EUROPEAN
ASSOCIATION FOR
THE EDUCATION
OF ADULTS

Country Report on Adult Education in SERBIA

Helsinki, 2011

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Please cite this report as: EAEA (2011): *Country report Serbia.* **(Place of issue). www.eaea.org/country/serbia. Date of Access.**

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Introduction

This Report covers the situation of Adult Education and Lifelong Learning in Serbia. It is divided into two sections. The section *Policy and Politics* gives an overview of the key policy currently in force, and also outlines the main legislation or political situation in the country. *Structure and Providers* gives a more detailed look at the organizational structures, and also outlines the main adult education providers, mainly looking at non-formal and informal learning.

We want to thank our members for their contributions to this reflection on the adult education situation in Serbia as far as possible as of 2010/2011. Inevitably there will be new things emerging within the ever changing situation of adult education, but we believe the majority of the information provided will be relevant and useful for the foreseeable future. However, to keep the resource accurate and up to date we are open to suggestions to improve the texts. If you feel there is something you can add about your country please contact us via email at eaea-info[at]eaea.org.

Overview

Serbia will now emerge from the recent implementation (2010) of a **'National Action Plan on the Implementation of a Strategy for the Development of Adult Education in the Republic of Serbia´**. The Action Plan outlines the key policy criteria for the coming years, paying particular attention to literacy and levels of education, also with a view to improving unemployment levels. However, it was also fundamental within the Action Plan that adult education was seen as an instrument of personal and social development in more general terms.

The Action Plan covers three priority areas, the first priority is the further development of legal, conceptual, strategic, organisational and institutional foundations to establish more **efficient participation** for social partners in adult education. The second priority focuses on establishing organisational structures and personnel, and with distributing the responsibilities and authority across the relevant ministries in the adult education field. The third and final priority is the **improvement of availability of adult education** by developing standards for programs and institutions and working to include **marginalised groups** in adult education. [1]

It is expected that other new policies and strategies will emerge after projects such as the **'Functional Basic Adult Education for Roma´**, a three year project recently implemented by the Institute for Pedagogy and Andragogy of Belgrade University, the Ministry of Education of Serbia, the National Roma Council, the NGO 'Adult Education Society´ and other partners. In brief, the project developed programs for elementary comprehensive education and also for vocational training, both leading to recognised certificates. The main principle of the project was to develop a **labour-market-oriented curriculum**. This curriculum included subjects in general education and courses in life-skills (including health, family life, active citizenship, communication, IT skills and entrepreneurship). The project also introduced a new role with Roma assistants for teachers, who can accompany students and help them both in school and with external social issues.

A further aim of the project was to create and develop a system of functional basic education for adults which would provide them with better access to basic education and provide a **'second chance' system** for this education level, primarily for Roma communities. Beyond this (perhaps crucially), it also enables the Roma community to access the education system more generally, and worked towards social inclusion and integration.

Based on the project´s results, a new model of functional basic education for adults was proposed (with a new legislative framework and a new mechanisms

of financing), which should then replace the existing system of elementary education for adults. [2]

Politics and Law

The political and legal situation in Serbia has inevitably affected the direction which adult education policy has taken. Most of this transition began in 2000 when democratic parties took over responsibility for the development of society. During this time the education system was one of the fundamental issues for the case of reform, which led the Ministry of Education to design the '**Strategy for the reform of Education**´ and based on this strategy, to define priorities and short-term, mid-term and long-term plans of actions and measures. One key strategy to emerge from this was the '**Strategy directions for the development of Adult Education**´, in: '**High-quality Education for everyone - Journey towards developed Society**´, (Ministry of Education and Sports, Belgrade, 2002).

In this strategy, the key problems within the Adult Education sector were identified as:

- Inadequate and **negative policy** and social terms **towards Adult Education**

- Restrictive financial support

- Shortage of law regulations and standards

- The absence of the Adult Education sector in State administration

- **Undefined status of teachers** in Adult Education

- Absence of systematic, **statistical follow-up** within the sector

Based on this analysis, a series of action plans and measures were designed and proposed as key steps in Adult Education reform, especially related to employment, the development of democracy and civil society.

