



Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme



Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-2013

Support for European Cooperation in Education and Training (ECET).

Transversal programme. Key Activity 1: Policy Cooperation & Innovation



Project Number: 190986-LLP-2010-1-GR-KA1ECETB

COMPARATIVE REPORT ON EUROPEAN REALITIES ON LLL

(Deliverable No. 5b)

With the support of the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Union

| | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Task No: | Del. 5b |
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| Status, Version No. | Final |
| Due date of deliverable: | February 2011 |
| Actual submission date: | February 2012 |
| Start Date of Project: | 01 March 2011 |
| Duration: | 24 Months |
| Dissemination Level: | Public |
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| Financing: | Project funded by the European Commission, Lifelong Learning Programme |

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission.

This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Deliverable no. 5b was produced in the context of the project “MASON – Mainstream SocioCultural Dynamics to enhance NLLs”. The aim of this report is to perform a comparative analysis of the prevailing socio-cultural elements in the national contexts of Greece, Poland, Slovakia, Spain, Bulgaria, Germany and Finland that shape “practices of action” that in turn intervene in the process of educational transformation.

Deliverable no. 5b is based on comprehensive analyses of national lifelong learning systems of the seven EU countries named above, which are annexed in this document. The development of the annexed national reports was based on a common guidance frameworks and tools for documenting good practice examples and interviews with LLL stakeholders at each national context. These guidance frameworks and tools are provided in the Implementation Guide (Deliverable no. 2). From a wider perspective, the analyses conducted in each national context were oriented by the Orientation Framework (deliverable 5a) which performed an in-depth analysis of historic trends in the evolution of LLL conceptualisations, LLL policies and strategies at EU level and identified underlying socio-cultural factors which cut across education traditions, countries and regions.

Each of the national reports annexed in this document offers a detailed state-of-the-art and reflective overview of the national lifelong learning strategies. These reports follow a common format to facilitate thematic comparability. The first part of these reports offer an overview of all formal and informal levels of education and training, from early childhood and care to further education and continuing training for adults, and an institutional analysis of the national LLL systems (legislative frameworks, structure, and current LLL strategies). The second part of these reports include i) an overview of the major LLL issues that became the focus of public discourse during the last years, particularly between March 2011 and February 2012, ii) the documentation of a case study of good LLL practice in the national context, and iii) the documentation of 10 interviews taken by LLL stakeholders. The above are aiming to offer insights into deeper socio-cultural issues and perspectives framing the concerns of the civic society and LLL stakeholders. The national reports conclude with a detailed SWOT analysis of the national LLL systems, grounded on the results of the institutional analysis and empirical evidence.

In Deliverable no. 5b the analysis of media and wider public discourse on LLL in the national contexts studied revealed similarities in issues raised on different action fields and between different countries. In Finland and Germany attention is given to the issue of the better integration of migrants in primary school and secondary education and to the improvement of vocational training. In Germany and Slovakia there is a concern on shortages of qualified professionals for practical occupations. In Poland one of the main issues is the number of schools which was reduced. In Greece, Poland, Spain and Slovakia a critical issue in public debates is that there are not enough jobs for university graduates. Differences that are observed in the media and wider public discourse of education and LLL originate from variations in the education traditions and structure of education systems, but above all by the current economic and financial condition of each country. The influence of different administrative structures and traditions can be seen especially in the comparison of Spain and Germany on the one hand and Greece and Finland on the other hand. In Spain and Germany, traditionally the regions and communities are strong, and thus accordingly have a strong influence on the E&T system. This requires greater coordination and harmonization of individual interests and actors. As compared to Spain and Germany, Finland and Greece have a rather centralised education governance system and can therefore enforce country-wide reforms. In Greece, the economic situation is so critical that currently all efforts to reform the education system are challenged or driven by the resulting cuts in public spending on education and training.

The interviews conducted with stakeholders in the national contexts were able to reveal differences and commonalities between the different participating member states with respect to the dimensions assessed. *Early childhood education and care* (ESEC) is a field of attention in most participating member states. Yet, there are differences in the use and the costs for ESEC services. In Finland the Law provides equal day-care opportunities for all based on the parents’ income while in Germany there are differences between the

states and also with respect to funding. In Germany and Greece there are sometimes difficulties for finding appropriate places for children day-care and the facilities sometimes depend on further engagement by parents or additional funding. Slovakia offers day-care only in regional cities and towns and there are also not enough places to satisfy needs; in Poland differences between urban and rural realities are reported.

Our interviewees in the field of school education in most of the participating MASON countries indicated that the social and economic background of the pupils influences their motivation and learning achievement as well as early school leaving patterns. Pupils with a socio-economic disadvantage are more likely to get a lower standard of education by choosing a less privileged educational pathway or by leaving the school early to get a job in fields like constructions and tourism (e.g. Finland, Greece). There are also issues with schools in areas with a predominantly immigrant population. For immigrants often language issues exist affecting their overall school performance. They also may receive less support by their parents due to language problems. The interviewees report different approaches to face these issues, e.g. introductory courses, but such measures are always subject to financial resources. This also applies to pupils who need special attention or supplementary teaching.

