

A Toolkit for Developing, Implementing and Monitoring Adult Education Strategies



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State of the Art in adult education strategies, policies and tools. Transnational report

Abstract

The following report has been prepared within the framework of the DIMA project. It outlines adult education strategies, policies and tools that have been introduced and implemented in the partner countries: Cyprus, Ireland, Slovakia and Slovenia. It also aims to illuminate the extent to which EU strategies and policies on adult education influence national policy-making in the field. The report is largely based on both national and European state-of-the-art reports as well as existing research and statistics provided in a number of European publications.

The paper starts with a brief historical overview, covering the milestones in the acknowledgement of lifelong learning and adult education in respective countries. It also addresses the parallels in adult education development across partner countries and examines the relationship between EU and national policy documents in the field. What follows is a definition of adult education and possible discrepancies in terminology, as well as an outline of current aims and objectives for the sector. Again, the report compares and contrasts the priorities among DIMA partner countries and assesses the possible impact of the European Agenda for Adult Learning in their development. The section closes with a short analysis of funding sources and their distribution.

The report then proceeds to describe policy dialogue and stakeholders involvement, singling out the role of civil society in the consultation process. The next section focuses on policy monitoring and evaluation, including benchmarks and indicators, particularly for monitoring participation levels. The topic is elaborated on in the following chapter, analysing how successful DIMA countries have been in reaching their respective benchmarks in participation. This is critically examined, taking into account the factors that may limit or encourage participation, including the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework.

What follows is an overview of adult education providers across the partner countries, with a brief mention of the variety of quality assurance methods (or lack thereof) and competences required for adult education professionals. The report then moves on to an analysis of the challenges in adult education policy development, with some ideas for improvement that have been included in both national and European state-of-the-art reports.

The report closes with a few of the many successful policy and practice examples described by DIMA project partners. They provide different perspectives, proving, among others, the importance of multi-stakeholder cooperation in national policy-making and describing the benefits of transnational projects in the collection and possible transfer of good practice examples.

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1. Current strategies and policies on adult education in Europe

1.1 Brief history of adult education in Europe

Interestingly, DIMA partner countries report similar developments in the way adult education policy has been shaped over the years, although some differences are also to be noted. To a certain extent, these developments reflect the changes in the EU policy on adult education.

Perhaps the most unexpected common denominator, linking Slovenia, Cyprus and Ireland, is the strong relationship between political transition and adult education. While the three countries gained independence in different decades of the 20th century, all of them report it to be reflected in an increased interest in adult education. Voluntary, often rural movements drive independence struggles and provide groundwork for more involvement in lifelong learning; that said, as the Irish partner rightly points out, it does not automatically lead to more recognition of adult education at the policy level. This can be explained precisely by the “ad hoc and unstructured¹” nature of these early initiatives.

The key element shared by most partner countries is the initial focus on vocational education and training, often well-structured and highly organized even at the beginning of the 20th century. A notable example is Ireland, where the so-called “technical instruction committees” were set up as early as 1900. In some cases, it was not until the 1990s or even later that more general and liberal adult education was recognized at the policy level. For an example, Ireland, while having already appointed two committees on lifelong learning between 1970s and 1980s, did not gain visibility for adult education until the late 1990s, with the publication of the first Green Paper on adult education and the subsequent White Paper on adult education. Slovenia represents a significant exception.

With a long-standing tradition of liberal education that can be traced back to learning societies in the 19th century, Slovenia also boasted a number of folk high schools that developed even before the Second World War. The Slovenian partner reports adult education to be “blooming²” throughout the 1950s, thanks to the creation of the Office for Adult Education in 1952 and the subsequent general Act on Education in 1958. While the Act reorganized folk high schools, renaming them as “institutions for vocational and professional adult education”, their description provided in the Act goes beyond what the name might suggest. The Act defines them as “educational institutions for general, socio-economic and civic adult education”; this comprehensive description seems unique at a time when most countries recognized adult education only in terms of vocational training. This, coupled with the launch of andragogic studies

¹ DIMA National Report: Ireland. Internal documentation, available upon request.