The period after the year 2003 saw a new challenge to this process with the disintegration of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, with separation and declaration of **independence by Montenegro**, **crisis in Kosovo** and declaration of independence. This inevitably diverted society´s attention away from educational reform, including Adult Education policy and law regulations, as well as its financing and institutionalisation on the margins of society.

In 2006 amendments were passed to '**The Law on the Foundations of Education and Upbringing**´ (Official Gazette No. 58/04) which put the emphasis back on content rather than on outcomes. In the education sector however, the key issues tended to focus on the education of children and young people, while

Adult Education was somewhat passed over as it was not considered as high in potential for socio-economic development

One of the main regulations within 'The Law on the Foundations of Education and Upbringing´ also defines the right of every citizen to access education, with article 4 specifically sating that **adults are entitled to education** which should reflect their special educational needs.

The Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted the **'Strategy for the development of Adult Education in the Republic of Serbia´** in the end of 2006. It was adopted at the same time as the **'Strategy for the Development of Vocational Education and Training´**. This strategy was aligned with concepts of lifelong learning in the EU, and was designed in co-operation between the Ministry of Education and other relevant partners (ministries and other institutions dealing with employment). In this document is defined educational policy for the primary and secondary level education of adults, i.e. those who are outside formal education and haven´t gained any primary or vocational education that might lead them towards employment. There are different categories which are given priority, such as: illiterate people, those who have not finished elementary school, unemployed people, women, those in the rural population, those with special needs, and minority ethnic groups. The strategy also allows for different flexible types of education: regular primary education, part-time primary education, initial vocational education, labour market programmes, and continuous education programmes.

A key document in Vocational training, the **'Strategy for the development of Vocational Education and Training´** was adopted in 2006. It defined new educational policy for Vocational Education and Training, aiming to harmonise this sector of education with the changing socio-economic reality in Serbia, economic growth and the labour market. According to this document the key issues are the development of occupations and standards, the **modernisation** of educational programmes, an increase in evaluation and certification, financing issues, and vertical and horizontal mobility within the system and beyond, (e.g. movements from a vocational to an academic programme or from learning to work and visa versa). [3]

Future trends/key concerns/directions

The future of Adult Education in Serbia could take many directions, however there are some emerging key concerns which will be crucial to its development over the coming decade. The first of which will be to increase the priority of adult education provision within the governmental system but also in the mind of society as a whole. As with all countries **sustainability** is also a key concern, however in Serbia this also relates to the emerging trend towards a greater collaboration and exchange between the countries in South-East Europe as a

region. Another focus seems currently to be on the system of **vocational education**, which is occurring now across Europe during times of economic instability. However for Serbia specifically this will probably take the direction of a **modernisation and harmonisation** between the vocational system and the formal system of state education. There is also a call for more understanding of the needs of adult learners, and the requirements and training of teachers and providers to be researched and developed over the coming years. [4]

Structure overview

Serbia is not typically characterised by a hierarchical system or structure, and therefore is quite difficult to define in simple terms. Although partly regulated (see 'Policy and Politics´) it tends to be **spontaneous and open in nature**, and there are a variety of ways that adult education can manifest. [5]

The structure of the Formal Educational system in Serbia consists of: Pre-school and primary education, (e.g. compulsory education), secondary education, and Higher Education. However, primary education schools also have the authority to implement a curriculum of **primary education for adults**, which is specially adjusted for their needs. At the moment there are 14 schools in Serbia (2010) whose intention is to provide primarily for adult students (older than 16 years), but in most cases their students in reality are over-aged elementary school students, members of marginalised groups, children who have dropped out of the regular education system, neglected children and children with special needs, with only a small number of adults.

