-2019
	Action Plan in Education: Summarised in five high level goals: (1) improve the learning experience and success of learners, (2) improve progress of learners at risk of disadvantage or with special education needs, (3) help those delivering education services to continuously improve, (4) build stronger bridges between education and the wider community and (5) improve national planning and support services.	2017, 2018, 2019
Italy	Life Long Learning System Established by law (number 92/2012, so-called 'Legge Fornero'): This Law establishes Life Long Learning as an individual right, introduces validation certification of non-formal competences and stimulates the construction of territorial networks (i.e. at the regional level).	2018
Latvia	Sector Skills Councils: To involve sector organisations in decision making about training needs of the employed or unemployed. All partners are involved in the planning and implementation of adult learning, as well as linking adult learning to the labour market, following development needs.	2015
	The Adult Education Development Plan: To ensure governance, supply and quality of provision to the target groups decided upon by the Sectoral Expert Council (Skills Council).	2016
Poland	Lifelong Learning Perspective: the first Polish LLL strategy, broadening the understanding of education policy as relating to life wide learning, including promoting adult learning in the workplace and in social activities	2013
	Skills Councils (Sectoral, Cross-Sectoral): The development of initiatives for addressing skills needs, coordinated by different ministries and in different sectors.	2017
	Integrated Skills Strategy: second Polish LLL strategy based on whole-government approach aiming at the development and effective use of skills relevant to the needs of learners, society and the economy.	2019
Slovenia	Skills Strategy: Its first phase focused on development, increasing participation, effective use of skills and the skills system itself, while the second phase focused on governance in adult learning. A diagnostic report in 2017 indicated 9 challenges around governance in adult learning ⁶⁵ .	2015-2018
	New Adult Education Act: Determining Guidance in adult learning as a public service, as well as the inclusion of adults into formal and non-formal education programmes (basic and further education) – including programmes that do not award officially recognised educational qualifications. ⁶⁶	2018
Sweden	Education and training obligation for newly arrived immigrants: All immigrants that need formal education and training (to be able to get a job) should be offered education and training in both language and VET/formal education	2018
Switzerland	Federal law on continuing education and training: Defines principles of continuing education & training (cross-policy) and encourages basic skills	2017

Developments in the legal frameworks and policies for adult learning

The 2011 study '*Impact of ongoing reforms*'⁶⁷, analysed the extent to which lifelong learning strategies and policies were developed (partly as a response to the Lisbon strategy and the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning⁶⁸). It found a distinction between broad lifelong learning strategies (covering the entire education system and often not specifically targeting adult learning), lifelong learning strategies focused on adult learning, and, Member States where lifelong learning strategies were absent. While establishing lifelong learning strategies may have seemed to be relevant for adult learning, the emphasis was often more on improving initial education systems, improving the permeability between different systems, reducing school drop-out, and increasing participation in higher education.⁶⁹ Adult learning did not receive the attention that could be expected to be associated with the term 'lifelong learning'.⁷⁰

The period between 2011 and 2018 saw growing awareness of the fact that adults learn in different places, and that adult learning is by definition covered by different policies. Striving towards one all-encompassing policy might not do justice to the character of adult learning. In 2017, adult learning was covered by one or more (usually a combination of) adult learning laws, general education laws, VET/ CVET laws, higher education laws, labour laws and some other legal provisions (e.g. relating to validation).

Table 3.2 provides an overview of the year of the latest reform that relates to adult learning.

Table 3.2: Reforms related to adult learning (year of latest reform)

Year	MS
2018	FI, SI, CY
2017	DK, LT, UK, PL
2016	LV, PT
2015	BG, EE, FR, MT, NL, RO
2014	AT, DE, IT
2013	HU, IE
2012	LU
2011	SK
Before 2011	BE (2007), HR (2010), CZ (2006), EL (2010), SE (2000)

Source: Ecorys (2019), Adult Learning policy and provision in the Member States of the EU: A synthesis of reports by country experts (section 5.1) and consultations with members of Working Group on Adult Learning operating within the framework of ET 2020.

The reforms differed considerably in the period 2011-2018. However, a trend that is noticeable throughout the Member States is that the content of the learning needs to be more tailored to learners, and the needs of society and the labour market. The governance developments in 2011-2018 also reflected this trend. This relates, for instance, to better linking adult learning to vocational education and training, setting up coordination mechanisms, and developing broad skills strategies.

In several Member States, the developments in 2011-2018 related to an **amendment of the vocational education and training act**, for instance in Bulgaria in 2016. In Denmark as well, in 2014/2015 a reform introduced a new VET-scheme for adults beyond 25 years of age, aiming to encourage more low-skilled adults to qualify as skilled workers. The new VET scheme for adults provided more transparent and targeted learning pathways for adults, and to building on the education and work experience that the adults already have. In Finland, a new act on Vocational Education and Training was adopted in 2018, creating a competence-based and customer-oriented system of IVET and CVET with increased guided learning at the workplace. In Poland, as part of the 2012 VET reform, vocational schools for adults were transformed into a system of more flexible courses; courses for adults can be provided by vocational schools for young people and institutions from outside the education system.

Other countries amended **their adult education laws**. In Estonia a new Adult Education Act (1 July 2015) aimed at increasing quality and transparency in adult education provision, and to support learning among adults through widening the system of study loans and health insurance for adult students.⁷¹ Furthermore, Estonia published a Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 (February 2014) as an overarching education strategy encompassing all education fields, defining priorities for the period up to 2020.⁷² In Sweden, in 2016 Swedish for immigrants became part of municipal adult education and all students have the right to an individual study plan and a guidance counsellor. The Government's ambition was that it would make adult education easier to adapt to individual needs and life conditions, and that Swedish for immigrants would become easier to combine with other courses in adult education.⁷³ In turn, the Government assumed that it would lead to shorter study periods, faster flow-through and less student aid.

Other changes involved setting up a **coordinating mechanism**. In Cyprus for instance, the National Committee for Lifelong Learning was established in 2015⁷⁴. The establishment of the National Committee of Lifelong learning is a major step towards better governance of the adult education sector. The plurality of the partners under the Committee ensured a greater level of coherence among different stakeholders and programmes. In Bulgaria, to improve coordination, regional groups for lifelong learning were established in 2016 and 2017; they have addressed the need for better coordination of lifelong learning policies at national and regional level, and for overcoming the significant differences in participation in lifelong learning by region in Bulgaria.

Ireland has seen a fundamental and radical re-organisation of further education and training (FET) structures and strategy between 2011 and now. There was the establishment of SOLAS as the Further Education and Training Authority in 2013, re-organising the 33 Vocational Education Committees (VECs) into 16 Education and Training Boards. In 2012 Ireland also established Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) as a new integrated agency. The first FET Strategy 2014-2019⁷⁵ articulated a vision of a flexible, responsive, quality-driven, labour-market relevant and integrated sector that supports learner progression, transition into employment and personal development, and aims to support economic development and social inclusion.

In Latvia, the Adult Education Governance Board, which includes ministries, social partners, and organisations involved in adult education, was established and the first meeting was held in February 2017. The Board uses the labour market situation information and sectoral expert councils to provide reviews and approve priorities for adult education and ensure regular assessment of adult education results. In Lithuania, the 2015 Law on Non-formal Adult Education and Continuing Education⁷⁶ strengthened the role of the Lithuanian non-formal Adult Education Council in relation to developing and implementing non-formal adult education and lifelong learning policy. In some countries, decentralisation laws have been passed that affect the governance and provision of adult learning (see for instance France, the Netherlands, the UK).

A significant number of countries saw the emergence of legal arrangements concerning the establishment and implementation of **National Qualifications Frameworks** that can impact on adult learning provision, such as

through including non-formal qualifications in a framework. This is one mechanism to support lifelong learning and allowing learners to combine initial qualifications with those for continuing training and for specialisation.⁷⁷

Other key developments are initiated through specific **strategies**, for example in relation to specific skills strategies for developing economic competitiveness. In Belgium, all three regions have a main social and economic strategic plan: The Vision 2050. Other examples come from UK Scotland (2010), Austria (2012), Slovenia (National Adult Education Master Plan 2013-2020), Czechia (2014) and Ireland (2016).

Romania developed a set of complementary strategies in 2015 that are linked to the ESF programme, and with the support of the World Bank. This concerned the strategy for reducing early school leaving, the strategy on tertiary education, and the strategy on lifelong learning. The Romanian approach aimed to ensure better coordination and complementarity between the three strategies. One year earlier, the strategy for employment was adopted, and in 2016 the strategy for education and vocational training was adopted.

Norway developed a comprehensive skills strategy (see box below). There were also some countries with specific strategies to improve quality in adult learning, validation of prior learning, and providing guidance and counselling (Sweden and Austria).





Norway: The National Skills Policy Strategy (2017-2021)⁷⁸

The National Skills Policy Strategy was presented in February 2017 and will be in force until 2021. The strategy stakeholders are the social partners, presented by all eight main employer and the employee organisations, the Sami Parliament, Norwegian associations for private/civil providers of adult learning, and the government represented by Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation, Ministry of Integration and Family Affairs, Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries and the Ministry of Education and Research.

The overall aim of the strategy is to ensure future business competitiveness, economic growth, and social- and labour market inclusion. Ensuring coherence of policies and measures of all stakeholders is also an important target. The strategy points out the direction for Norway's future skills policy. It gives common goals and priority to three areas.

The National Skills Policy Strategy partners agree to:

- Contribute to making informed choices for the individual and society;
- Promote better learning opportunities and effective use of skills in working life;
- Strengthen skills among adults with low skills and weak labour market attachment.

They also agree to preserve the labour market model (a high degree of unionisation, coordinated wage bargaining, culture for full-time work) and stress the importance of the so-called tripartite cooperation.

The strategy does not modify the divided responsibility between the stakeholders.

Strengthening the career services is also an important target. The strategy partners agree to put in place a more comprehensive and coordinated system and to further develop regional career centres. They believe it is urgent to raise the quality and competences of career counsellors, and are particularly focused on integration, immigration, Sami and seniors.

Furthermore, the National Skills Policy Strategy includes several structural/organisational changes. The most important ones include the establishment of the Future Skills Needs Committee and the Skills Policy Council.

The Future Skills Needs Committee (a 3-year project) is a forum where researchers and skills forecast experts, ministries and major social partners organisations) meet to analyse, discuss and disseminate available statistics, research and information on future skills needs. The aim is to link the various research and analysis of skills needs to gather more knowledge of future skills needs, improve future skills forecasts and reach a common understanding of labour market developments and skills needs.

The Skills Policy Council, consisting of all the strategy partners, monitors the implementation of strategy. The council will meet regularly during the strategy period.

The council will discuss any questions and all skills policy relevant issues, e.g. the results and deliveries from the Future Skills Needs Committee.

Developments in the funding of adult learning

Developing governance of adult learning systems also involves developments in their funding, since reforms and policies often have financial consequences. Sometimes the reforms and policies demand higher (public) spending, sometimes reforms and policies are in fact budget cuts and shift the costs from public to private sources (companies, individuals). Funding is related to a range of different funding instruments, such as: training funds; tax incentives for companies; tax incentives for individuals; grants for companies; grants for individuals; vouchers; individual learning accounts; loans; saving schemes; training leave; and payback conditions.⁷⁹

Comprehensive data on the funding of adult learning in Europe is still difficult to find. This is due to the nature of adult learning, being spread out across educational sub-sectors and covering different policy areas such as education, employment, innovation/competitiveness, social affairs, health, and prisons. In addition, a harmonised definition of adult learning with clear demarcations is not available (if it is possible to develop at all), making comparisons across countries difficult.⁸⁰ The development of individual contributions and private sector funding is even more difficult to track. Research on the amount of revenue of private adult learning providers in the Netherlands concluded that between €3.1 and €3.4 billion is spend on private providers of adult education and training. This accounts for 80% to 90% of the total expenditure on learning by adults.⁸¹

When it comes to public funding, in approximately half of the Member States, the central or state level of government has full responsibility for the allocation of public funding. In many countries however, regional governments have a high level of responsibility, such as in Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, UK, Poland, Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark and Romania. Furthermore, in some countries, local governments play a considerable role in financing adult learning: for example, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, and Sweden.⁸²

Based on a survey of experts⁸³, asking them how public funding for adult learning has evolved since 2010, almost half of the country experts indicated that public funding for adult learning has increased since 2010 (AT, BG, HR, EE, DE⁸⁴, HU, LT, MT, PL, RO, SK, SI, SE). Around one-quarter indicated that it decreased (FI, EL, LT, NL, ES, UK). Four countries maintain their public funding levels (DK, FR, IE, IT).⁸⁵ Furthermore, the amount of public funding for adult learning can fluctuate within a country. In Slovenia for instance, the situation is not so clear-cut; while in 2014 the budget of six ministries involved in adult education increased, at the Ministry for Education the budget for adult education decreased from 2013 to 2014 for half of its budget caused by the decrease in ESF funding.

In line with the discussion on governance, the structure of funding often links to (short term) project and programme funding rather than to continuous, regular financing of adult learning systems as specified in policies and legal frameworks. In this project-based approach, funding is usually earmarked to a specific (societal) problem. This type of funding makes the adult learning sector and the organisations active in adult learning vulnerable to changes in political priorities.

In the financing of adult learning, a regularly re-emerging modality is the use of individual learning accounts. Many countries have made attempts in the past (see for instance in the UK⁸⁶), but only two Member States currently have working models. The following box provides two recent examples of individual learning accounts, from France and the Netherlands (being established).



France⁸⁷

The French policy on personal training accounts starts from the idea that the individual needs to be empowered to define his or her own learning needs. The personal training account (Compte personnel de formation - CPF) entered into force on 1 January 2015 and must enable its holder, throughout his professional life, to maintain his level of qualification or to access a higher level of qualification and facilitate the management of his professional transitions. The CPF is universal in nature: anyone aged 16 or older entering working life benefits from a CPF until retirement, regardless of their status: employee, job seeker, self-employed person. This account is attached to the person who can use it throughout their working life.