² DIMA National Report: Slovenia. Internal documentation, available upon request.

in early 1970s, explains the diverse and well-developed adult education landscape in Slovenia today.

Other partner countries, however, did not see a wider recognition of adult education, especially at the policy level, until the 1990s, which is also in line with the gradual acknowledgement of the sector by the EU. It was then that lifelong learning was included as an inherent part of both Socrates and Leonardo action programmes and then finally brought into focus when the European Commission proclaimed 1996 to be the European Year for Lifelong Learning.

Adult education developments in the 2000s and 2010s seem to mirror the EU policy on adult education, at least to some degree. When the European Commission published the broad Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, Slovakia soon followed with the National Report regarding the Memorandum on Lifelong Education. By the same token, the Irish government's White Paper on adult education, published in 2000, offered a comprehensive view on adult education, placing "a greater emphasis on citizenship, participation and community well-being³", also in line with the EU Memorandum. Interestingly, the Irish White Paper did come under criticism. While it singled out the marginalized groups as the target of future activities, some believed it failed to acknowledge the state and social responsibility for social exclusion.

Another important parallel between the EU and partner countries' policies concerns the gradual shift towards employability, reflected also in the increasing focus on career guidance. Some examples of relevant policy documents include the 2007 Slovakian Strategy of Lifelong Learning and Lifelong Guidance, concentrated on maintaining the highest employment, or the 2013 Irish Further Education and Training Strategy, calling for more consultation with stakeholders to investigate the needs of the labour market. This will be discussed further in terms of current strategies later in this report.

1.2 The definition and understanding of adult education

It should now be clarified what exactly is meant by "adult education". While the EU documents are largely clear in the understanding of adult education, the DIMA partner countries report a certain disparity in the terminology used at the national policy level, as will be seen below.

The 2006 European Commission's Communication *It is never too late to learn* defines adult education as "all forms of learning undertaken by adults after having left initial education and training, however far this process may have gone (e.g., including tertiary education)."⁴ The Final report for: Study on European Terminology in Adult Learning for a common language and common understanding and monitoring of the sector prepared by the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy, University of London in collaboration with Deutsches

³ DIMA National Report: Ireland. Internal documentation, available upon request.

⁴ European Commission (2006). *Adult education: It is never too late to learn*. Brussels: European Commission

Institut für Erwachsenenbildung (DIE), the Agence Nationale de Lutte contre l'Illettrisme (ANLCI) and the University of Warsaw, builds on this definition, but not without introducing some important changes. While adult learning is described as “the entire range of formal, non-formal and informal learning activities which are undertaken by adults (...) which results in the acquisition of new knowledge and skills,” it is limited to those activities undertaken after “a break since leaving initial education and training”⁵.

Among DIMA partners only Cyprus, in the absence of a national definition on Adult Education, unofficially adopts the EU definition of adult education. However, this definition is not stated in any of the official policy documents of the country only Cyprus has adopted the EU definition of adult education, with others often using different names for what is known in the EU as adult education. Both Ireland and Slovakia refer to “further education” rather than adult education, with an important difference – while further education in Ireland can be formal, informal and non-formal, the Slovakian partner describes it as mainly non-formal, never leading to any academic degree. The meaning of lifelong learning is also somewhat differently understood, with Ireland drawing clear lines between its four components (primary education, post primary education, higher education, further education and training) and Slovakia equating lifelong learning with adult education at the policy level.

Interestingly, there is also a clear difference in the extent to which vocational education is integrated in adult education policies. Ireland reports vocational education to form an integral part of adult education policies and in Cyprus VET and adult education have a great overlap. Slovenia and Slovakia seem to draw a line between the sectors at the policy level, with Slovenia having a clear and precise definition of adult education incorporated into the Adult Education Act. It is defined as including:

*education, continuing professional education, training and learning of persons who have fulfilled their obligation of basic education and who wish to acquire, up-date, broaden and deepen their knowledge and do not have status of pupil, secondary schoolboy/schoolgirl or student.*⁶

1.3 Aims, objectives and priorities of adult education

As stated above, a closer look at the adult education policy both at the EU level and in DIMA partner countries shows a clear shift towards employability as a response to the ongoing economic crisis and high unemployment levels across Europe. Two relatively recent EU policy

