



**Grundtvig Learning Partnership-
Improving Participation in Adult Education**

MINUTES of the Transnational Meeting - 16 -19 July 2015

BRUSSELS / BELGIUM - HOST: EU WAREHOUSE

The final transnational meeting of the Grundtvig learning partnership “Improving Participation in Adult Education” took place in Brussels, Belgium, on the premises of the “Vertretung der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft in Belgien” in Brussels.

At the occasion of the final meeting the partners reviewed their work done so far and continued to exchange and learn from practice. The final meeting was mainly focusing on European level aspects of the participation topic, “access and choice”, some marketing perspectives as well as workshops on finalizing the policy-level recommendations.

After welcoming the partners and presenting the achievements of the partnership so far, EU WAREHOUSE presented new input on participation aspects on European level: “structural, situational and psychological barriers / good and best practices: European level aspects”.

The IPAE-topics were connected to the EU2020-strategy priorities and the EU headline targets on employment, early school leaving etc. as well as to the seven flagship initiatives, from which “Youth on the move” and “An agenda for new skills and jobs” are relevant to the project topic.

With regards to promoting Adult Learning on EU-level, EU countries have set a target for adult learning: by 2020, 15% of adults aged 25-64 should be taking part. In 2012, average participation was 9% and only 5 EU countries had reached the target rate. More adult learning can help Europe overcome the economic crisis, meet the need for new skills, and keep its ageing workforce productive. Learning is also essential for social inclusion and active citizenship. These days, people cannot just rely on the skills they acquired at school to last them till the end of their working life. The participation of adults in learning varies significantly between EU countries: from 1.4% to 31.6% (2012 figures), and the overall trend is that numbers are stagnating. Participation rates are especially disappointing for low-skilled and older adults. Action at European level will increase knowledge about



successful policies, provide support, and enable a better exchange of experiences between countries.

EU WAREHOUSE related IPAE further to the Adult Education Survey (AES). AES is a household survey which is part of the EU Statistics on lifelong learning. People living in private households are interviewed about their participation in education and training activities (formal, non-formal and informal learning). The target population of the survey is composed of people aged 25 to 64. The survey takes place every five years and its results are published on Eurostat website

The Eurydice report 2015 demonstrates that participation in lifelong learning is influenced by several factors, including education level, employment status, age and skills. More highly educated and better-employed staff are more likely to have opportunities to access education programmes. For less well-educated and low-income citizens, education is a more difficult proposition. When asked about the obstacles to their participation in lifelong learning, nearly 40 % of these respondents stated that they didn't need it for their job. This indicates that many do not believe they have the opportunity to develop in their career, and also shows that they attach little value to the idea of learning for learning's sake. 22 % also stated that they did not have time for education because of family responsibilities, while a further 13 % considered provision to be unaffordable.

It was very interesting to observe for the partners, how the discussions and findings on European level correspond to the work done in the framework of the IPAE-project. The Eurydice report 2015 also stated, that "these findings leave several questions unanswered. Most importantly, should "lack of interest" be considered as an inevitable reality – an individual's state that has to be accepted? Or could it be taken up as a challenge to make adult education more appealing? And given the failure of lifelong learning provision to reach less well-educated citizens, are policies appropriately targeted to those most in need? For example is online information reaching – or missing – its intended audience (and does it have a specific audience in mind)? And in our communities, are we supporting family members and friends who show an interest in pursuing lifelong learning, particularly those people who have only attained the most basic education?"



Through a comprehensive overview of policies and data related to the renewed European agenda for adult learning, this Eurydice report aims to support the exchange of policy and practice between countries. The report concentrates on measures to ensure that the most vulnerable groups of adult learners, in particular those with low basic skills or insufficient qualifications, have appropriate access to lifelong learning opportunities. We went through chosen aspects of the report's six chapters, which provides data on adult education and training, national policy commitments to adult learning, main types of publicly subsidised programmes, learning flexibility and progression pathways, outreach initiatives and guidance services as well as targeted financial support.

The “European Agenda for Adult Learning” was also presented in the framework of the meeting. The Commission is working with 32 countries to implement the European Agenda for Adult Learning. The Agenda highlights the need to increase participation in adult learning of all kinds (formal, non-formal and informal learning) whether to acquire new work skills, for active citizenship, or for personal development and fulfilment.

1. Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality
2. Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training
3. Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship through adult learning
4. Enhancing the creativity and innovation of adults and their learning environments
5. Improving the knowledge base on adult learning and monitoring the adult-learning sector

Looking at adult education and training in Europe, one in four adults in Europe have completed lower secondary education at most – differences between countries and age groups are significant. Around one in five adults have low literacy and numeracy skills, and nearly one in three have very low or no ICT skills. Adults with the greatest education and training needs have the least opportunity to benefit from lifelong learning.

See also results of the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC): <http://www.oecd.org/site/piaac/>

Across Europe, there is a wide range of education and training programmes which provide basic skills to adult learners – further investigation is needed to better understand the field. In all countries there are opportunities for adults to achieve a recognized qualifications



during adulthood; however, the proportion of adults who have completed a medium-level qualification later in life varies between countries

Lowering the barriers to adult participation in learning calls for modes of delivery that help overcome time constraints; yet even when they are available, there is little evidence on how well used they are by low-qualified adults. Efforts are being made to encourage the provision of flexible learning routes, but in most European countries access to a particular level of education is still dependent on completing the previous level. While there has been significant progress on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNIL), enabling the most vulnerable groups to access this service is still a challenge.

The partners continued to work together in European workshops on the topic “Improving participation in AE – access and choice” – in order to deepen the understanding of the meaning of “choices” for access-topic and to learn from best practice and look at strategies, methods and tools. The results of the group work were fed back to the group. With regards to the overall objectives of the IPAE-project, *access and choice* are central terms. *Choice* can be defined as the ability to exercise control over ourselves and our environment. And in order to choose, we must first perceive, that control is possible. How much choice you *technically* have, is far less important the how much choice you *feel* you have. With two sets two workshop questions the participants worked intensely on questions of choice and the “cost of comparison”. The workshop EU WAREHOUSE developed has been inspired and build on examples by the “The Art of Choosing” by Sheena Iyengar, a professor at the Columbia Business School, who is recognised as one the world’s leading experts on choice.

The results from the discussion: It is important for people to know that they have a choice and what influences the choice (like personal abilities, the community, religion, finances etc.). If somebody else makes a choice for you, you need to trust the person. Whatever the impact of our choice is, we need to take responsibility and to learn to deal with the consequences.

Long-term-unemployed adult learners e.g. don’t join (educational) schemes because they don’t respond to their needs. Very often the pressure of long-term-unemployment is underestimated – the requirement for this target group is sometimes simply too high – and



the reward “to get employed” is not high enough (“same money”). There is no perception of the value of work in itself, which leads to low self-esteem.

Another team came up with the following three ideas around choices.

1. If you don't see that you have a choice, you do not need to find out why (e.g. early school leavers, alcohol abuse);
2. People don't have the courage to make the choice;
3. If you want to change, you can do it (“it is easier when you are still young” as a new paradigm”) and you need support on the way.

Another consideration was if choice is really attractive. So, if people are used to being forced, they won't freely take choices. If you come from a system where you can't choose, it is very unlikely that you respond fully to choices – and, there is also the possibility to fail.

In the next session the partners had a look at the joint work on marketing perspectives with regards to improve participation in and awareness of adult learning on which Globalios Idéjos and EU WAREHOUSE had work on together, building on the achievements in the framework of the GI “CAMP2.0: Challenging Attractiveness of lifelong learning: web 2.0 tools for strengthening Marketing and Public relations competencies of adult education providers”-project. In the framework of that collaboration various aspects like “Developing Social Media Strategy”, “Creation of Social Media Content”, “Social Media Tools“were looked at from the point of view of usefulness for improving access to adult education.

In our final session, we looked again at the policy-level recommendations again and discussed and complemented them. The debate was very lively and inspired and summed up the work achieved so far, trying to put it into thought what could be forwarded as recommendations of the IPAE-Team with regards to the policy level.

Expressed was a common wish for a more appreciative approach towards the topic with a strong humanistic value, not only emphasizing the fiscal and “money” aspects. There is definitely a need for more lifelong learning as well as a need to look at the gap between employment market and the philosophy behind it. (Lifelong) learning should not only be seen as a means to get people into employment again, but revalued altogether.



In the evaluation of the final meeting the partners expressed their high satisfaction with the last meeting and with the project altogether.

We all expressed, how much we have learned from each other and how profitable the learning from the various work settings and angles in the different countries was.

The participants were very contented with the contents, the organization, the moderation and the atmosphere of the final meeting.

Thank you very much again to everybody for your visit and for the journey we could take together. It was not only very fruitful and enriching with regards to learning and exchange of best practice, it was also very pleasant to work in a nice and stimulating atmosphere, where all partners were motivated to show their very best!

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