Since 1 January 2019, the Personal Training Account has been credited in euros at the end of each year, and no longer in hours. The account will be credited with €500 per year with a maximum of €5,000. The funding of the account will be reinforced for all assets that do not have a level V qualification (€800 capped at €8,000). The amount of the CPF is a base in euros that can be matched, in particular by a competences

operator; Pole emploi (national employment agency); the Region or State; the employer; or the account holder himself.

The CPF offers access to training courses leading to professional certifications registered in the national register and those leading to certificates validating blocks of skills. Under certain conditions, actions to validate acquired experience, skills assessments, preparation of the theoretical practical test of driving licences or training, support and advice provided to business creators or purchasers are also eligible.

In a working population of 25 million, almost 4 million accounts are active and 500,000 are financed. Since January 2015, 216 million training hours have been awarded. The introduction of the personal training account is accompanied by the introduction of an overarching ICT monitoring system that tracks an individual's skills development and the extent to which the account is used for skills development.



The Netherlands⁸⁸

In order to stimulate adult learning, public individual learning and development budgets are currently being developed. Adults will be able to spend the budgets on a wide variety of training activities. These include (parts of) diploma-oriented programmes, training activities resulting in a certificate recognised by a branch or sector, programmes that lead to a qualification of which the level is referenced to the Netherlands Qualifications Framework (NLQF), training activities from providers that have a quality mark from the branch organisation for private providers (Nederlandse Raad voor Training en Opleiding: NRTO) and procedures for the recognition of previously acquired competences. The individual learning and development budget is part of a larger initiative to let adults gain control over their own learning and development. In this context, the government intends to develop a digital overview of individual training opportunities and (in time) the matching financial means for training. This facility will ideally develop into an individual portal providing insights into training opportunities and learning rights (including financial support) that someone can use. This may be depending on someone's education and current labour market position.

It can contain:

- Unused rights for publicly funded education. If someone in initial education has not yet obtained a bachelor and master degree, this can be enjoyed later. This is already possible, but many people are not aware of this. This also applies to publicly funded VET programmes that can be followed regardless of diplomas already obtained.
- Individual learning and development budget (public individual learning and development budget and, if possible, also private sources for financing of education, such as individual learning accounts).
- Training opportunities for people without an employer or receiving unemployment benefit.
- Temporary learning or development budgets in special situations, such as vouchers for training to occupations in demand or career development interviews for 45-year old people.
- Lifelong learning credit.

Developments in coordination in adult learning

Coordination and governance do not necessarily concern the whole field of adult learning. Each focus area might require a different coordination mechanism, and the involvement of different stakeholders. In the area of stimulating adult learning in the workplace, for example, the ET 2020 Working Group on Adult Learning (2016-2018) found that adult learning in the workplace – as a policy objective – is not strictly linked with one single policy field. It can have different objectives and purposes and is supported by different policy frameworks and it is coordinated to different extents in different countries. Just over half of the countries have a comprehensive policy, where the policies are well coordinated. The stakeholders involved in adult learning in the workplace may include ministries, employers, PES, trade unions, and training providers. The extent to which they are involved varies significantly from country to country.⁸⁹

The National Coordinators for the Implementation of the European Agenda for Adult Learning noted that in most countries there are established national coordination activities involving policy makers from different policy areas or levels. The most common form of cooperation consists of panels, steering committees, and advisory groups, meeting on a regular basis. Some countries maintained or increased the involvement of social partners in this coordination (AT, BG, DE, EE, LV, NL, SI, TR and UK). In Bulgaria, the designation of National Coordinators from 28 regions was established, providing a good basis for a permanent coordination mechanism for adult learning.⁹⁰ Countries with a national level governance worked on regional coordination mechanisms and those in which regional level governance is involved in adult learning have worked on national coordination systems (DE, ES).⁹¹

The governance and policy frameworks also show that adult learning might sometimes be ‘hidden’ under other policies and frameworks, making it difficult to recognise it as a specific sector. In terms of policy coherence (seeing adult learning as a means to solve a specific problem such as social inclusion) this might be a positive aspect, but from a system perspective it does not always contribute to a visible, sustainable and strong adult learning sector with trusted providers and sustainable funding streams.

Policy frameworks for adult learning still show signs of fragmentation and are not always well aligned between sectors, policy areas and legal frameworks related with adult learning.⁹² There is a group of countries in which adult learning policies are reported as being mostly aligned across different aspects of the policy framework. This group includes some ‘high performers in adult learning provision’ and smaller Member States. Other countries have aligned legal frameworks, perhaps reflecting a focus on establishing lifelong learning policies (for instance, Slovakia has a Lifelong Learning Act in place), aligning with European level goals. Alignment and coordination appear more of a challenge for decentralised systems.

Despite the level of fragmentation, multi-governance working is both a key strength of, and a challenge for, adult learning systems in the EU 28; there is a notable increase in partnership working in this policy field across different agencies and levels, particularly over the last 3-5 years, though there is still much scope for more progress by Member States in this direction. Up until a few years ago (at the beginning of the 2014-2020 period), the adult learning agenda was often the sole responsibility of a single government department, with limited joint planning, development and implementation; in recent times the scope and depth of cooperation has increased as Member States recognised that effective adult learning systems needed a multi-dimensional approach.⁹³

Summary and emerging issues in relation to governance

This section has discussed developments in relation to the EAAL priority concerning ensuring the coherence of adult learning with other policy areas, improving coordination, effectiveness and relevance to the needs of society, the economy and the environment; increasing, where appropriate, both private and public investment.

Member States updated and improved their VET and adult learning legislation and established better coordination mechanisms. Furthermore, adult learning is now being understood more holistically as any ‘learning by adults’, and not being confined to specific sectors or systems, thus challenging traditional coordination and governance models. Public spending on adult learning has increased somewhat between 2011 and 2018, partly due to a broader conception of adult learning spanning ministerial responsibilities. European funding still plays an important role in the funding of adult learning in many countries, which has implications for the long-term sustainability and development of the sector. There seems to be a renewed impetus for individual learning accounts as a strategy to encourage adults back into learning.

With respect to policy frameworks, adult learning still tends to be more characterised by fragmentation than alignment. This in part reflects the complexity of the sector and the distribution of responsibilities in it. This context in part explains why the picture with respect to the finance for adult learning is ‘fuzzy’, and unclear.





The following broader issues emerge in the context of governance of adult learning:

- There is an increasing emphasis on facilitating adult learning within formal education structures (VET and HE);
- There is some trend to decentralisation and devolution of responsibilities in adult learning policy- making and delivery. At national level, there is more emphasis on broader policies linked to broader social issues;
- Adult learning is being understood seen more holistically as ‘learning by adults’, not being confined to specific sectors or systems, thus challenging traditional coordination and governance models;
- Adult learning might be seen too often as a delivery mechanism to solve (political/ societal) problems and not as a sector in its own right (investments often earmarked to solve specific (socio-economic) issues);
- There is evidence that some countries have improved their coordination mechanisms by involving broader stakeholder groups including social partners;
- Public spending on adult learning seems to have increased somewhat between 2011 and 2018, partly due to a broader conception of adult learning crossing ministerial responsibilities. European funding still plays an important role in the funding of adult learning in many countries, which has implications for the long-term sustainability and development of the sector;
- There seems to be a renewed impetus for individual learning accounts as an activation strategy.

As evidenced in this section, at Member State level, there are developments in terms of new policy frameworks; a perceived increase of budget allocation to adult learning and improved coordination mechanisms. These developments are in line with the EAAL priorities.



3.3 Developments in supply and take up of provision in adult learning (EAAL priority 2)

As already reflected upon in the previous section, adult learning is wide in its scope, represented through a variety of education and training provision available to adults in Europe. This can range from formal to non-formal learning opportunities, from the foundations of reading and writing competences to advanced knowledge and skills – building further on basic skills – at higher education levels, and include liberal education as well as workplace learning. Different typologies of adult learning supply have been published in both academic and policy-oriented literature, including the European Commission’s own work.⁹⁴ Regardless of the typology, it is a common understanding among both policy-makers and academics that basic skills like literacy and numeracy are essential fundamentals for life, work, and further education.

As an illustration of the variety of reforms in recent years in relation to this EAAL priority, Table 3.3 below provides a non-exhaustive list of short examples. This covers reforms that support specific forms of provision and effective outreach. In the later sections, a wider set of examples is explored in more detail.

Table 3.3 short descriptions from the countries of reforms in support of supply and take up of provision

Country	Name / Description of policy / programme	Year started / implemented
Bulgaria	New Chance for success: facilitating access to general secondary and professional education as well as labour market inclusion of vulnerable groups (those >16 years old, with lower level of education).	2017
Estonia	Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020: To provide equal opportunities in lifelong learning and increase participation. Additionally, to incorporate a digital focus to lifelong learning.	2014
France	Personal training account created.	2014
	Creation of CléA: Certificate of (Basic) Knowledge and Professional Skill, composed of 7 domains. ⁹⁵	2014
	Creation of CléA Numerique: Certificate of Digital Skill, composed of four areas of expertise. ⁹⁶	2018
Hungary	Adults became eligible for apprenticeship contracts: Previously, this type of contract was limited to 'school aged' learners. The amendment has boosted participation of adults in apprenticeships.	2015
Ireland	Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025: Aims to improve access and level of provision in skills development relevant to learners so as to participate fully in society and the economy.	2016
	Literacy + Numeracy Strategy: Aims to improve literacy and numeracy levels across the population.	2016-2019
	Action Plan to expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship: aims to have 31,000 cumulative new apprenticeship registrations (including adults) and 19,000 cumulative new traineeship registrations by 2020.	2017
	Employee Development Policy Framework: To provide skills development opportunities for employed learners, particularly those in lower skilled jobs.	2018
	New guidelines for interprofessional funds: So that the 19 funds currently existing pay more attention to skills assessment and certification of acquired competences at the end of upskilling / re-skilling pathways.	2018
Latvia	Modular CVET programmes have been implemented: Separate modules of existing VET programmes have been developed, as well as 'groups' of modules that learners can follow to develop their professional skills.	2018
Poland	National Training Fund: part of Labour Fund dedicated for education and training of employees and employers with annual priorities consulted with the Council of Labour Market.	2014
	Tripartite training agreement: between an employer, a head of a municipality and the training institution in which the last is obliged to provide a tailored training for the unemployed or job seeker aged 45+.	2014

Source: Consultation of the Members of the ET 2020 Working Group on Adult Learning in December 2018.

In line with the EAAL priority, firstly, an overview of recent developments in literacy, numeracy and digital skills across Europe is presented. Secondly, specific outreach measures are discussed.

Developments in the provision of literacy, numeracy and digital skills training

Initiatives for basic skills education, including the focus on literacy, numeracy and digital skills are present in most European countries. The focus on basic skills can be implicit or explicit, and training can be delivered in education and training institutions as well as in other settings like the workplace. The target groups also differ⁹⁷.

The focus on provision to raise achievement in basic skills is currently receiving high levels of interest, and is supported by evidence from PIAAC as explained in section 2.2⁹⁸. Despite the democratisation in education in previous decades, guaranteeing basic skills for all young adults has not been achieved. Currently, countries have mechanisms in place to offer education and training courses to those in need of strengthened basic skills. Dependent on the entrance level of the candidate, this can involve entry level education helping adults to read and write. Afterwards, or when adults already have entry level skills, they can further increase their skills with the aim to obtain a qualification of upper secondary education, equivalent to level 4 of the European Qualification Framework⁹⁹. Second chance education can help them to achieve this goal.

While basic skills provision is thus available in most countries, the **ways in which this is organised differs across countries**. Data from 2013-2014¹⁰⁰ on the availability of dedicated basic skills programmes and frameworks indicates a West-East division, showing that most West European countries do have specific adult training providers focussing on basic skills embedded in their provisional structure. In other countries this is organised in different ways, for example through separately funded projects. Adults who already have a sound level of basic skills but who do not hold a qualification of upper secondary education yet can enter second chance education initiatives.

In the United Kingdom, Ireland and Belgium, adults can access these courses in specific adult education institutions in which they are not mixed with younger learners. In the Nordic countries, the Baltic States and most of West and Central Europe, adult learners seem to be able to access both mainstream and adult education institutions. In Italy, Greece and several Eastern European countries, specific adult education programmes for obtaining a qualification of upper secondary education are lacking, which means that adults need to enrol for classes within the initial schooling system.

According to the reports from the network of country experts from 2017, this situation still seems to hold, with many of the Eastern European countries reporting the use of European funds such as ESF or Erasmus+ to organise basic education initiatives. While this type of funding is important in all countries, the existence of provision focussing on basic skills in a range of Eastern European countries seems to (over)depend on European funds.

It is worthwhile investigating further the relationship of this finding to the lower rates of adult participation in learning in this European region. However, these countries have invested in the formal education of young people and young adults more effectively than Western European countries. As a result, they have a significantly lower level of early school leaving (ESL), and a much higher level of at least upper secondary attainment among adults¹⁰¹. In addition, in most of them there were no sudden increases in the participation of adults in education and training, which can be related to changes in the ways of identifying non-formal education¹⁰².

There are also recent initiatives such as the German national Decade for Literacy 2016-2026¹⁰³, investing €180 million in adult learners' basic skills over ten years, to improve the employability of adult learners with a lack of basic skills, and to significantly reduce the overall number of illiterate people. The Austrian Adult Education Initiative since 2012 offers German language courses with the aim to improve adult skills and abilities to read and write (see box below). The following sections discuss developments in relation to specific types of provision: migrants, digital, and focus on work.



Austria: “Initiative for Adult Education”¹⁰⁴

The programme “Initiative Adult Education” (Initiative Erwachsenenbildung), promoted by the Austrian federal government and the provincial governments, has been running since January 2012. It enables second chance attempts on fundamental educational attainments, including basic education, for free and is above all aiming at disadvantaged persons. Approx. 70 % of the participants have a migrant background.

The sustainability of the programme is reflected in the following principles:

- The interests and resources of the participants are the starting points for the offers.
- Autonomy and self-efficacy of the participants are promoted.
- The learning process takes place on an equal footing and is a dialogue among equals between teachers and learners.
- Political education, anti-discrimination and anti-racism are cross-cutting issues in all learning areas
- The transfer of competences expanding the participants’ ability to act.