⁵ National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy (2010). *Final report for: Study on European Terminology in Adult Learning for a common language and common understanding and monitoring of the sector*. Retrieved from: http://www.pedz.uni-mannheim.de/daten/edz-b/gdbk/10/adultreport_en.pdf

⁶ DIMA National Report: Slovenia. Internal documentation, available upon request.

documents, *An agenda for new skills and jobs: A European contribution towards full employment* (2010) and *Rethinking Education: Investing in Skills for Better Socio-Economic Outcomes* (2012), seem to have set the political direction and priorities for the years to come; the relocation of the Adult Education Unit from DG Education and Culture to DG Employment has worked to a similar effect. Current strategies described by DIMA partners confirm the tendency to look at adult education policy from the perspective of the labour market, although other priorities are also to be found.

The focus on employability is present in strategies mentioned by all consortium partners, albeit to a varying extent. It seems particularly visible in Ireland and Slovakia, with the Irish partner admitting that “in the further education and training strategy 2014-2019 roll-out providers can expect to see greater diligence in collecting quantitative data linked to the ‘job market’ and prioritised to meet the needs of employers”⁷. This tendency is also reflected in the available funding schemes, as most education programmes supported by the EU funds are reported to be focused on employment activation. Similarly, the main strategy guiding adult education provision in Slovakia prioritizes entering the labour market; quite tellingly, the new act on adult education is currently being reformed as a result of a project entitled *Further education and guidance for adults as a tool for better enforceability at the labour market*. The Slovakian partner also quotes the 2012 Manifesto of the Government of the Slovak Republic, which highlights the necessity for a “comprehensive educational system which would lead to (...) qualifications applicable to the labour market”⁸.

Adjusting adult education policies to the needs of the labour market is reported by the consortium members from Slovenia and Cyprus, although to a lesser extent. It is one of the four objectives of the Master Plan for Adult Education 2013-2020 in Slovenia (described as “job-related education and training”); similarly, in Cyprus, while promoting employability represents one of the four strategic objectives of the Lifelong Learning Strategy 2014-2020, it is the last priority axis, coming after access, quality and research. In fact, it is access to adult education that seems to be yet another policy objective linking DIMA countries.

Improving access to adult education services is described, implicitly or explicitly, as a priority by the partners from Ireland, Slovenia and Cyprus. The Slovenian Adult Education Act (1996, amended in 2006) calls for more accessibility of adult education services; more specifically, inclusion of disadvantaged groups and improvement of basic skills are mentioned in a White Paper published in 2010. Similarly, Supporting Inclusion and Diversity represents Goal 3 of the Irish Department of Education and Science Statement of Strategy 2015-2017. In Cyprus, improving accessibility and participation (the latter to be discussed in section 4) is the first priority axis of the Lifelong Learning Strategy. This also reflects the EU adult education policy, as improving

⁷ DIMA National Report: Ireland. Internal documentation, available upon request.

⁸ DIMA National Report: Slovakia. Internal documentation, available upon request.

accessibility is also one of the current priorities of the European Agenda for Adult Learning, as stated in the most recent (2015) *Joint Report on the implementation of the Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training* prepared by the European Commission and subsequently adopted by the Council.

Three partner countries, Ireland, Cyprus and Slovakia, also describe improving accountability and quality of adult education services as a priority. In Ireland the aforementioned DES strategy names it as Goal 2, asking for “the delivery of a high quality education and training experience for everyone”⁹. Similarly, in the Cyprus Lifelong Learning Strategy improving the quality and efficiency of education and training represents Priority Axis 2, while the Slovakian report names improving quality in adult education through certification of the institutions as the “key objective”¹⁰. Again, improving the quality of adult education provision represents one of the updated priorities of the European Agenda for Adult Learning.