Overall governance is controlled by the **Ministry of Education**, which is in charge of education in the broadest sense, although the **Educational Board of the Serbian Parliament** is in charge of any legal governance. **The National Educational Council** is the most important authority for elementary and secondary vocational education. Other institutional bodies which are in charge for this sector are '**The Institute for Education Quality and Evaluation´** and '**The Institute for the Improvement of Education´**. The latter encompass four organisational units: the Centre for strategic development, the Centre for curricula and textbook development, the Centre for professional development of employees, and the Centre for vocational and artistic education. Apart of the listed bodies there are forums of vocational schools, student´s parliaments and parents´ councils. [6]

Key Providers/Main institutions/Sources for Adult Education

'Non-Formal´ Learning

Aside from schools, other organisations, or even individuals, can organise and deliver special programmes in area of adult education if they **fulfil the necessary standards** for implementation of these programmes, and if they have **Ministry´s approval**. This is seen as very important for the field of adult education as it has opened the opportunities for organisations to begin to implement programmes for adult education, but still aims to maintain criteria for **quality control**. [7]

Traditionally, fundamental institutions in the area of non-formal learning for Serbia are **museums, libraries, reading rooms, theatres, cinemas and art galleries**, which have not only been classed as venues for culture or entertainment but also for non-formal education. Generally common are mixed institutions, such as culture houses and cultural centres, where different courses, training and access to culture are combined within the same space (such centres therefore also often have mixed sources of funding). [8]

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

Over the past two decades Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have become one of the **most influential** pillars of the adult education system, especially in their role as **advocates and promoters of non-formal learning** which has perhaps been overlooked or downgraded in previous years. For example civil society organisations play a key role in the development of adult education through think-tanks, by initiating and creating strategies, and education policy. [9]

NGOs have also developed their role as providers of **literacy** teaching specifically by targeting a broad range of groups including refugees, women, **Roma communities**, and the disabled. They worked to introduce interactive methods and target-oriented approaches into education and literacy teaching, and are now seen as being successful providers for these often marginalised groups. [10]

Vocational Institutions and career-related training

The system of non-institutional organisations or individuals being able to develop adult education (as outlined above) has allowed the area of vocational training to develop as it provides opportunities for different types of organisations and individuals to implement programmes of vocational education and training. This

therefore provides a greater freedom for students to choose from a variety of options and providers.

- National Employment Agency

With their network of local branches in all major towns in Serbia, the National Employment Agency represents one of the major providers of education for the unemployed. They implement a series of programmes with the aim to improve the employability of the work force, and also to improve social standing within the community (or to overcome social disconnection through lack of participation within society).

The main programmes are:

- **For trainees** - training for those without work experience in a particular profession, together with gaining permanent employment and passing trainee or professional exams.

- **For volunteers** - professional development for people with no previous experience in a particular profession and passing trainee or professional exams without also then gaining permanent employment.

- **For people undertaking work experience** - increasing the level of competency and employability of young people through work experience and professional development.

- For subsidising **post graduate** studies

- Foreign **language** courses

- Basic **IT** training

- Other different **professional training**- increasing professional flexibility of the work force through career changes (qualification changes) or increasing competency levels by gaining new qualifications. This consists of courses developed for special professions, including: welders, accountants, butchers, computer technicians, lift service technicians, bakers, tailors, tram drivers, barmen, chefs, database administrators and system engineers. [11]

Within the field of vocational training there is a growing concern to find ways to harmonise vocational education within the mainstream education structure, one example of this is the current discussions around the idea of a **National Qualification Framework (NQF)** in the whole **South-East European area**. The other concern will be to try to increase access to training, and to bridge the gaps

between the needs of the learners with those of the labour markets and business communities. [12]

Universities

Institutions for Higher Education are divided into **University institutions** (universities and faculties, and Art academies) and **non-university Education** (academies, applied studies, Higher Education Institutions and Higher Education Institutions for applied studies). There are currently (2010) 7 state founded Universities, covering 86 faculties, and an additional two faculties which don´t belong to any university. Also, there are 46 private faculties, within 7 private Universities. Private universities are often more dedicated to the needs of the employment market, and therefore offer more flexible opportunities for study to their students, aiming to be more suitable for the needs and experiences of adult learners. [13]

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