Specific provision: Supply of education and training to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers

The recent migration situation has increased policy attention to education and training programmes serving migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. These adults have their roots in other countries and might not speak the dominant language of the new country or they might not have their foreign credentials recognised¹⁰⁵.

Most countries have put provision in place, as outlined in Eurydice’s database of national education systems¹⁰⁶. For instance, in Belgium (Flanders), non-native speakers can learn Dutch at one of the ‘Centres for Basic Education’, regardless of whether they are recent or second-generation migrants. Bulgaria runs basic skills courses which include modules on the Bulgarian language. In Spain there is a wide range of Spanish courses for foreigners included in the training offer of adult education centres at varying levels of language literacy; these courses were attended by 38,322 users around the country during the 2016/2017 school year.

Cyprus offers Greek language lessons for foreigners, illiterate adults and asylum seekers to boost their literacy skills in one of the national languages. The programmes are provided by the Ministry of Education and Culture, as well as other Ministries and organisations. Basic education in Denmark has a specific track on Danish as a second language for immigrants, and the provision of basic skills training in Finland seems to have increased because of the higher influx of migrants and refugees. In the Netherlands, specific courses on Dutch as a second language are available. Swedish for migrants is available in Sweden under the Swedish for Immigrants initiative. Slovenia has a specific programme on the ‘Early Integration of Immigrants’, together with a programme on ‘Slovenian Language for Foreigners’. English as a Second Language (ESOL) is offered in all four countries of the UK to both recent and second or third generation migrants who have low literacy skills in English. Europe-wide projects target migrants’ education as well.¹⁰⁷

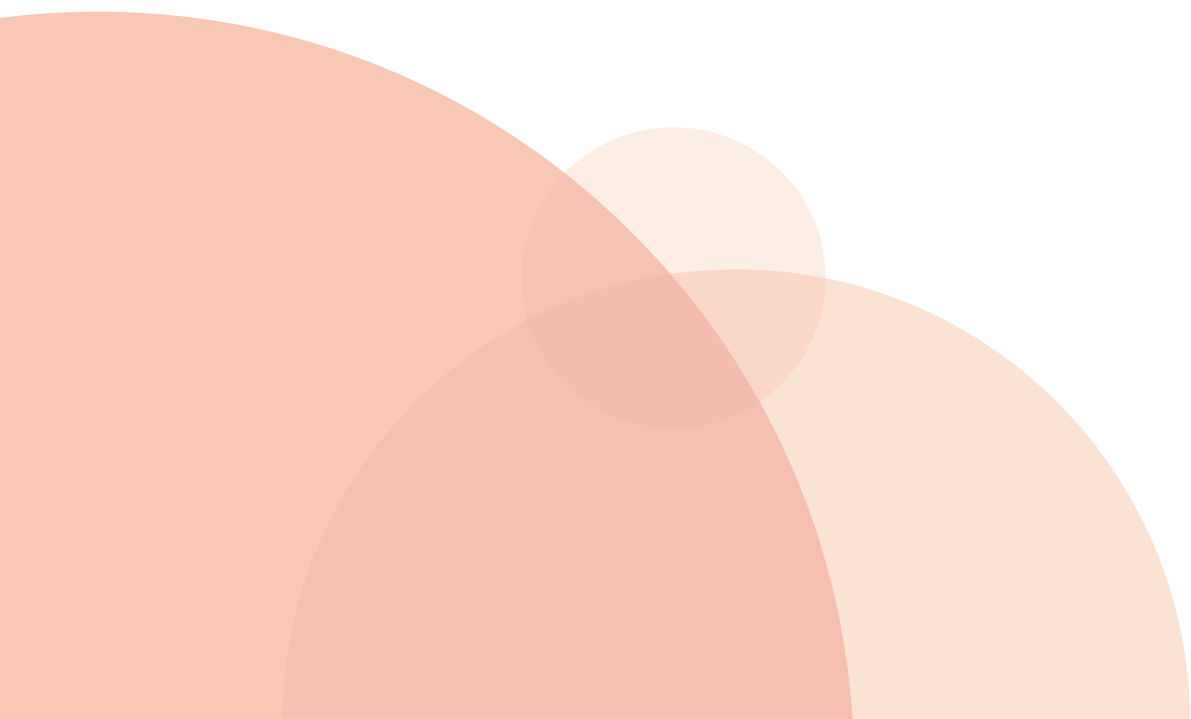
Specific provision: Growing focus on digital skills

The strong traditional focus on reading, writing and calculating has shifted towards inclusion of digital skills in the last decade. Based on an analysis of the national reports from the network of country experts, many countries nowadays offer digital skills training in some sort of format (partly under the influence of European initiatives)¹⁰⁸.

The Austrian Adult Education Initiative mentions the focus on digital skills¹⁰⁹. Enhancing ICT competences is one of the aims of Adult Education Centres, State Institutes for Further Education and Open Schools in Cyprus. ICT skills are also an important part of vocational basic skills training in the Czechia. The development of digital skills is an important part of Estonian adult education, which has resulted in the offer of ICT training free of charge for adults. Digital skills training is a component of basic education offered in Second Chance Schools in Greece.

In Malta, the Department for Lifelong Learning organises ICT training, including a focus on basic digital learning. In Poland, the focus on digital skills is present within courses organised by the Public Employment Services, while in Portugal short term ICT training is offered as part of basic education for low-qualified adults. A programme on 'Digital Literacy for Adults' has taken place in Slovenia (Focus on intergenerational learning in the field of digital skills¹¹⁰). An essential digital skills framework¹¹¹ in the UK from 2018 highlights the need for training to help adults work online in a safe and legal environment. In Latvia several initiatives have been taken in recent years in relation to digital competences for adults (see box below).

As a part of the Government's Digital Workforce Programme, Hungary's Digital Education Strategy has been developed. The 2016 Government Decision decided to launch programmes on developing digital education and pedagogy in school-based vocational training, whilst in adult education it aimed at the adaptation of free digital literacy course for citizens to improve their competitiveness on the labour market. The aim of the VET pillar of the Hungarian Digital Education Strategy is to ensure that students completing vocational training acquire general and professional digital competences for the labour market.



ICT projects in Latvia

In Latvia, the project “ICT opportunities furthering events for the Society” is geared towards increasing the number of e-service, e-tool usage in the society, thus also increasing the ICT competency level of the direct target group for the training activities regarding the usage of e-services and e-tools – librarians, teachers and government and municipality institution employees (digital agents), whose main duties consist of working with all the residents of Latvia daily, who either lack the necessary digital skills to use e-services, e-tools, or who make the decision not to do so based on other factors, for instance, concerns regarding security and privacy issues. As a result, a network of digital agents is created in order to assist the whole society.

In the project “IT training for small and micro businesses competitiveness and productivity promotion”, training related to the improvement

of digital skills was provided to more than 5,500 SMEs employees and in 2017-2018, more than 50 different training programmes have been developed and offered to improve the digital skills of SMEs employees in 2017-2018.

Within the private sector, the most important social responsibility initiative concerning the improvement of digital skills of elderly people was launched in 2008: “Connect, Latvia!”¹¹² to provide seniors with basic computer literacy skills. Training was provided free-of-charge in all the regions of Latvia in three levels. More than 31,000 seniors received training and improved their computer literacy skills for everyday life and work until 2015. Since 2015, the initiative was taken on by several NGO organisation for seniors, thus providing sustainability and longevity of this important initiative.

Specific provision: focus on training for employment

Adult education aims to prepare adults for a variety of situations, such as coping better with the demands of life in general, and to make a successful transition to the labour market. This is particularly the case for adult education referred to as ‘basic skills’ education (a phrase which refers to very different learning content in different countries). Many initiatives for basic skills education are framed in relation to adults’ functioning on the labour market. In most cases, these initiatives focus on adults who left school with no or low qualifications.

The relationship between basic skills and learning in the workplace has increased in importance, partly under influence of the 2016-2018 Adult Learning Working Group dedicated to this topic. Several initiatives in the area of basic skills have been developed and carried out across countries, mostly funded through European incentives.¹¹³ As explained above, interventions relating to skills are not restricted to boosting basic proficiency in literacy and numeracy, but are increasingly focussing on other types of skills that are perceived as fundamental. These include critical thinking skills, problem-solving and media literacy. As such, in the section below, an overview is being provided on the provision of work-related skills that go beyond the level of basic skills such as literacy and numeracy.

At national level there are many examples of developments in this area as mentioned in country experts’ reports. For instance, in Belgium, both the Flemish and Walloon Public Employment Services offer training at the basic and medium level to help increase the chances of adults finding a job. Under the Bulgarian Human Resource Development Programme, the project ‘New Chances for Success’ was established (2011-2015) to help illiterate adults access both general and vocational education¹¹⁴. In the Czechia, “basic skills” education tends to be ‘vocational’ in nature, preparing adults for a job, with less focus on skills like literacy and numeracy. In Latvia sectoral experts and VET school teachers have defined general skill needs in all 15 sectors. Twenty-six AL modules based on key competences for LLL and decisions made in work groups were designed and published.

A strong focus on vocational pathways is also present in the German system, which sees basic education as providing adults with a set of usable skills in the workplace instead of having them work towards official

qualifications. Spain has a specific track on vocational secondary education for adults. Entrepreneurial training for low-skilled adults is organised in cooperation with the Public Employment Services in Poland, but also in Romania and Estonia. These types of programme deal with basic skills like literacy and numeracy in a more indirect way

In relation to including skills training in Active Labour Market Policies, Europe has targeted younger adults through the **Youth Guarantee Scheme**¹¹⁵ and the **Youth Employment Initiative**¹¹⁶. The scheme led to a range of reforms in Active Labour Market Policies in some of the European countries¹¹⁷:

1. Accelerated reform: BE, BG, FR, HR, HU, IT, LT, LV, PL, PT, SI.
2. Reinforced policy framework: AT, DE, DK, EE, FI, IE, LU, MT, NL, SE, UK.
3. More limited reform: CY, CZ, EL, ES, RO, SK.

Specific measures on effective outreach and widening access

The supply of adult learning provision is one thing, but reaching out to and succeeding to attract the target group is another. Low-qualified adults who are furthest away from the labour market might struggle to find ways to access help, or not be aware that they could be helped. Reaching out to adults, providing them with information and guidance and empowering them has received considerable attention in previous years through several European funded projects¹¹⁸. Firstly, this section focuses on initiative of outreach, typically aiming to make contact with the target population in order to offer them support. Secondly, examples of guidance and counselling are being discussed.

Outreach has received more attention under influence of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways¹¹⁹, European projects and national reports stating challenges in reaching out to those who need it the most. Initiatives to reach out to adults have also been mentioned in national reports from the network of country researchers in 2017 and provide several insights into the state-of-art of country approaches to this issue.

In Spain, the initiative Aula Mentor has actively reached out to adults living in remote areas through online learning platforms.¹²⁰ In Sweden, the government is investing SEK 300 million (€30 million) towards outreach activities targeting 4,000 female immigrants who might not find their own ways to adult learning providers. While official evaluations of outreach activities do not yet exist, successful cases can be found, including the often praised Qualifica programme in Portugal.





Focus on outreach in Portugal's Qualifica¹²¹

In 2017, Qualifica Centres were launched in Portugal, further developing the work that has taken place in the country since 2000 in the area of recognition, validation and certification of skills. Special attention has been paid to low-skilled people, a significant group among the adult population in the country. Apart from adults with low or no qualifications, the programme reaches out to unemployed adults and those who are not in education, training or employment. The aim is to offer these adults tailored learning pathways. As such, employers, education and training institutions and municipalities are

supposed to work together. Several tools have been put in place to raise awareness of the programme among the population. The website www.qualifica.gov.pt explains the aims of the programme and provides information on its services. Media campaigns have been launched to make the programme known among the population. Accessible learning opportunities through the recognition of prior learning, but also through the support from employers and the provision of flexible and modular training have been implemented.

There are several current initiatives on guidance and counselling, which tend to include a focus on the provision of information on learning opportunities. For example, Austria has an Initiative on Educational Guidance and Counselling for Adults. Luxembourg has a National Orientation House¹²² on education and training and local municipalities help in providing information on adult education initiatives. In Portugal, the Qualifica¹²³ programme aims to raise adults' skills as well as to recognise them, and counselling and guidance is also one of their main objectives to provide and inform adults with tailored learning pathways.

The role of non-governmental organisations as intermediaries informing the public has been mentioned in the case of Slovakia. Career guidance and information-counselling centres are available as well and growing in numbers.

There are also countries that see the need to **expand guidance structures within existing structures**. Denmark has in recent years worked towards broadening their levels of guidance, which tended to be too much 'inward' looking. Estonia recognises the need for higher levels of provision for guidance and advice activities. In Greece too, more attention to lifelong guidance and counselling has been mentioned as an important focus point for future reforms. Finland has developed guidance structures for adults especially in the years 2007-2014 mainly with ESF funding (Opin ovi-projects¹²⁴), after which the focus shifted towards young people due to the Youth Guarantee initiatives, though the National Lifelong Guidance Group worked hard to maintain a focus on the needs of adults.

Furthermore, as outlined in national expert reports, there are countries that **acknowledge the need for improvements** in the areas of outreach and guidance. Ireland acknowledges that outreach to disadvantaged learners is not easy and that getting significant proportions of low-skilled adults into the education and training system remains problematic. The Netherlands also acknowledges the need to further improve the area of guidance and specifically mentions actions undertaken to reach and mobilise adults with low basic skills. In Poland, outreach activities might take place at the local level, but a national vision on aspects like guidance is lacking. Romania has put specific outreach policy measures in place, but these have – so far – not been successful. In Slovenia, vulnerable adults tend to be unaware of available adult learning opportunities and outreach approaches have been evaluated as ineffective, and proposals have been made to visit learners at home in order to encourage them to take part in education and training. In the UK, much of the information available to reach out to adult learners is online, meaning that those with limited digital and problem-solving skills might have problems in accessing this information.

In Hungary, guidance seems more limited to career guidance, while broader information, advice and outreach in relation to education and training has been recommended. A similar narrow focus on guidance for career purposes has been mentioned in Lithuania. In Romania, some counselling services exist, further initiatives are limited in scope.