Interestingly, while some of the adult education priorities do seem to reflect those described in the European Agenda, the document itself is rarely, if ever, reported to be used at the national level. In spite of the appointment of National Coordinators of the European Agenda in Member States, most partner countries take little notice of either the Agenda or larger EU strategies, such as ET 2020. That said, the Slovenian partner describes its Master Plan for Adult Education as “harmonized”¹¹ with the European Agenda, while Cyprus had established an implementation team of the Agenda, which included “representatives from the major actors in the field of Adult Education and training in Cyprus”¹² for the years 2012-2015. The regular meetings of the team are reported to have been largely successful in the promotion of the European Commission initiative. A more detailed, cross-national analysis of its implementation in Southern and Central-Eastern Europe, including Cyprus, Slovakia and Slovenia, was recently done through [RENEWAL](#), the 2014 project coordinated by EAEA. The state-of-the-art report, including country- and region- specific information is now publicly available.

1.4 Financing adult education

All DIMA partners agree that funding for adult education in their countries comes mainly from public sources, either from the national or European level, rarely from the local or regional one. It is, however, important to point out that European funding schemes, such as the European Social Fund, are decided on and distributed regionally. This is particularly important in view of the fact that most partners single out European funds as the major source of funding for adult education,

⁹ DIMA National Report: Ireland. Internal documentation, available upon request.

¹⁰ DIMA National Report: Slovakia. Internal documentation, available upon request.

¹¹ DIMA National Report: Slovenia. Internal documentation, available upon request.

¹² DIMA National Report: Cyprus. Internal documentation, available upon request.

with some partners, such as Slovakia, estimating that as much as 80% of public funds comes from the EU.

Funding is also decided locally in the case of Ireland where, since 2013, 16 education and training boards are in charge of devising a budget for the area depending on needs and innovation. This constitutes a major change, as until 2013 budget allocation was based on previous spending.

At the same time, the partners express their wish to see more investment in adult education. Cyprus, for example, deplors the fact that while funding for education is quite high comparing to other EU countries (that is, 6.5% of the GDP as opposed to the EU average of 5%), the investment in adult education represents just a fraction of the total budget devoted to education (1-1.9%). This mirrors the concern of adult education stakeholders working at the European level; in its recent statement on the Erasmus+ programme, EAEA described adult education as still “grossly under-valued and consequently under-funded¹³”, as reflected in the distribution of Erasmus+ funds, which assign only 4% to adult education.

Some partners would also like to have a more comprehensive framework that would outline financial support for adult education. Such is the case of Slovakia: while their current Lifelong Learning Strategy lacks any financial framework, “the proposal of the national financial support mechanism was elaborated with the national project *Further education and guidance for adults as a tool for better enforceability at the labour market*”¹⁴. The project is further discussed in [section 7.1](#).

2. Policy dialogue and stakeholders’ involvement

While in all DIMA partner countries the responsibility for adult education policy development rests chiefly with the Ministry of Education, other governmental bodies and social partners are also involved, although to a varying extent. It seems that consultations with social partners, either formal or informal, are usually held at needs stage, with some specific examples described below.

Formal models of consultations have been instituted in Ireland, Cyprus and Slovenia. The Irish partner welcomes the recent establishment of sixteen Education and Training Boards, which are expected to consult local stakeholders, particularly with employers and focus groups of adult learners. Cyprus and Slovenia, on the other hand, are reported to conduct consultations within a formal body that also includes social partners: the National Committee for Lifelong Learning in Cyprus and the Council of Experts for Adult Education within the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport in Slovenia. In Cyprus, the National Lifelong Learning Committee and the supporting technical committee are responsible for monitoring, coordinating and promoting all necessary actions to implement the lifelong learning strategy of the country.

¹³ [EAEA feedback on Erasmus+](#)

¹⁴ *DIMA National Report: Slovakia*. Internal documentation, available upon request.

An interesting example is that of Slovakia and its two Memorandums about the cooperation in adult education. With signature parties including adult education providers, universities and employers' institutions, the memorandums set the scene to not only identify skills relevant for the labour market or contribute to the recognition of informal and non-formal learning, but also work on the legislative framework of adult education. The meetings of the signature parties are held quarterly and also involve policy monitoring.

In some cases, consultations with stakeholders are held with regard to a specific aspect of adult education. This is a common practice at the EU level, with the European Commission establishing working groups, advisory groups and high level groups, such as the working group on financing adult education or the EQF advisory group. Similarly, the Cypriot partner reports the establishment of an interdepartmental committee for validation of informal and non-formal skills, which also includes representatives of social partners, namely the commissioner for volunteering and the NGO commissioner.

While some partners voice their concern over the limitations of the consultation process, wishing for it to be held more frequently and involve a wide range of stakeholders, a valid point is made in the Slovenian report. The Slovenian partner emphasizes the importance of establishing broader associations that foster cooperation between relevant stakeholders in the adult education field. It could be then argued that this also facilitates the consultation process itself.

3. Policy monitoring and evaluation

While all DIMA partners report adult education policies to be regularly monitored, the process and methods adopted vary not only from country to country, but also locally. This is pointed out by the Cypriot partner, who describes monitoring to be carried out at different levels and by different bodies. Generally speaking though, at the national level the implementation of major policy documents, such as adult education or lifelong learning strategies, is regularly reviewed, with their priorities updated accordingly. In Slovenia, for example, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, with the support and expertise of Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, evaluates how annual plans have been realized. Every two years this evaluation analysis has to be submitted to the Slovenian Parliament.

In some cases monitoring and evaluation also include a wider range of stakeholders. In Cyprus the lifelong learning committee and a supporting technical committee responsible for monitoring the national lifelong learning strategy and issuing progress reports are composed of different stakeholders. In Slovenia the Council of Expert for Adult Education, the consultative body mentioned in the previous section, is also responsible for monitoring and evaluating the Annual Plan for Adult Education. The evaluation is done on the basis of the financial data presented by all seven ministries involved and the targeted numbers for participants.

Most DIMA partners mention benchmarks and indicators, also used at the EU level, as a method of monitoring adult education policy implementation. These usually include benchmarks for participation in learning activities, which will be discussed in more detail in the following section. Monitoring progress in achieving the intended benchmark, however, appears to be challenging due to problems in data collection. This is reported by both Ireland and Slovakia. The Irish partner expresses a wish for a single data collection system that would “in a timely manner collect the required data and deposit it in an accessible location for analysis¹⁵”, adding that the unified data collection model is expected to be implemented in the future. The Slovakian partner, on the other hand, notes that while the tools for data collection have already been implemented – adult education institutions are legislatively obliged to provide statistics to the Institute for Information and Prognoses of Education – a mere one-third of providers do it. The problem of insufficient data collection has already been acknowledged at the EU level; in fact, “improving the knowledge base on adult learning and monitoring the adult-learning sector¹⁶” constitutes the fifth and last priority area of the 2011 European Agenda for Adult Learning.

4. Participation

4.1 Measuring participation levels

The pressing need to increase participation levels in adult education is echoed across all DIMA country reports. Most partners report their national participation levels to be stagnating, if not decreasing. DIMA partner countries have responded to the 2020 EU benchmark on participation in adult learning, set at 15%, by establishing their own targets; the most ambitious one is set by Slovenia at 19% and the lowest one by Cyprus, at 12%.

An important point is made by the Irish partner, who highlights the difficulty in quantifying participation levels. Quoting a blog by the EAEA member AONTAS, the report explains that the reasons are threefold: first, they are linked to the wide range of activities on offer; second, to their informal context; third, to the disagreement over the meaning of “adult education”. As was already mentioned in the previous section, the Europe-wide concern over insufficient data collection has been acknowledged in the European Agenda for Adult Learning.

That said, participation levels are regularly monitored and reported in the annual Education and Training Monitor published by DG Education and Culture. The most recent one (2015) puts the EU average level of participation at 10.7%¹⁷, still significantly below the intended 15% rate. It is important to mention at this point that the ET Monitor data is based on the Labour Force Survey,

¹⁵ *DIMA National Report: Ireland*. Internal documentation, available upon request.