Summary and emerging issues in relation to supply and take-up

This section has discussed developments in relation to the EAAL priority on increasing the supply of high-quality adult learning provision, especially in literacy, numeracy and digital skills. It also focused on developments targeted at increasing take-up of learning opportunities through effective outreach, guidance and motivation strategies targeted towards the most vulnerable groups in society.

Member States implemented different strategies, types of provision and supporting measures to improve chances for adults, especially specific vulnerable groups, to participate in learning. The current migration situation has led countries to develop programmes specifically tailored towards those in need of language courses, although general citizenship courses were found to be implemented as well. Several initiatives focussed on digital skills and workplace learning and guidance and outreach initiatives have gained ground in several countries. Furthermore, Member States that see the need to expand guidance structures within existing structures as many countries acknowledge the need for improvements in the areas of outreach and guidance.

The extent to which basic skills education has been implemented in the education and training structures of different member states differs. Eastern European countries tend to have weaker adult-focussed structures in place compared to the Nordic and Western European countries. But this may be explained by the fact that these countries have invested in formal education of young people and young adults. This investment proved to be effective, because these countries managed to create a solid basis for LLL policy, which will benefit from it in the future.

Many of these countries have managed to reduce the phenomenon of early school leaving (ESL) to the lowest level in the EU (Croatia, Slovenia, Poland, Lithuania, the Czechia).¹²⁵ In addition, they also managed to disseminate at least upper secondary attainment among younger adults (up to 34 years old) to the highest level in the EU.¹²⁶ Furthermore, their existing provision is less flexible in nature. This might be part of the underlying reasons why participation among low-qualified adults in these countries remains low.



This section has demonstrated that – one way or another – initiatives for basic skills education are being implemented in most European countries:

- The current migration situation has led countries to develop programmes specifically tailored towards those in need of literacy courses, although general citizenship courses were found to be implemented as well;
- Several initiatives focussed on digital skills and workplace learning;
- Guidance and outreach initiatives have gained ground in several countries (for instance Portugal, Austria, Germany, Luxembourg, Sweden).

As evidenced in this section, at Member State level, there are developments in terms of providing different forms of provision. These developments are in line with the EAAL.



3.4 Developments in access to adult learning (EAAL priority 3)

Adults with no or low qualifications are underrepresented in adult education participation statistics¹²⁷. The barriers preventing them from taking part in adult learning activities can relate to a lack of confidence in their own abilities, negative attitudes towards education and training, or a lack of financial resources or time to be able to take part. Low qualified adults might have difficulties in understanding the benefits of learning. As such, support mechanisms are important to help adults engage with basic skills and second chance education. While adults who obtained a qualification of upper secondary education or higher tend to participate in adult learning more, a previous section in this report has demonstrated that participation rates remain below target in a wide range of countries. As such, widening access to adult learning is relevant to the entire adult population.

As an illustration of the variety of reforms in recent years in relation to this EAAL priority, Table 3.4 provides a non-exhaustive list of short examples. This covers reforms that improved equity of access, flexibilisation, digital learning, learning while working and recognition of prior learning. In the later sections, a wider set of examples is explored in more detail.

Table 3.4: short descriptions from the countries of reforms to increase access to adult learning

Country	Name / Description of policy / programme	Year started / implemented
Belgium (FR)	Validation of Competences Consortium: This committee aims to facilitate access and increase flexibility in pathways through the development of validation and valorisation.	2013
	Founding of the 1st 'Cité de métiers': A lifelong learning guidance and counselling centre, that aims to improve the orientation, guidance and awareness regarding the available pathways within lifelong learning.	2018
Cyprus	New Framework of Second Chance Schools: An ad-hoc committee was founded to develop and introduce the framework; this process is still ongoing. The objectives are: (1) to make second chance schools more adult-friendly, (2) to increase participation in adult education and (3) to decrease early school leaving.	In development since 2017, ETA 2019
	Introduction of mechanisms for validation of non-formal and informal learning: Funded by the ESF, this project introduced validation mechanisms in the areas of Youth, Volunteerism and Adult Education.	2013
Denmark	Reform General Adult Education Programme: Following the tripartite agreement, it was agreed that adult education should be more flexible to accommodate to needs of both employers and employees. All training programmes were reviewed and updated (in some cases several programmes were merged /fused).	2017-2021
	Newly developed platform on VET/Adult Education options: Currently the 1st generation of the platform is available, providing easy access to knowledge and enrolment. In the future, the platform will support videos as well for people with weak reading skills.	2019
Estonia	Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020: To provide equal opportunities in lifelong learning and increase participation. Additionally, to incorporate a digital focus to lifelong learning.	2014
France	Reform in order to develop the choice in professional life: Law of September 5th, 2018	2018
Finland	Ohjaamo: A one-stop-shop', providing low threshold guidance services for young adults (aged < 30). It strives to provide information on employment and education as well as preventing marginalisation. There are about 70 of these all over Finland.	2014
Greece	Life Long Learning Centres opened: They functioned during 2013-2016, creating a positive attitude towards learning and providing equal opportunities and adult education programs. There is a new phase underway which aims to continue and expand the lifelong learning centres.	2013-2016
Hungary	Adult Learning Legal System Reform: Modifications were made to increase flexibility - enabling learners to follow partial modules of full VET qualifications.	2017

Country	Name / Description of policy / programme	Year started / implemented
Italy	Creation of new CPIA networks for AL: CPIA are networks of schools for adult learners, created at provincial level in each region. Currently, a total of 130 CPIA are established, involving over 1200 technical / professional schools.	2015
Poland	Reform of vocational education for adults: transformation of vocational schools for adults for more flexible system of courses.	2012
	Occupational Barometer: forecast of situation regarding occupations which qualifies jobs into three groups: deficit, balance and surplus.	2015
	Database of development services: portal of adult learning offers for SMEs and adult learners on skills required by employees.	2017
	Local Centres for Knowledge and Education: a project involving the use of school network in disadvantaged areas for adults with difficult access to education.	2017
Sweden	'Right to upper secondary education' for adults: This means adults also have the opportunity to acquire secondary education - to subsequently become eligible for higher education.	2017

Source: Consultation of the Members of the ET 2020 Working Group on Adult Learning in December 2018.

In line with the EAAL priority, an overview is provided of equity of access; flexibilisation; digital learning; and learning while working. Lastly, recognition of prior learning is discussed.

Developments related to improving equity of access for all

General approaches to improving access for all have been mentioned in various national reports by the network of country experts from 2017. Proving basic education and training for free is available in many countries and aims to help the most disadvantaged and hard to reach adults. In Austria, funding for free basic education is available, although more funding is recommended to achieve more equal access. Similar concerns have been raised in Belgium – both in Flanders and Wallonia – where adult learners in the most vulnerable positions, including those in unemployment, do not need to pay to participate in basic education. Nevertheless, these measures do not seem to be sufficient to attract large numbers of disadvantaged adults into education and training.

Bulgaria has also acknowledged the inequalities in access and despite a range of financial incentives given to learners, these initiatives need to be made more visible towards to target groups. In-kind contributions are being made as well, such as access to libraries, meals, career services and free internet access. In Spain, apart from offering courses for migrants and adults from underrepresented groups, programmes have been established to widen participation of adults living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The initiatives include the refurbishment of buildings and helping adults to increase their job prospects.

In Poland, the initiative Local Centres for Knowledge and Education (Lokalne Ośrodki Wiedzy i Edukacji, LOWE) is included in the activities for the implementation of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways. The aim of LOWE is the educational activation of residents of disadvantaged areas with previously limited access to educational offers. The operational aim is to develop an additional function of schools, to provide adult education offers in the field of key competences tailored to the needs of resident community. Included in that, an aim is to develop effective action models in the local community for adults who need support in the field of skills and to develop methods and tools for the staff of schools expanding their educational mission to parents and other adults in their environment. From autumn 2017, 50 such centres have been created in 13 out of 16 regions in Poland. A competition for the next 100 centres is being prepared.

In Ireland, initiatives for widening access operate at the levels of different sectors and strategies, including the focus on the inclusion of people with disabilities in both education and employment. In Italy, growing equality in education and training is being stimulated through offering interrelated support to asylum seekers and those in need of humanitarian protection, including offering access to food, housing, health services as well as education and training and orientation towards a job. Luxemburg offers financial support for education and training for underrepresented groups, and basic skills training is available to them for free. Latvia has made similar financial investments, although only in recent years, making it difficult to assess its effectiveness.

The Netherlands has invested in stimulating participation of low-skilled groups, although local municipalities spend their budgets differently. The Qualifica Centres in Portugal further increase the number of adult learners, especially those with low or no qualifications; the combination of guidance towards education and the recognition and validation of adult skills has made Portugal an example of what Upskilling Pathways implementation might look like. Sweden has several initiatives to increase access to education and training, such as the “knowledge boost” initiative and the new Swedish “start studying support”.

In Slovenia, adult education is open to everyone, however, mechanisms of positive discrimination are in place for people from underrepresented groups; in case places are limited, access for these groups will be prioritised. In Latvia, since 2011, more than 6,000 people have successfully completed the assessment of professional competence. The number of professional qualification certificates issued during this period suggests that the assessment of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is gradually becoming more demanding in society.

Initiatives to increase access to education and training in Cyprus are mainly targeted towards accessing VET programmes, and the most disadvantaged learners in need of basic skills training are often not reached. A project on improving competences to increase employability has tried to encourage long-term unemployed adults to participation in basic skills training. In addition, a new initiative is underway, which aims at a more modern and flexible programme of formal second-chance education for adults by designing new curricula, new timetables and introducing new regulations, and distance learning courses.

While Denmark has been rather successful in moving unemployed adults into vocational training offers, other groups struggle to gain access. People with disabilities or special needs can in theory access adult education initiatives, but funding is not adequate to cover their needs. Refugees or asylum seekers without proofs of identity have difficulties in accessing education and training because of the current government’s hard stance on returning policies. Estonia’s focus on widening access is on low-educated and low-skilled adults with the aim to increase their basic and vocational skills. Large parts of vocational training offers are taken up by those in employment with intermediate or high levels of qualifications.

Inequalities in access can also be the result of geographical disparities. This was specifically mentioned in Greece where adults in suburban and rural areas have more difficulties to access education and training initiatives compared to those in urban areas. This problem is also relevant in other countries with a large geographical spread, such as Hungary.

As mentioned in a previous section, guidance and information services might help adults to access education and training. A lack of these services, as mentioned in the Finnish report, risks maintaining inequalities in access to adult learning. The dependence on subsidies from the State for outreach activities has been discussed in France. To attract adults into learning activities, it will also be important to provide them with information on the benefits of participation, as not being convinced about the advantages might leave adults uninterested in taking part. The low awareness of adult learning opportunities among the population is the situation in Lithuania as well as among the Roma community in Croatia. In Romania, the situation of inequalities and low access to education and training is clear from European statistics, but, strategies and priorities seem to be difficult to generate. As such, more work in this area is needed. The UK’s skills focus has strongly shifted towards the provision of apprenticeships, but this has not wiped out the inequalities in access; for example, women are clearly underrepresented in apprenticeships in areas such as engineering, and people from ethnic minority backgrounds are less likely to obtain a place.

Investing in outreach and guidance might not always be successful. The Polish report critically reflects on the investments made on targeting socially excluded groups such as unemployed and low qualified adults and those belonging to minority groups; however, participation rates among these adults remain low and the

returns on investment are being questioned. Similar concerns about the success of outreach activities were questioned in the Slovakian report, as long-term data about these issues are usually lacking.

In recent year, several target groups seem to have been put in the spotlight due to societal and economic events. The refugee and migrant situation has led some countries to invest in basic skills and second language education for those who do not speak the national language. The access to adult learning for migrants is also important because they are at risk of not having their foreign qualification recognised in their new country; as such, they might end underemployed.

The Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways is also aimed at helping migrant adults to increase their basic skills and to have these skills validated. Access to education and training has also had a strong focus on younger adults, especially those not in employment, education and training (NEETs). As mentioned above, the Youth Guarantee Scheme has been a flagship programme to help them towards leaving this status.

Developments in relation to flexibilisation of education pathways to increase access

Countries have worked on different aspects of flexibilization¹²⁸. For instance, Austria has entrance exams to adult learning courses available for those who do not fulfil the traditional entrance criteria but who have gone through VET and apprenticeship routes. In Belgium, both in Flanders and Wallonia, adult education has become more flexible through the introduction of distance learning, modular and part-time learning provision. Cyprus introduced flexible learning modes at tertiary level, but these are lacking for those studying at lower levels, for example basic skills education and training.

Denmark has also put flexible practices in place, making learning and working manageable at the same time. The need for a sound combination of different life spheres is also important in the Estonian context, where adult learning becomes more flexible through distance learning or evening classes, and adults wishing to undertake part-time vocational training do not have to pay. Finnish universities have implemented flexible training programmes, and the new Training Contract model also provides more flexible training pathways. The Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) in Ireland has helped adults access part-time adult education.



Back to education initiative Ireland¹²⁹

The Back to Education Initiative in Ireland targets those over the age of 16 who have not obtained the qualification that marks the end of secondary education. The initiative is therefore targeted towards non-traditional learners who can further their education through part-time courses, including the opportunity to gain officially recognised qualifications. The BTEI recognises that adults have to juggle a range of activities at home and in the workplace and pays specific attention to the opportunity of combining participation in education and training with work and care duties.

Flexible and tailored provision is a core element of their vision on widening participation in adult learning. For example, it is important to offer these courses in different places in the country so that adults can learn within their own communities, close to home. Flexibility is also recommended through offering short taster courses to help adults decide which programmes they want to study, and through focussing on their personal development and coping with previous negative learning experiences.

Innovative and flexible ways of learning have been implemented in Italy at the regional level, although these practices have not been collected into a national database. The Netherlands has flexible systems in place in relation to higher education, although more opportunities for partial education and different entrance dates could be increased. Increasingly VET is becoming more flexible, encouraged by various policy measures, including pilots, a new subsidy measure and a recently initiated action programme on adult learning in VET. Portugal provides modular courses to adults and offers flexible pathways to adults, not only in relation to education and training, but also in relation to the validation of skills. Romania has recently introduced measures to make the adult education sector more flexible.

Some countries lag behind in relation to making adult learning systems more flexible. This is for instance the case in Bulgaria where short courses or opportunities for distance learning are hardly available. Similar problems are present in the Czechia, where everybody must undergo similar lengthy courses regardless of their starting level: modular adult learning systems have not yet been put in place. While Germany is well known for its vocational education and training system, it acknowledges the limited actions that have been undertaken to make learning more flexible, especially for the most disadvantaged adults who need more flexible, tailored and individual approaches.

A need for more tailored and flexible opportunities for the most fragile groups has also been recognised in France. The principles of flexibility have also been underlined in the need for reforms in Croatia, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland and Slovakia. Luxembourg has a fairly traditional way of dealing with adult education, making little use of flexible and innovative learning approaches. In Poland, as was mentioned above, vocational schools for adults have been transformed since 2012 into a system of more flexible courses.

Developments in the use of digital learning for increasing access

The use of digital learning tools has increased in the context of education in general and adult learning in particular, and they can blend with more traditional forms of adult learning provision, or open-up new ways in learning. They can be used to train adult learning professionals.

Adult education in Belgium (Flanders and Wallonia) nowadays includes elements of distance learning and e-learning. This has been a focus point of recent reforms in the French speaking social advancement education. A 180 hours component of distance learning is being offered in basic skills programmes in the Czechia. Also, the Spanish 'Aula Mentor'¹³⁰ initiative can be mentioned in the context of offering distance

learning. Elements of distance learning are nowadays incorporated within the Danish adult education centres (AVU) to make learning more flexible. This happens in Estonia as well, both at the level of basic, secondary and vocational training programmes. In Spain, there are 32 institutions for distance education for adults, which also serve prisoners; e-learning is possible at the level of basic, secondary and vocational education.

Open classrooms offering distance learning units have also been implemented by the French Public Employment Services to provide job seekers with basic skills training. In Lithuania, adult education classes can be taken online by those who live in rural and remote areas for which travel distance to adult education centres would be difficult. While Luxembourg mainly offers traditional modes of adult learning, Second Path to Qualifications courses have been introduced, giving adults the option between face-to-face or distance learning approaches to enhance their employability through training. In Malta, accredited courses leading to qualifications can be studied through distance education.

Online provision targeting basic skills is available in the Netherlands through the website oefenen.nl. Sweden has a long tradition of offering adult education courses through distance learning and have continued these initiatives in recent years; some municipalities can demand providers to offer specific programmes through distance learning as alternative modes to face-to-face learning. The UK has several online providers offering distance learning courses. Those who lack final qualifications of secondary school but who want to advance their qualifications can for example take online modes of the Access to Higher Education programmes.

Some **higher education** systems have been opened up to non-traditional adult learners, partly through the increased use of digital tools offering online and distance learning.¹⁵¹ In Belgium (Flanders), every tertiary education institution can offer distance learning modules or evening classes, although the extent to which this is implemented varies according to institutions and fields of study. In Estonia, despite the lack of specific provision for adults, several programmes are being offered by universities using distance learning approaches. In Italy, universities can provide e-learning courses, and this has been regulated by a ministerial decree. In Lithuania, distance learning has been introduced at several universities too as well as in Latvia, where nowadays, most universities have some sort of distance or e-learning opportunities in place. This is also the case in Slovakia. Flexible higher education (as well in VET), including the opportunity for online learning has been a point of attention in the Netherlands.

For some countries **room for improvement** is indicated in relation to digital learning. While a very limited number of distance learning initiatives exist in Bulgaria, financial support is lacking to widely implement this mode of learning. As such, distance- and e-learning is perceived to be lagging behind in relation to the situation in a range of other European countries. In Cyprus, most adult education programmes not taking place at higher education institutions do not include elements of distance or e-learning, but this has now been perceived as a priority to make adult learning more attractive. While Germany has a Distance Learning Protection Law, it has so far paid little attention to e-learning in the publicly funded adult education systems. While the Folk High Schools have developed an online tool to combat illiteracy, it is being questioned whether the target group is able to use this tool independently and has adequate access to computers.

In Hungary, a select number of distance learning opportunities for adult learners exist, but it is the country's aim to increase its proportion from the current 3% to 6% by 2020 and to triple the number of online course providers by the same year. In Poland, recommendations relate to implement more online provision, especially needed for those who live in rural areas and to widen access to learning in general. More funding from the Ministry of Education will be needed to achieve this. Currently, e-learning guidebooks have been produced to help adult educators design online courses.

Developments in relation to improving access to learning while working

Adult education and training is often work-related, and access can be facilitated through allowing employees to learn during working time or to receive support from the employer. Nowadays, in many countries, some form of training leave is in place for employees, so they have the right to take time off work for education and training purposes. The mapping on adult learning in the workplace conducted for the 2016-2018 ET 2020 Working Group on Adult Learning identified recent examples of policies that stimulate learning while working.

In Austria an initiative focused on improving the competences of trainers in the workplace. Between April 2016 and February 2017, trainers were trained in Austria specifically to deliver basic skills training in the workplace. The 'T ABA' course¹³² gave adult educators the necessary expertise to implement basic skills training directly in companies or in another work-related context. The French Personal Training Account was introduced in 2015. An individual has the right to 150 hours of training in more than 7 years (24 hours each year for 5 years then 12 hours each year). The Account can be used by the individual to follow any training course (registered in a national list decided mainly by social partners and employers) and is funded via the VET levy (1% of the wage bill for large companies; 0.55% for small companies). The learners keep their salary while being trained.

In the Netherlands language agreements are signed by employers from 2016 onwards, and when joining they need to acknowledge the importance of language skills and make efforts to improve the skills of their employees. In Ireland a new policy framework published in 2018 focuses on providing up-skilling and re-skilling opportunities for those already in employment, with a particular emphasis on learners in lower skilled jobs. Learners can access training directly or through their employer.

Developments in recognition of prior learning

Access to further adult learning can also be constrained because of the lack of recognition of skills and previous learning. In recent years, Cedefop has undertaken extensive work on the validation of non-formal and informal learning¹³³. The ways in which countries deal with the recognition of prior learning differ. For example, in a wide range of countries, validation and recognition is being dealt with as a responsibility of education departments and ministries, while in some countries, labour market institutions have recognition systems in place too. In a group of member states, the third sector is also involved in recognition procedures. When comparing the 2010 and 2014 assessments on whether countries have a national (or where relevant, regional) strategy or policy for validation, it is noticeable that countries developed from indicating they had 'no strategy' in place (half of them) to claiming these procedures are 'in development' (one third).¹³⁴

Qualifications Frameworks¹³⁵ have also made it easier to understand the meaning of qualifications. So far, 35 countries have their own national qualifications frameworks which are linked to the European Qualifications framework. This number increased rapidly between 2011 and 2018.

Summary and emerging issues in relation to access

This section has discussed developments in relation to the EAAL priority concerning widening access by increasing the availability of workplace-based learning and making effective use of ICT, putting in place procedures to identify and assess the skills of low qualified adults, and providing sufficient second-chance opportunities leading to a recognised European Qualification Framework (EQF) qualification for those without EQF level 4 qualifications.

Member States worked on equitable access to adult learning and further flexibilisation of educational pathways to increase accessibility for adults. Specific inequalities were addressed in Member States, for instance by targeting specific disadvantaged groups. In addition, countries reached out to specific economic sectors. In this context, the importance of effective guidance and information systems is mentioned. Specific attention was put on the use of digital tools to increase accessibility and to access learning while working. In this context, Member States put in place train the trainer programmes. In addition, MS continued working on policies on the recognition of prior learning.



The following broader issues emerge in the context of the accessibility of adult learning:

- Access to education is unequal, and official statistical evidence confirms this situation. Nevertheless, a wide range of projects to widen access to under-represented groups can be identified. Core target groups include migrants, low-skilled adults and (young) adult not in employment, education and training (NEETs);
- At the European level, initiatives like the Youth Guarantee and Upskilling Pathways aim to help these groups, and countries have initiated a range of projects, often funded through European funding schemes;
- The idea of flexible provision is being recognised by adult learning experts across Europe, but there is still room for improvement, especially in Eastern European countries which are in need of offering more tailor-made and flexible modes of learning to their adult population. While online and distance education is increasingly implemented in higher education, facilitating the learning of mature students, this flexible mode of learning has not yet reached the same status at other levels or types of adult education;
- Providing workers with time for studying can be an important incentive but remains too much a privilege of employees working in larger companies and those working at the higher occupational levels. Furthermore, participation in education and training has been largely ignored in European debates on work-life balance, although lack of time is generally indicated as the major barrier preventing adults' participation in education and training;
- Recognition of prior learning is increasingly implemented in European countries, in relation to both formal and non-formal education and plays an important part in Upskilling Pathways.

As evidenced in this section, at Member State level, there are developments in terms of making adult learning more accessible to all. These developments are in line with the EAAL priority.



3.5 Developments in quality assurance for adult learning (EAAL priority 4)

As an illustration of the variety of reforms in recent years in relation to this EAAL priority, Table 3.5 provides a non-exhaustive list of short examples. This covers reforms that have improved quality assurance systems, improved initial and continuing education of adult learning professionals, and improved monitoring and responsiveness to labour market needs. In the following sections, a wider set of examples is explored in more detail.

Table 3.5: short descriptions from the countries of reforms in relation to quality assurance in adult learning

Country	Name / Description of policy / programme	Year started / implemented
Austria	Ö-Cert: A quality trademark for adult education providers - allowing for increased transparency, simplified administration, access to financial support for customers/learners and contributes to the quality and professionalisation of adult education ¹³⁶ .	2012
Belgium (FR)	Validation of Competences Consortium: This committee aims to facilitate access and increase flexibility in pathways through the development of validation and valorisation	2013
Cyprus	New Framework of Second Chance Schools: An ad-hoc committee was founded to develop and introduce the framework; this process is still ongoing. The objectives are: (1) to make second chance schools more adult-friendly, (2) to increase participation in adult education and (3) to decrease early school leaving	In development since 2017, expected in 2019
Estonia	Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020: changing the approach to learning, as well as providing competent and motivated teachers.	2014
France	Mandated quality certification (law September 5th, 2018): in order to receive public funding, each provider must meet the national standard quality to the quality certification.	2018
Hungary	Formation of Sector Skills Councils: Greatly increasing the role of employers in the context of adult learning and providing a more accurate response to labour market demands (skills needs)	2018
Ireland	Further Education and Training Strategy: Consisting of five focal areas or 'strategic goals' ¹³⁷ : (1) skills for the economy, (2) active inclusion, literacy and numeracy strategy, (3) quality provision, (4) integrated planning & funding, and (5) standing of VET	2014-2019
	Professional Development Strategy: Aims to build on existing good practice throughout the sector, to develop a professional development framework and structures to support the Education and Training Boards in meeting the Further Education and Training needs of learners, employers and communities ¹³⁸	2017-2019
Latvia	Recognition of competences gained outside formal education: Following cabinet regulation, this allows learners to have skills recognised that were acquired while active on the labour market and to acquire qualification certificates in EQF levels 3 and 4.	2011
Poland	Inclusion of non-formal qualifications into an integrated qualification system following quality assurance provisions of the Act of 22 December 2015 on the Integrated Qualifications System (IQS)	2017

Country	Name / Description of policy / programme	Year started / implemented
Serbia	'JPOA Status' : Publicly recognised adult education organisers: This regulates conditions in terms of programs, personnel, space, equipment and teaching aids in order to enable the acquisition of qualifications and professional competences through non-formal education providers. The list of publicly recognised organisers is updated continually.	2015

Source: Consultation of the Members of the ET 2020 Working Group on Adult Learning in December 2018.

In line with the EAAL priority, an overview is provided of improved quality assurance systems and the improved initial and continuing education of adult learning professionals. Lastly, improved monitoring and responsiveness to labour market needs is discussed.

Developments in relation to quality assurance systems for adult learning

As indicated in the Key messages of the 2011-2013 ET 2020 Thematic Working Group on Adult Learning on quality: *“Good quality adult learning meets the expectations of adult learners, helping them develop the desired skills and knowledge at the desired level. Such expectations can be very diverse, as adults undertake learning for many different purposes (from social and occupational inclusion to career progression, from job change to widening personal interests) with a view to developing skills and knowledge from basic to high level.”*¹³⁹ Quality here is interpreted as defined by the four key dimensions of equity, efficiency, effectiveness and relevance.¹⁴⁰

A 2013 European Commission study already mapped quality assurance systems related to adult learning in Member States. This work was updated in 2018 by making use of the information on quality assurance from the 2017 network of external experts' country reports (see Annex B). When assessing the developments in quality assurance systems between 2013 and 2017 the situation in Europe did not change radically. Change in terms of coverage of the adult learning system by quality assurance systems was only recorded in Portugal with the establishment of the Qualifica centres and their quality assurance systems put in place. The box below showcases new developments within existing quality assurance systems in adult learning in France and Austria.



Eduform: an example in France¹⁴¹

The French policy invested in the establishment of quality requirements for VET qualifications and units. These have been put in place for the public and private training providers that deliver VET qualifications and apprenticeships.

Also, all registered training programmes eligible to be used by the personal training account need to meet these specific quality criteria defined by France competence (September 5th 2018 law).

In France a quality seal in the Ministry of Education and Youth is in place for the public and private organisations that deliver the units of VET qualifications (Eduform).



Ö-Cert in Austria

In Austria since 2011, AT-Cert (Ö-Cert)¹⁴² was founded. AT-Cert was developed by scientists, including representatives of the provinces and of the adult education sector. AT-Cert is a supra-regional model for the recognition of quality assurance measures of adult education organisations. AT-Cert recognises different quality certificates and creates uniform quality standards for education providers all over Austria.