¹⁶ Council of the European Union (2011). *Council resolution on a renewed European agenda for adult learning*. Brussels: EU

¹⁷ European Commission (2015). *Education and Training Monitor 2015*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union

one of the two surveys measuring participation in adult learning that are carried out by Eurostat. It is conducted annually among EU Member States (including all DIMA partner countries) and its methodology differs from the Adult Education Survey, which is done every five years, most recently in 2011. [As explained by Eurostat](#), the results of the two surveys are not “directly comparable”, as other differences include the reference periods (4 weeks in the case of LFS and 12 months for AES), the coverage of non-formal education (LSF does not cover guided on-the-job training) and the overall design of the survey.

On the national level, an interesting system has been introduced in Slovenia, where the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education has developed a web-based tool for monitoring participants in publicly funded programmes in adult education. The tool helps to collect detailed information about participation characteristics, such as gender, age, professional status and professional attainment. It also monitors the outcomes in reaching the target groups and serves as “acknowledgement of realization of programmes”¹⁸.

4.2 Barriers and incentives

Regardless of the exact participation rates, all DIMA partners agree that adult education policies should effectively remove, or at least reduce, the existing barriers. Interestingly, the barriers to participation listed by the partners seem to tie with the results of the 2011 Eurostat survey. These often include financial constraints, mentioned by Slovakia, Slovenia and Cyprus, as well as scheduling issues. Another important reason often keeping adults from taking up learning activities is the lack of motivation; as the Slovakian partner explains, adults are more likely to engage in learning if they see it as a potential to boost their employability. Since informal and non-formal forms of learning are not perceived as directly linked to the labour market, many adults do not feel any motivation to pursue such activities.

This is precisely why some DIMA partners name employment and upskilling opportunities as the main incentive to engage in adult learning. At the same time, the attractiveness of some liberal education initiatives should not be underestimated; the Slovenian partner underlines the importance of Lifelong Learning Weeks, third age universities and study circles.

Another common point made by a few DIMA partners regards the participation levels of vulnerable groups. Both Cyprus and Slovenia highlight the fact that these groups are less likely to participate as they are often unaware of the existing possibilities; at the same time, they are the ones most in need. This is also in line with the results of the recent Eurydice study *Adult Education and Training in Europe: Widening Access to Learning Opportunities*. At the same time, not all countries have a specific strategy targeting vulnerable groups; Cyprus and Slovakia report lacking one. That said, even countries that do have a specific strategy for reaching out to vulnerable groups have not set a specific benchmark for their participation in adult learning. Interestingly,

¹⁸ DIMA National Report: Slovenia. Internal documentation, available upon request.

this is also true in the case of the EU policy; while there is a benchmark for participation in adult learning (15% by 2020), the inclusion of vulnerable groups is not measured separately.

A wide implementation of a coherent and permeable validation system could act as an incentive for participation in adult learning, also among vulnerable groups. This is why the 2012 European Council recommendation called the Member States, among others, to make effective validation agreements by 2018, reaching out to particularly vulnerable groups and linking the NQFs to the European Qualifications Framework. That said, not all DIMA partner countries claim to have a comprehensive validation system. More specifically, Cyprus and Slovakia are currently working on the design of a national qualifications framework, with Slovakia establishing an interdepartmental committee charged with this task. As underlined by the Slovenian partner, a successful validation system brings a number of benefits, as it not only helps to recognize previously acquired skills and competences, but also boosts self-confidence and thus makes the adult more eager to continue learning. A broad analysis of tools and methodologies used in Europe for validation of informal and non-formal skills, particularly among the disadvantaged groups, is currently being carried out within the framework of the EAEA coordinated [AVA project](#).

5. Actors in adult education

While the offer of adult education opportunities in adult education across DIMA partner countries is extensive, encompassing folk high schools, study circles or private institutions – to name but a few – interestingly enough, adult education provision is not always clearly regulated at the policy level. This often brings far-reaching consequences, affecting the quality of provision, entry-level qualifications of adult educators and their professional status.

Perhaps the most important distinction to be made at this point is that between public and private adult education institutions. The difference in terms of legal regulations is noted particularly by the Slovenian partner, who remarks that the quality of provision and outcomes is assured only in the case of publicly recognized programmes. To be more specific:

various forms of supervision and evaluation of education are in place, such as the verification of public institutions, regulatory procedures for the adoption of curricula, and obligatory Teaching Certification Examination for teaching and other professional support staff¹⁹.