Developments in relation to improving initial and continuing education of adult educators (professionalisation)

With regard to the initial and continuing education of adult educators, a distinction needs to be made between those adult educators involved in formal education programmes (e.g. second change secondary education; VET programmes for adults; higher education) and those adult educators not involved in formal education programmes. For the first group, the regulations and possibilities for initial and continuous training are similar to those for teachers in the formal systems (secondary education, VET and higher education). For the second group, usually no specific arrangements or legal frameworks are established¹⁴³. There are, however, relevant developments to improve the possibilities for the second group of adult educators. In Luxembourg, since 2015 for non-formal adult education, quality is assessed at the level of individual adult trainers. The performance of adult trainers and initial education teachers is assessed with the same criteria. New teaching and evaluation methods have been defined.¹⁴⁴

In Ireland, a Further Education and Training Professional Development Strategy was published in 2017. The strategy identified several priority areas for development, such as management development, technology enhanced learning (TEL), employer engagement and quality assurance. More broadly, interesting initiatives have been taken to better educate and continuously train these adult educators in Europe (see box).

Austria: EBMooc¹⁴⁵

EBmooc is the first open online course for adult education in Austria. It was first carried out in 2017 and has so far reached (as of May 2018) around 5,500 registered participants. In this six-module course (total of 18 hours), teachers and trainers, counsellors, and education managers

can learn the basics and tools of adult digital education through the Internet. Participants do not have to pay anything and can divide the time themselves and receive a confirmation of participation. In addition to the self-study there are also forums, online-meetings (webinars) and accompanying groups for the exchange with other interested parties.

In general, it remains challenging to identify clear developments in relation to professionalisation of adult educators between 2011 and 2018. When there are developments, these remain at a sub-policy level and have not led to a stronger embedding of the possibilities for adult educators in initial and continuous training, or to an increase of the professional profile of adult educators. In some countries, adult education is increasingly supported by volunteers, which is likely to raise debates on the profile of adult educators and the competencies that are required to undertake the job.¹⁴⁶

Developments in relation to monitoring and responsiveness to the labour market needs

Member States have put in place monitoring and evaluation frameworks to assess whether adult learning policies are (still) delivering the envisaged results and whether adjustments are needed. Generally speaking, better monitoring takes place in relation to the formal sector than the non-formal sector. The monitoring systems, however, do focus on similar aspects irrespective of the sector - similar to what is included in EQAVET¹⁴⁷. Although comprehensive information is lacking on whether monitoring and evaluation practices cover the entire adult learning sector in countries, based on the assessment by the network of experts, regular monitoring and evaluation, where results are followed up, is reported as established practice in at least Belgium, Latvia, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Sweden and the UK.¹⁴⁸

In recent years there has been an increasing level of attention towards skills mismatches, skills forecasting and preparing education and training systems to provide the right skills for the future.¹⁴⁹ Within these initiatives, the main focus is on initial education and training systems and on making the qualifications they offer more responsive to changing and future labour market needs. A 2013 Cedefop study¹⁵⁰ explored the feedback mechanisms between initial VET and the labour market and confirmed that there was a diversity of solutions currently applied across Europe, deeply rooted in national traditions.

For adult learning, not many international initiatives have focused on this issue.¹⁵¹ At MS level however, provision is becoming more demand-led, particularly in relation to matching it more closely to the needs of the labour market and employers. In a large group of countries¹⁵² the broader ‘modernisation’ of adult learning provision takes closer account of what the labour market and employers need. Countries also use large-scale surveys of businesses to develop provision that is more in line with demand rather than supply. In particular, the OECD analyses on Adult Skills (PIAAC: Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies) play an important role.¹⁵³

The ET 2020 Working Group on Adult Learning 2017-2018 did identify and discuss several initiatives to align adult learning supply to demand in the period 2011-2018 (see box).

Poland: A large scale study on Human capital:¹⁵⁴

The first edition of the survey ran from 2010 to 2014. The second edition is being implemented between 2017 and 2022. The budgets are €5 million and €3.5 million respectively, funded through ESF. As skills are the drivers of a knowledge-based economy - they create jobs and attract investments - there was a felt need to improve the support provided for skills development and hence to have an updated account of skills needs in terms of demand and supply.

The surveys targeted employers, the general population, training and providers; sectoral research was conducted as well. The surveys are conducted every two years, with smaller mid-term surveys in between to track developments over time. The results of the surveys were intended to be used by key stakeholders: policy makers; practitioners (employers’ organisations and HR, employees (trade unions), investors (foreign), HEIs (shaping curricula)); and scientists.

The survey was based on three basic questions:

- What are Polish employers’ skills needs? (Demand)
- What are the skills of the Polish workforce? (Supply of skills on the labour market)
- How to overcome skills mismatches?

Portugal: System for the anticipation of Qualification Needs (SANQ):¹⁵⁵

This aims to provide a better matching of qualifications at sectoral and regional level taking into account the past match and anticipated future balance between supply and demand. It consists of three components: diagnosis (evolution of the labour market linked to professions and qualifications. Importance of the qualification in the regional labour market); planning (forecasting volume of employment in relation to a given qualification) and regional in-depth analysis (municipalities’ task to identify developments and identify priority areas for skills development).

There is a broad stakeholder base at national, regional and local level. The anticipation takes place at qualification level. This initiative is embedded in a range of skills-development frameworks such as the National Qualifications System; the National catalogue of qualifications; the Qualifica centres (new opportunity centres) focusing on Recognition of Prior Learning; establishment of 16 Sector councils for qualifications. The development of the SANQ is supported by ESF.



Slovenia: Career platform for employees:¹⁵⁶

This is a model enabling forecasting skills needs (sectors, companies, labour market), identification of skills gaps, fulfilment of gaps related to existing VET offer and timely development of “tailor made” programmes that meet the skills needs. It provides consultancy to businesses to

identify long-term goals and identify the skills needs of company employees. It also supports HR staff to develop career-planning. This project is also supported by ESF. The methodology of this project is already more broadly applied in the Competence Centres for HR Development.

Summary and emerging issues in relation to quality assurance

This section has discussed developments in relation to the EAAL priority concerning improving quality assurance, including monitoring and impact assessment, improving initial and continuing education of adult educators, and collecting the necessary data on needs to effectively target and design provision.

Member States implemented regulations and policies to improve quality assurance in adult learning. Also, broader reforms (such as VET reforms) touch upon quality assurance aspects. However, Member States still provide limited opportunities for the professionalisation of adult learning staff. Quality assurance and developing a quality culture in adult learning is slowly developing, partly under influence of EQAVET. Member States also worked on better data on labour market responsiveness of adult learning programmes and better monitoring and evaluation policies in adult learning.

The quality assurance and professional development of the adult learning workforce remains a challenging topic. Despite the emphasis especially at the beginning of the period (2011-2013), there is limited evidence that progress has been made to substantially increase the quality and the professional status of adult educators. This is partly caused by the fragmented nature of the adult learning sector. There is no single quality assurance mechanism that would be applicable to all contexts in which adult learning takes place (as distinct from primary and general secondary education quality assurance and inspectorate systems).

This also is related to the professionalism of adult educators. Establishing requirements might work in one area of adult learning (for instance training leading to a formal qualification) but might harm other parts of the sector (for instance when it concerns more non-formal provision such as professional mentoring). There is evidence that adult learning is more aligned with labour market needs.



The following broader issues emerge in the context of the quality of adult learning:

- There are increasingly blurred lines between the roles that adult learning professionals can play and what volunteers can do, especially when adult learning is more and more applied as a means to solve (social) issues.
- Member States still provide limited opportunities for the professionalisation of adult learning staff. There are, however, some interesting online initiatives in this regard.
- Quality assurance and developing a quality culture in adult learning is slowly developing, partly under influence of EQAVET.

As evidenced in this section, at Member State level, there are developments in terms of improving quality assurance systems for adult learning. These developments are in line with the EAAL priority.

3.6 Final remarks and other developments in adult learning

The previous sections highlighted developments in relation to the EAAL and found evidence that countries are working on the EAAL priorities. Although in these reforms the EAAL is not often directly mentioned, many European level initiatives have been referred to in relation to the developments (such as recommendations, funding programmes and analytical work). In relation to European support to adult learning some critical reflections can be provided:

- While it is positive that the European Commission provides funding for basic skills related projects, for example through the European Social Fund, this might also involve a risk. Stakeholders might carry out a project, but once the initiative finishes, there might be no long-term follow-up, or embedding of the projects into sustainable policies.
- The EU set the target of 15% adult participation in learning by 2020. In an open method of coordination process it is good to set targets¹⁵⁷, but evidence is lacking concerning whether reaching the overall and national targets is actually feasible, or under which conditions it would be feasible. This also relates to a disconnect between the policies developed and how they contribute to reaching the targets.
- Evidence of the impact of European-supported initiatives is often not available. Sometimes even the outcomes are not effectively disseminated and mainstreamed or even available for a wider public. For instance, websites of finalised Erasmus+ projects might no longer be available, meaning that the evidence or training materials generated in these initiatives have likely disappeared too. It is therefore positive that EPALE, with over 50,000 members, more and more fulfils the role of repository of sources (also of Erasmus+ results) and exchange platform in the field of adult learning.

A broader development to be taken into account concerns environmental challenges or, to put it more broadly, sustainability challenges and the relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDG; especially SDG 4 calling on countries to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.'). Many of the 17 goals are relevant for adult learning to establish sustainable societies. The Education 2030 Framework for Action goes further, calling on countries to provide '*lifelong learning opportunities for youth and adults*' and stressing that lifelong learning '*encompasses formal, non-formal and informal learning*'.¹⁵⁸ The SDG could work as 'guiding lights' for the orientation on post 2020 priorities for adult learning in Europe. Furthermore, the contribution of adult learning through the development of peoples' skills and competence, in the implementation of other European strategies (for instance on innovation, greening, economic and social policies and democratic values) could be better recognised.



4. Key messages from the stocktaking exercise

Attention of policy makers towards adult learning has generally increased and the policy area of adult learning is significantly broadened, being associated with more situation in which adults learn

The stocktaking shows that in the period 2011-2018 adult learning received an increasing level of attention at European level and in many European countries. After the adoption by the Commission of the EAAL in 2011, adult learning as a policy area has significantly broadened, capturing the learning of adults in areas that would previously not be associated strongly with adult learning. This concerns the recognition that adults learn in VET and HE and that requires more tailored policies. The same can be said for entrepreneurship and employment policies, social policies, cultural policies, policies on digital society, sport and tourism policies, health care policies, integration policies, public safety policies etc. - which are strongly related to the expansion of non-formal education. This development also hints at the inherent fragmentation of adult learning policy and provision in countries where different policy areas have different policies that relate to specific forms of adult learning in terms of learning objectives, content offered, forms of organising learning and settings in which learning takes place.

There is an increased felt need for functioning adult learning systems that respond to national and EU challenges in fast-changing contexts (changing nature of work; automation; demographic development)

The importance of adult learning for achieving smart, inclusive, innovative and sustainable growth is more and more accepted by Member States and national level stakeholders. This comes across even more strongly in debates on the future of work and the impact of digitalisation and demographics. Moreover, reviewing the role of adult learning in the context of the SDGs further emphasised the importance in further strengthening adult learning policies and provision as adult learning can contribute to pursuing many of the other SDGs.

At EU level in the period 2011-2018, initiatives have been implemented that supported EU countries to work in line with the EAAL priorities

At EU level, the European Commission is responsible for a number of initiatives that supported Member States working on the EAAL priorities:



Governance of adult learning (EAAL priority 1):

In line with the EAAL priority, the European Commission has published guidance materials (studies etc.) to support improvements in the governance of adult learning¹⁵⁹. Furthermore, all the ET 2020 Working Groups on Adult Learning have addressed governance and financing issues in their recommendations.



Supply and take up of provision in adult learning (EAAL priority 2):

In recent years this EAAL priority was specifically addressed, in particular by the Council recommendation on Upskilling Pathways¹⁶⁰. In order to help them achieve increased levels of basic skill (literacy, numeracy and digital), low educated /low qualified are to be offered a skills assessment which should be the basis of a tailored offer of learning; skills acquired should be validated; adequate guidance and support to learners should be made available. The main findings of the European Commission's stock taking of the Member States proposed measures are that

- 1) still more action is needed by Member States and all stakeholders to increase the volume of the upskilling offer to match the scale of the challenge;
- 2) basic skills need to be addressed more explicitly;
- 3) attention to assessment of existing skills and prior learning as a basis for developing tailored learning pathways is required;
- 4) plans to coordinate and join up current and new opportunities need to be intensified; and finally,
- 5) future funding for Upskilling Pathways needs close monitoring to ensure that it leads to sustainable systems to develop lifelong learning for all in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights.



Access to adult learning (EAAL priority 3):

In line with this EAAL priority, the European Commission through Erasmus+ projects encourages further flexibilisation not only of adult learning, but also of VET and higher education programmes to increase adult participation (e.g. 2015-217 project on work-based training in the school-to-work transition process¹⁶¹). Furthermore, the European Commission and its agencies have conducted studies on adult learning in VET and higher education. Using digital tools to improve access to adult learning has been the topic of the 2015-2017 Working Group on Adult learning. The group provided recommendations about how better use could be made of digital resources for adult learning. The topic has also been the subject of studies.¹⁶² Moreover adult learning at the workplace was a key focus of the 2016-2018 Working Group on Adult Learning. Finally, recognition of prior learning plays an important role in many policy developments (for instance Upskilling Pathways) and analytical work (see for instance the regular Cedefop monitoring reports the use of validation of non-formal and informal learning). The 2012 Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning is due to be implemented by 2018).



Quality assurance for adult learning (EAAL priority 4):

In line with the EAAL priority, the European Commission devoted one of the thematic Working Groups to quality in adult learning (ET2 020 Working Group 2011-2013) and devoted a study on quality in adult learning¹⁶³. Furthermore, the EQAVET framework provides a relevant framework for adult learning providers and systems, and EPALE is a major initiative to professionalise the sector. Finally, Erasmus+ supports the continuous professional development of adult educators.

In the Member States, developments have taken place in line with the EAAL priorities: changing and improving governance arrangements; implementing specific approaches to reach out to specific groups; developing more tailored and digital provision; and developing Quality Assurance mechanisms

Although MS texts do not refer explicitly to the EAAL priorities, in the period 2011–2018, several policies have been developed and implemented that are in line with them:

- In the area of **governance (EAAL priority 1)**, Member States updated and improved their VET and adult learning legislation and established better coordination mechanisms. Furthermore, adult learning is now being understood more holistically as any ‘learning by adults’, and not being confined to specific sectors or systems, thus challenging traditional coordination and governance models. Based on a survey of experts¹⁶⁴, asking them how public funding for adult learning has evolved since 2010, almost half of the country experts indicated that public funding for adult learning has increased between 2011 and 2018. This is partly the case due to a broader conception of adult learning spanning ministerial responsibilities. European funding still plays an important role in the funding of adult learning in many countries, which has implications for the long-term sustainability and development of the sector. There seems to be a renewed impetus for individual learning accounts as a strategy to encourage adults back into learning. The governance and policy frameworks also show that adult learning might sometimes be ‘hidden’ under other policies and frameworks, making it difficult to recognise it as a specific sector. Policy frameworks for adult learning still show signs of fragmentation and are not always well aligned between sectors, policy areas and legal frameworks related with adult learning. Despite the level of fragmentation, multi-governance working is a key strength of adult learning systems in the EU 28 as there is a notable increase in partnership working in this policy field across different agencies and levels, particularly over the last 3-5 years.
- In the area of **supply and take up of provision (EAAL priority 2)**, Member States implemented different strategies, types of provision and supporting measures to improve chances for adults, especially specific vulnerable groups, to participate in learning. The current migration situation has led countries to develop programmes specifically tailored towards those in need of language courses, although general citizenship courses were found to be implemented as well. Several initiatives focussed on digital skills and workplace learning and guidance and outreach initiatives have gained ground in several countries. Furthermore, Member States that see the need to expand guidance structures within existing structures as many countries acknowledge the need for improvements in the areas of outreach and guidance.
- In the area of **access to adult learning (EAAL priority 3)**, Member States worked on equitable access to adult learning and further flexibilisation of educational pathways to increase accessibility for adults. Specific inequalities were addressed in Member States, for instance by targeting specific disadvantaged groups. In addition, countries reached out to specific economic sectors. In this context, the importance of effective guidance and information systems is mentioned. Specific attention was put on the use of digital tools to increase accessibility and to access learning while working. In this context, Member States put in place train the trainer programmes. In addition, MS continued working on policies on the recognition of prior learning.
- In the area of **quality assurance for adult learning (EAAL priority 4)**, Member States implemented regulations and policies to improve quality assurance in adult learning. Also, broader reforms (such as VET reforms) touch upon quality assurance aspects. However, Member States still provide limited opportunities for the professionalisation of adult learning staff. Quality assurance and developing a quality culture in adult learning is slowly developing, partly under influence of EQAVET. Member States also worked on better data on labour market responsiveness of adult learning programmes and better monitoring and evaluation policies in adult learning.

Still, despite efforts at EU and Member State level, the participation rate of adults in learning (as measured by the Labour Force Survey) has not significantly increased over this period. The EU Adult Education Survey and the EU Continuing Vocational Training Survey on the other hand show a more positive development in adult learning participation in Europe

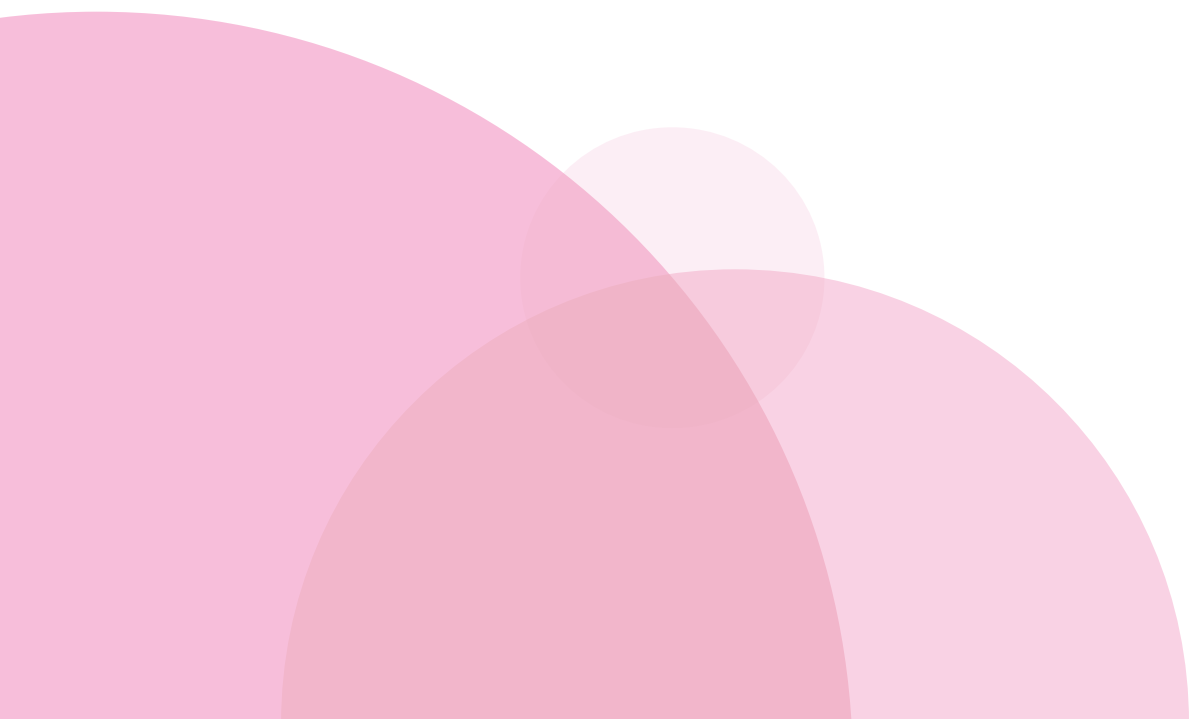
Despite the European and national initiatives and developments, the rate of adult participation in learning, as measured by the Labour Force Survey has not increased sufficiently to reach the target set for 2020 of 15% and many Member States are still very far from attaining the 15% participation benchmark.

The current indicator (EU-LFS) seems not fully capable of capturing the effects of major policy reforms

The stocktaking did not include a critical analysis of the reasons why this is the case but suggests that the current indicator is not fully capable of capturing the effects of major policy reforms. It remains the case that a future EU policy framework could pay more attention to how the priorities together contribute to reaching targets set.

The stocktaking has identified several areas that still require further policy attention at MS and EU level. This relates to conditions for adult learning, specific target groups, and specific focus areas

The stocktaking identified some progress, but also areas that still need further work to make adult learning a reality in the post 2020 context for every adult in Europe.¹⁶⁵ These development areas can be split into enabling conditions; specific focus areas; and specific target groups.



Enabling conditions: what structures and systems need improvement?

Adult learning policy and provision should be based upon a recognition of the fact that it is of benefit for individuals, employers and society. Adult learning should be seen not as a burden (in terms of time, money), but as an investment that pays off for all - there is no learning without benefits. This requires the further development of a culture of learning throughout life, in the economy and society, and to make all aware of the benefits of learning. To progress in this direction, the stocktaking identified the following enabling conditions that need further attention post-2020:

- **Financing:** while finance for other educational sectors broadly increased in the last decade, for adult learning this is not the case. This is despite the fact that more and more policy attention is being placed on adult learning. It is by far the least well publicly funded sector of education, despite covering the largest group of learners, and is faced with the more profound challenges in reaching and activating them, especially those that need education and training the most. A priority for post-2020 is therefore to explore the possibilities of rebalancing expenditure on the different sectors of education and training and increasing financial contributions to adult learning from government and employers.

In addition, the way adult learning is financed needs to fit better with the objective of encouraging adult learning; this could mean that for specific purposes more demand-side funding (such as through individual learning accounts) could be provided.

Finally, the use of European funding in adult learning could be reconsidered. There is sometimes a dependency on EU funding to support regular adult learning policies (substitution). Many smaller projects do not seem to have a wider impact and this aspect of EU funding could be made more effective.

- **Coordination:** in the period 2011-2018, adult learning has received a wider consideration from policy makers in different policies areas. It is recognised that adults learn in a wide range of environments, under different conditions, and under different policy frameworks. Adult

learning policy and provision is in many countries fragmented ; still more could be done to establish effective national coordination mechanisms and to improve the coordination of approaches between policy fields.

- **Engagement with employers:** the stocktaking noted that adults learn in different contexts. The working context is a very important one, as people spend much time working. In order to stimulate the learning of adults, employers need to be made aware that the learning of their employees is of benefit to them as well. This could mean encouraging social partners to re-think how they encourage employees to learn, and to engage in discussions on how the costs of learning can be shared between the individual, the employer and the state.
- **Professionalisation of adult learning staff and institutions:** the stocktaking identified policy developments in the area of quality assurance, professionalisation and monitoring and evaluation of adult learning but also identified this as an area in need of further action. Adult learning provision should be of high quality, meaning that it is relevant for the individual, the labour market and society, it should be delivered by quality trainers, and regularly evaluated. The professional status of adult learning staff can be further boosted through further working on national competence profiles, standards, CPD opportunities at national and international level.

Specific focus areas: what aspects of adult learning provision need additional attention?

Adult learning policies should pay attention to the following specific areas:

- **Inclusive societies:**

adult learning provision could do more to facilitate the acquisition of key competences and thereby contribute to more inclusive societies. This relates for instance to critical thinking to support in understanding of fake news.

- **Digital societies:**

adult learning can focus even more on the use of digital tools, both to educate and train adults to use digital tools, but also to use digital tools more widely and effectively for educational purposes. This also requires adult learning professionals to further develop in this area.

- **Learning workplaces:**

adult learning policy could stimulate even more work-based learning and promote the workplace as a place of learning for all (not only for young people in an initial VET programme).

Target groups: which adults need specific attention?

Adult learning should be for all. This means that all adults should be provided with appropriate opportunities for learning under the right conditions. These conditions differ according to the target group. There are those that express their own learning needs; there are those who can afford to pay for it themselves; there are those that are not in such a position. The conditions will need to be in place to provide the right situation for all to learn. Adult learning should not be perceived as a way to solve a 'skills deficit', but more holistically as something that is intrinsically valuable for each and every person. In this, specific target groups, all requiring a specific mix of policy interventions to reach out to them in an effective way could be: people with a migrant background; people who have been out of education and training pathways for a long time; people lacking basic skills; people out of employment; and people below or at the poverty threshold.

All in all, in the post 2020 context, national, European and global priorities in many policy areas (economy, innovation, social, environment, justice), should better recognise the role and contribution of adult learning. For realising future objectives people need skills. Skills that are provided through adult learning systems.





Annexes

Annex A:

Priorities and vision for Adult Learning in 2020 as expressed in the European Agenda for Adult Learning

Council Resolution on a renewed European agenda for adult learning (OJ C 372, 20.12.2011)

The adoption of a renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning which will continue, complement and consolidate work in the field of adult learning under the four strategic objectives identified by the Council in the 'ET2020' strategic framework. While initially focusing on the period 2012-14 (see the Annex hereto), this Agenda should be seen in the context of a longer-term vision for adult learning which — in the period up to 2020 — will endeavour to raise the sector's profile in general and, more specifically, to:

- i. enhance the possibilities for adults, regardless of gender and their personal and family circumstances, to access high-quality learning opportunities at any time in their lives, in order to promote personal and professional development, empowerment, adaptability, employability and active participation in society;
- ii. develop a new approach to adult education and training which focuses on learning outcomes and learner responsibility and autonomy;
- iii. foster greater awareness among adults that learning is a lifelong endeavour which they should pursue at regular intervals during their lives, and particularly during periods of unemployment or career transition;
- iv. encourage the development of effective lifelong guidance systems, as well as integrated systems for the validation of non-formal and informal learning;
- v. ensure the comprehensive provision of high-quality formal and non-formal education and training for adults aimed at acquiring key competences or leading to qualifications at all levels of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), supported by civil society and the social partners, as well as by local authorities;
- vi. ensure flexible arrangements adapted to different training needs of adults, including in-company training and workplace-based learning;
- vii. foster greater awareness among employers that adult learning contributes to promoting productivity, competitiveness, creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship, and is an important factor in enhancing the employability and labour market mobility of their employees;
- viii. encourage higher education institutions to embrace less traditional groups of learners, such as adult learners, as a means of displaying social responsibility and greater openness towards the community at large, as well as responding to demographic challenges and to the demands of an ageing society;
- ix. promote the role of social partners and civil society in articulating training needs and developing learning opportunities for adults, as well as optimise the involvement of central, regional and local authorities;
- x. promote a balanced allocation of education and training resources throughout the life cycle on the basis of shared responsibilities and strong public commitment, particularly to second-chance opportunities and the development of basic skills;

- xi. involve social partners and raise their awareness of the benefits, also to them, of learning in the workplace, including basic skills provision;
- xii. make well-developed learning provision for seniors, in order to promote active, autonomous, and healthy ageing, and which uses their knowledge, experience, social and cultural capital for the benefit of society as a whole;
- xiii. make a strong commitment to promoting adult learning as a means of fostering solidarity between different age groups (for example, by means of an 'intergenerational pact') and between cultures and people of all backgrounds.



Annex B:

Quality assurance systems

Table C.1 indicates whether quality systems – at macro level – were found in a particular country for formal adult learning (and more specifically HE, VET, and second chance education) and non-formal learning (and more specifically VET, basic skills, and liberal learning). A cross (X) indicates that there is evidence that a quality system is in place for that particular sub domain (having some form of policies, procedures, rules, criteria, tools, and verification instruments implemented that have the purpose of ensuring and enhancing the quality provided by any adult learning provider) . The last column provides an overall assessment.