These measures usually do not concern privately-financed institutions. A similar situation is reported by Cyprus, where the Ministry of Education and Culture oversees quality assessment of public institutions, but no mention is made of privately-owned adult education providers. In this context, Ireland seems to have the most comprehensive mechanisms of quality assurance, thanks

¹⁹ DIMA National Report: Slovenia. Internal documentation, available upon request.

to the recently established Education and Training Boards. As the Irish partner admits, however, it has yet to be seen how effective the mechanism will turn out to be.

Interesting points are also made concerning the competences required for adult educators and the educational pathways that are available. Most reports highlight the diversity of skills necessary to perform the tasks well: not only do adult educators have to be competent in their subject matter, but they also need a wide range of interpersonal skills. The ability to adapt to different environments is also crucial, especially in light of the increase of migration flows in the EU. This is why it is surprising that opportunities for professional development and clear pre-requisites for entering the profession are so rare. As mentioned by the Irish partner, the quality of education available for trainers and educators cannot always be assured, as the qualifications of teacher educators are not in any way regulated.

Finally, most DIMA partners point out the difficulties in the working conditions of adult education staff. Financial insecurity is highlighted by partners from both Cyprus and Slovenia; the Slovenian partner explains that it is difficult, if not impossible, to provide long-term financial planning when providers only find out about the allocated public funding at the last minute. This, as it is the case in Cyprus, can lead to part-time and short-time contracts for the adult education staff. Coupled with the limited opportunities of career progression in an often relatively small sector, it could be argued that the working conditions among adult education providers in DIMA partner countries still leave much room for improvement.

6. Current challenges in the field of adult education

Interestingly, most DIMA partners, while raising some issues specific to their national policies, emphasize similar points in terms of current challenges and possible improvements. The recurring themes include doubts over quality assurance, concern over prioritizing employability at the policy level as well as the necessity for more inclusion of disadvantaged groups in the adult education provision.

As discussed in [section 1](#), working towards transparent quality standards in adult education provision is the key objective of the Slovakian adult education sector, including certification of relevant institutions. The specific steps made towards achieving this goal will also be discussed in the following section, as one of the best policy example. The necessity for more quality assessment is also highlighted in the report from Cyprus, with special attention paid to the field of non-formal adult education.

The increased focus on employability as a reflection of the ongoing economic crisis is yet another concern repeated in most DIMA country reports. The Irish partner, for example, notes that prioritizing employability often undermines the importance of “broad citizen education for

a healthier democratic society”²⁰. The consequences of the market-oriented approach to adult education can go even further, sometimes leaving behind the underprivileged groups, often deemed less profitable for the market and thus excluded from learning activities.

It then comes as no surprise that DIMA partners also highlight the necessity for more inclusion of disadvantaged learners, especially since, as has been stated before, they are the ones most in need of increased learning opportunities and at the same time, the least likely to find out about them. Often unable to participate due to lack of financial resources or appropriate qualifications, their learning opportunities are distinctly limited. This is why EAEA has always advocated more visibility of the underprivileged groups also at the policy level, proposing for example to include a separate benchmark on their participation in adult learning.

One possible answer to those challenges would be to follow the example of countries that have already achieved some success in a specific area of adult education. The Slovakian partner, in particular, stresses the importance of collecting best practices and trying to implement them nationally or locally. In view of that, what follows is a brief overview of a few best practice examples across the DIMA partners.

7. Lessons from successful examples

7.1. Policy case studies

DIMA national reports clearly demonstrate that some challenges faced by the adult education sector can be met at the policy level, often with the direct involvement of adult education providers. This section outlines three notable examples from Slovakia, Slovenia and Ireland, showing how an effective, multi-stakeholder cooperation can bring about a long-lasting change in national policies on adult education.