Table C.1: Overview of quality systems at macro level related to adult learning, covering formal and non-formal learning

	Formal			Non-formal (publicly financed)			Overall assessment on the existing of quality systems assuring quality in non-formal publicly funded adult learning (-, -/+, +)
	HE	VET	Second.	VET	Basic skills	Other (liberal)	
AT	X	X	X	X	X	X	(+)
BE	X	X	X	X	X	X	(+)
BG	X	X	X	0	0	0	(-)
CY	X	X	X	X	0	0	(-)
CZ	X	X	X	X	0	0	(-/+)
DE	X	X	X	X	0	0	(-/+)
DK	X	X	X	X	X	X	(+)
EE	X	X	X	X	0	0	(+)
EL	X	X	X	X	0	0	(-/+)
ES	X	X	X	0	0	0	(-/+)
FI	X	X	X	X	X	X	(+)
FR	X	X	X	0	0	0	(-)
HR	X	X	X	0	0	0	(-)
HU	X	X	X	X	X	X	(+)
IE	X	X	X	0	X	X	(+)
IT	X	X	X	0	0	0	(-)
LT	X	X	X	0	0	0	(-)
LU	X	X	X	X	X	X	(+)
LV	X	X	X	X	X	0	(+)
MT	X	X	X	0	X	0	(-/+)
NL	X	X	X	0	0	0	(-/+)
PL	X	X	X	X	0	0	(-/+)
PT	X	X	X	X	X	0	(+)
RO	X	X	X	X	0	0	(-)
SE	X	X	X	X	X	X	(+)
SI	X	X	X	0	0	0	(-/+)
SK	X	X	X	0	0	0	(-)
UK	X	X	X	0	X	X	(+)

Source: Panteia (2013), Developing the adult learning sector: Quality in the Adult Learning Sector (Lot 1), p. 27-29. 2017 country reports.

Annex C:

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- 79 See Cedefop database on financing adult learning: <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/FinancingAdultLearning/>
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- 92 See Ecorys (2019), Adult Learning policy and provision in the Member States of the EU: A synthesis of reports by country experts (section 5.4 (summary)).
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- The typology constructed by Boeren and Whittaker (2018) focussed explicitly on provision available for low-qualified adults in Europe. Hefler and Markowitsch (2012) worked around workplace learning. See: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/national-description_en; European Commission (not published), analysis of National Coordinators' final reports; Boeren, E. & Whittaker, S. (2018). A typology of education and training provisions for low educated adults: categories and definitions. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 50(1), 4-18; Desjardins, R., 2017. Political economy of adult learning systems comparative study of strategies, policies and constraints. London: Bloomsbury; Myers, K., Conte, N., and Rubenson, K., 2014. Adult learning typology: adult learning and returns to training project. Ottawa: Social Research and Demonstration Cooperation; <http://uil.unesco.org/adult-education/unesco-recommendation>; Hefler, G., and Markowitsch, J., 2012. The qualification-providing enterprise? Support for formal adult education in small and medium-sized enterprises. In S. Riddell, J. Markowitsch & E. Weedon (Eds.), *Lifelong learning in Europe: equity and efficiency in the balance* (pp. 103–124). Bristol: Policy Press.
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- 108 Member States have been invited by the European Commission to construct their national digital skills strategy and has launched Digital Skills and Job Coalitions (<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/digital-skills-jobs-coalition>). A database contains a number of good practices in relation to digital skills initiatives for education, the labour market, all citizens and ICT professionals. A European Digital Skills Awards has been introduced to put projects helping people to increase their digital skills into the spotlights. Examples include industry-led training initiatives, the certification of IT skills and the implementation of digital skills in existing education and training curricula. Furthermore, a number of European funded projects have specifically focussed on the area of digital education, for example: MOTech – Motivating new technologies for adult education in rural areas (http://www.e-seniors.asso.fr/Motech_Flyer.pdf).
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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/738922/Essential_digital_skills_framework.pdf
- 112 <http://www.connectlatvia.lv>
- 113 For example, the Leonardo da Vinci project BAGRu (<http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/eplu-project-details/#project/bab728c7-97d5-452b-983e-ed154bb587c1>). The project Literacy@Work (Literacy@Work http://www.solidar.org/system/downloads/attachments/000/000/061/original/2015_07_27_case_studies_bfi.pdf?1457601204). LIT.VOC (Lit.Voc <https://eaea.org/our-work/projects/literacy-and-vocation-lit-voc/>). Basic skills training in the workplace was also the core focus of the European project WoLLNET (WoLLNET <http://www.wollnet.org/>). Workplace literacy was also the focus of the CELINE (CELINE project <http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/eplu-project-details/#project/dba07a73-dd4f-4575-9f92-2dede0f00f5f>). Ar.Key (Ar.Key <http://www.arkeyproject.eu/?idioma=1>) – a project on augmented reality (AR) applied to training on key competences targeted low-qualified adults
- 114 http://www.eli-net.eu/fileadmin/ELINET/Redaktion/user_upload/Bulgaria_Adults_Report.pdf
- 115 <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1079>
- 116 <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1176> The financial and economic crisis of the late 2000s has especially hit young adults. The Youth Guarantee aims to help young adults until the age of 25, but in a range of countries, this upper age limit has been extended until 29 or 30. The overall aim of the Youth Guarantee Scheme is to make these young adults an offer for employment, education, training or an apprenticeship four months after their intake in the programme.
- 117 The Youth Guarantee and Youth Employment Initiative three years on <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52016D0646>
- 118 EU projects on guidance: The Guidance and Orientation for Adult Learners project – project GOAL (<http://www.projectgoal.eu/>) – was carried out in six European countries and worked towards the development of guidance services accessible for low-educated adults with the aim to help them towards achieving their employment and/or education related ambitions. The project revealed that many adults using the services encountered informational barriers and were unaware of the wide range of learning opportunities available to them. This underlines the nature of the fragmented adult education and training landscape in Europe which is difficult to navigate and understand especially for the most vulnerable adults in society. The Grundtvig network on Outreach Empowerment and Diversity (OED) (<https://eaea.org/project/implementing-outreach-empowerment-and-diversity-imploed/>) has been followed up by the imploED project, focussing on generating impact and implementing initiatives in the area of outreach and empowerment. A set of policy recommendations have been published, which have been targeted to policy makers at the European level and the national level, and to adult education institutions. An extensive overview of good practice examples has been made available too. Both imploED and project GOAL strongly focussed on the role of building partnerships with a wide range of relevant stakeholders and to provide more help in navigating the complex and fragmented structures of adult education provision.
- 119 <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1224>
- 120 www.aulamentor.es
- 121 Description taken from the following report (slight adjustment by author): OECD (2018), *OECD Skills Strategy Implementation Guidance for Portugal*.
- 122 <https://www.justarrived.lu/en/reference/house-orientation/>
- 123 <https://qualificaportugal.pt/>
- 124 http://www.opinovi.fi/english/opin_ovi_projects.html
- 125 According the newest Eurostat data (2018 provisional data) there is only 3.1% early school leavers in Croatia, 4.0% in Slovenia, 4.7% in Poland, 4.8% in Lithuania and 6.4% in Czech Republic (average for EU is 10.6%). Latvia and Slovakia also have achievements that are better than the EU average.
- 126 According the newest Eurostat data in Poland there is 95,3% of people aged 30-34 with at least upper secondary attainment level, in Czechia 94.4%, in Slovenia 94.4%, in Lithuania 94.0, in Croatia 93.0%, in Slovakia 91.6% , while EU average is 83,4%.
- 127 Boeren, E., (2016), *Lifelong Learning Participation in a Changing Policy Context An Interdisciplinary Theory*. Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- 128 The 2011 report 'Impact of ongoing reforms in education and training on the adult learning sector' provided several categories in relation to flexibilization: (1) flexibility of admissions, (2) flexibility of attendance and of delivery, (3) flexibility of location, (4) flexibility of duration, (5) flexibility of recruitment. Research voor Beleid (2011), 'Impact of ongoing reforms in education and training on the adult learning sector.'
- 129 Description taken from the following website (slight adjustment by author):
<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/Further-Education-and-Training/Back-to-Education-Initiative-BTEI/>

- 130 www.aulamentor.es
- 131 The European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU) acts as an advocacy group for stronger inclusion of flexible lifelong learning modes in tertiary education. The IDEAL project 'Impact of Distance Education on Adult Learning' was funded by the European Commission.
- 132 www.bfi.tirol/fileadmin/PDF/Projekte/TABA_Lehrgangsfolder_digital.pdf
- 133 <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning>
- 134 See: <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/data-visualisations/european-database-on-validation-of-non-formal-and-informal-learning>
- 135 <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-efq>
- 136 <https://ec.europa.eu/epale/en/organisations/o-cert-overall-framework-quality-adult-education-austria-5>
- 137 <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Further-Education-and-Training-Strategy-2014-2019.pdf>
- 138 <http://www.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/SolasFETPDS.pdf> (p7)
- 139 European Commission (2013), Thematic Working Group on Quality in Adult Learning Final Report: Policy Summary 24th October 2013, p. 3.
- 140 This definition of quality is proposed in UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2009), Global Report on Adult Learning. Hamburg: UIL. Cf. section 2.2 in Research voor Beleid (2013), Developing the adult learning sector: Quality in the Adult Learning Sector (Lot 1), p. 12. Equity - equitable access to and participation in education and training; Relevance - provision must represent an effective route to and support, persistence in adult learning to the achievement of individual and societal goals; Effectiveness - means end relationships in terms of educational outcomes for learners. Completion rates and achievement levels are hard indicators of effectiveness; Efficiency - level and distribution of resources and the economical investment of resources to achieve specified aim under given condition: ratio of cost to benefits; Sustainability - results of learning should be sustainable in the long term and should not harm the environment or society at large.
- 141 Description taken from the following report (slight adjustment by author): European Commission (2018), Promoting adult learning in the workplace. Final report of the ET 2020 Working Group 2016 – 2018 on Adult Learning, p. 41.
- 142 <https://oe-cert.at>
- 143 See the Eurydice country database, section 9.7-9-9: for instance on Austria: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/initial-education-teachers-and-trainers-working-adult-education-and-training-1_en
- 144 The provisions of the grand-ducal regulation of October 24th, 2011, regulating the training of adult trainers will no longer be valid for adult trainers recruited for 2016-2017 academic year. The dispositions of the Law of July 30th, 2015 (cf. art. 6, p. 3912) will be applicable. See: INFPC (2016). Supporting teachers and trainers for successful reforms and quality of vocational education and training: mapping their professional development in the EU – Luxembourg. Cedefop ReferNet thematic perspectives series, p.15, https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2016/ReferNet_LU_TT.pdf
- 145 Description taken from the following website (slight adjustment by author): <https://erwachsenenbildung.at/ebmooc/>. EBMooc is running on <http://imoox.at/>
- 146 See for instance in the Netherlands in Dutch courses: <https://www.taalvoorhetleven.nl/taalvrijwilliger/vrijwilliger-worden/>
- 147 <https://www.eqavet.eu/>
- 148 See Ecorys (2019), Adult Learning policy and provision in the Member States of the EU: A synthesis of reports by country experts (section 5.3).
- 149 See the work of Cedefop on skills forecast (<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/data-visualisations/skills-forecast>); the Skills panorama (<https://skillspanorama.cedefop.europa.eu/en>); the work of the OECD on the future of work (<http://www.oecd.org/employment/future-of-work/>).
- 150 Cedefop (2013), Renewing VET provision: Understanding feedback mechanisms between initial VET and the labour market. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop research paper; No 37. http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/5537_en.pdf, figure p. 25.
- 151 A positive example is the EMSAAL initiative of ITC-ILO, sponsored by the lifelong learning programme in 2012 focussing on skills anticipation in adult learning: <http://emsaal.itcilo.org/>
- 152 As identified by the network of experts: Ecorys (2019), Adult Learning policy and provision in the Member States of the EU: A synthesis of reports by country experts (section 7.1).
- 153 <https://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/>
- 154 Description taken from the following report (slight adjustment by author): European Commission ET2020 Working Group on Adult Learning (2017), Report Peer Learning Activity: Policies aiming to ensure that workplace learning provides the skills needed.
- 155 Description taken from the following report (slight adjustment by author): European Commission ET2020 Working Group on Adult Learning (2017), Report Peer Learning Activity: Policies aiming to ensure that workplace learning provides the skills needed.
- 156 Description taken from the following report (slight adjustment by author): European Commission ET2020 Working Group on Adult Learning (2017), Report Peer Learning Activity: Policies aiming to ensure that workplace learning provides the skills needed.
- 157 One condition for a successful OMC. See: Research voor Beleid (2011), Impact of ongoing reforms in education and training on the adult learning sector.
- 158 UNESCO (2015), Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all. Paris. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002432/243278e.pdf>
- 159 For instance: ICF (2015), An in-depth analysis of adult learning policies and their effectiveness in Europe.
- 160 <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1224>
- 161 <http://www.workbasedtraining.eu/en/>
- 162 For instance: Ecorys (2015), Adult Learners in Digital Learning Environments.
- 163 Research voor Beleid (2013) Developing the adult learning sector: Quality in the Adult Learning Sector.
- 164 See Ecorys (2019), Adult Learning policy and provision in the Member States of the EU: A synthesis of reports by country experts (section 6.4).
- 165 European Council (2011), Council Resolution on a renewed European agenda for adult learning (2011/C 372/01).

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In 2011 the Council of the European Union adopted a renewed European Agenda on Adult Learning (EAAL) as part of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020). Since 2015, the EAAL defined four priorities to work on in adult learning policies, namely, governance; increasing supply and take up; more flexible and wider access; and finally, quality.

Given the mandate of the ET 2020 Working Group on Adult Learning, which includes identifying policy priorities in adult learning for the period after 2020, it is an opportune time to take stock of the achievement in the period 2011-2018, and to learn about what new priorities are emerging. This report takes stock of the achievements and identifies emerging topics and priorities for the post-2020 period.

The report concludes that attention of policy makers towards adult learning has generally increased and that there is an increased felt need for functioning adult learning systems. Furthermore, **at EU level initiatives have been implemented that supported EU countries to work in line with the EAAL priorities** and at MS level, developments have taken place in line with the EAAL priorities. Still, despite efforts at EU and Member State level, the participation rate of adults in learning (as measured by the Labour Force Survey) has not significantly increased over this period. Finally, the stocktaking has identified several areas that still require further policy attention at MS and EU level. This relates to conditions for adult learning, specific target groups, and specific focus areas.

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