As has been stated before, Slovakia considers quality assurance and transparency to be their key priority in adult education. Interestingly, its inclusion on the policy level comes from a successful project entitled *Further education and guidance for adults as a tool for better enforceability at the labour market*, implemented by the National Institute of Lifelong Learning in Bratislava. The project was born out of the need to militate against low recognition of skills among the employers and their limited involvement in the adult education sector. The results are twofold: first, the project led to the development of as many as 40 standardized modular programmes for achieving professional, specialized qualifications and 25 adult guidance centres; second, it proposed significant changes in legislation. In this sense, the new Act on further education is an important outcome of the project, as it brings long-lasting effects on the sector as a whole.

²⁰ DIMA National Report: Ireland. Internal documentation, available upon request.

Similarly, the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education is directly involved in the implementation of the Adult Education Master Plan for 2013-2020. Described as a comprehensive and far-reaching strategy, the Master Plan defines priorities, programmes, supportive activities, target groups, monitoring instruments and the scope of public finances. Perhaps the deciding success factor is the inclusion of as many as seven different ministries in the programme, such as the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning etc. This leads to a wider integration of adult learning activities across different sectors, be it raising awareness of health hazards or climate changes. The programme is coordinated and evaluated by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports, but it is also supported by the expertise of the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education.

Yet another endeavour, from Ireland, proves that collaborative networking can increase permeability between adult education and other education sectors; in this case, higher education. The establishment of a working group of higher education institutions and further education and training providers has helped enhance access, transfer and progression opportunities within geographical areas. Among the intended products of the cooperation, the Irish partner lists a series of working papers that would document challenges and opportunities of further education and training students to higher education, as well as a public intranet portal presenting ways of progression from FET to HET in an accessible way and conferences and seminars that would facilitate the development of appropriate progression pathways.

7.2. Practice case studies

In light of the continuing focus on employability across all Europe, it should come as no surprise that this also turns out to be the main topic of many best practice examples described by DIMA partners. What follows is a short description of two projects developed in Slovenia and Ireland, both of which aimed at up-skilling young adults with little or no work experience. The third best practice example, however, is focused on underprivileged learners and involves a large partnership coordinated by EAEA.

The project implemented in Ireland was entitled Positive 2 Work and involved a large partnership between Louth Meath Education and Training Board, SkillsNet, Department of Social Protection and Horseware. By involving a number of local stakeholders, the project succeeded at offering young, unemployed adults substantial work experience coupled with regular classes. The Irish partner stresses that while there was no guarantee of employment, 7 out of 13 learners received 6-month full-time employment contracts with Horseware, which might later turn into longer contracts.

The Slovenian project, entitled Project Learning for Young Adults, was developed by the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education. To help vulnerable groups of NEET youngsters return to education or find employment, the network of PLYA providers (12 organisations spread around Slovenia) organize project-based learning activities (in 2015 in 12 PLYA groups). The subjects varied from

art to ecology and the classes took place on an everyday basis. The success of the project goes beyond pure numbers, although these are impressive too, with an estimated 50% participants continuing their education, 26% finding a job and 18% getting a job and continue with education at the same time. As emphasized by the Slovenian partner, perhaps the most important aspect is engaging the local youth in working on issues that are important to the community. In view of this, it is understandable why in 2007 the project won the title of the Champion of social policy by the European Commission.

Another project recognized by the European Commission was the Outreach Empowerment Diversity (OED) network, chosen “a success story” by a panel of experts from DG Education and Culture in January 2016. Coordinated by EAEA, the network was established in 2012 with 17 organisations from 14 countries. Thanks to such an extensive scope of the network and an in-depth analysis of respective participatory practices, the project was an opportunity to construct a comprehensive picture of how European organisations and local providers reach out to marginalized groups and empower them to become active European citizens. The network had an impact not only on participating institutions, but also on teachers, trainers, policy-makers and, ultimately, learners from marginalized groups. The project outcomes included a collection and analysis of good examples from across Europe that tackle the overlap of social inclusion and active citizenship in adult education, methodology guidelines for trainers and management staff in adult education as well as policy recommendations for European and national/regional policy-makers. All of them are freely available and can be accessed from the [project's website](#); moreover, a further initiative following up on the implementation of the methodology and policy recommendations will be carried out within the framework of ImpLOED, officially launched in March 2016.