With respect to *tertiary education*, there are two main aspects raised by the interviewees: access/ enrolment and permeability. Regarding access/enrolment there are big differences between the countries under analysis. In some countries, like e.g. Finland access to tertiary education has no specific barriers and therefore in Finland there are high participation rates of about 45%. On the other hand, e.g. in Greece there are high obstacles for tertiary education and students have to take national exams that need a lot of extra efforts to be admitted to a university. Yet, in several countries, e.g. Finland and Greece there are thoughts about how many university graduates can be absorbed by the labour market. This is also subject to the current economic crisis. With respect to permeability there is the issue to which extent students who did initially not choose to follow an educational path that allows university studies can enrol to universities later in their adult lives to get additional qualifications. Regarding permeability there are different perspectives in the countries that reflect on the one hand the chance for permeability that means that students *can* go to university but on the other hand the real permeability that means that students also *do* it. The latter is often quite low as persons that are already working often face too many practical obstacles to choose a second educational pathway at university.

According to interviewees, *further and continuing education and training* is offered mainly by private institutions in most of the MASON countries. This implies that there are costs arising for such kind of education and there is often the issue of who pays for these costs, employee or employer. In some countries this issue became crucial during the economic crisis in a way that the crisis also affected participation in further education and thereby institutions for further education.

The *case studies of good LLL practices* at national level show quite different aspects and realizations of initiatives aimed to address crucial issues regarding lifelong learning. In Bulgaria an initiative was documented which is focused on training vouchers for participation in further education to increase participation in lifelong learning. The Finnish case focuses on the partnership approach and describes particular centres that offer counselling to companies to find appropriate training provisions for their employees, particularly for SMEs. The German case aims at the qualification of young people in VET to facilitate their smooth job entry while the Greek case describes the set up of supplementary lessons for poor pupils with low learning outcomes. The Polish case deals with the learning provisions to elderly persons which enable them to get access university studies, while the Slovak case focuses on teachers' professional development by a credit system. Finally, the Spanish case describes an approach to mainstream digital learning to the educational system.

All these practices, even though very heterogeneous, show that there is a wide spectrum of learning needs but also a wide spectrum of good practices and determination to address challenges in Lifelong Learning through the active involvement of various LLL stakeholders. By this, the practices and their implementations relate to different targets and are also funded differently, from the Greek case that relates to teachers'

volunteers who give for free extra supplementary lessons to disadvantaged pupils to the Finnish case that aims at widening equality throughout the country with respect to further education opportunities.

Finally, this report synthesises the *strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats* regarding national LLL systems and strategies.

Strengths

Most of the national LLL policies studied are evaluated as supportive with regard to the implementation of Lifelong Learning strategies at different stages of life. Differences between the strength points per country stem from the particular traditions of their education systems. In Spain and Germany participation in early childhood and care (ESEC) is widespread. Interesting cases are these of Greece and Slovakia, where public pre-school education is supported, being compulsory in both countries. Finland and Bulgaria although still lagging behind, they have made huge progress with regard to participation in ESEC. In Finland the education system offers everybody equal opportunities for education, irrespective of domicile, sex, economic situation or linguistic and cultural background, coupled with an overall high level of school performance in core subjects. Finland is the top achieving EU country in the PISA 2009 assessments and in parallel the most equitable in terms of the impact of the socio-economic background of students on their performance. Poland is also among the top achievers, specifically in reading and science. Finland has one of the largest shares in tertiary attainment level among 30 to 34 year olds, along with Spain; both are above the EU27 average. Finally Slovakia, Greece and Bulgaria have among the lowest shares of early school leavers in EU27.

Weaknesses

Weaknesses according to particularities in education governance systems can be identified in Finland, Greece and Germany. In Finland and in Greece changes in governments are also accompanied by changes in the Lifelong Learning strategies; the implication is that introduced reforms may not have the necessary time to establish. In Germany the federal system could hinder mutual learning and exchange of good practices between the states. The gap between those who can afford private remedial tutoring and those who cannot increases impeding later equitable access to post-secondary education based on academic performance. This is an important issue in Germany, in Greece and in Poland. One further weakness is a lack of vocational guidance at schools, particularly in Slovakia, Greece and Poland.

Various other weaknesses in LLL systems are reported depending on the national context. In Germany, the low share of public early childhood care institutions and voluntary attendance have an impact on students with migration background: that are not able to attend to early childhood and care and they often have difficulties to learn German at home. In Greece, the monitoring of the regularity of participation of students by educational authorities is an issue preventing the establishment of an early warning system for students at risk of dropping out of school. There is also lack of monitoring of pupils performance at core subjects such as language, maths and science at regional and national levels; the only national-level exams are organised in the last grade of the upper secondary education. In Poland, regarding the tertiary education, the conservative, slow-to-change public institutions and a rigid layer of hierarchical bureaucracy hinder innovation in didactics. In Spain, Lifelong Learning policies are not known to a large part of the public: there seems to be no tradition of Lifelong Learning policies in Spain devoted to the general public, while LLL is mostly thought to be focused to professional training. In Slovakia, a high share of low achievers in the recent PISA studies could be established and a growing trend in school grade repetition during compulsory education results in prolonged duration of schooling. In Bulgaria one of the major weaknesses in the large share of low achievers in reading, maths and science as evidenced in the PISA 2009 assessments.

Opportunities

The opportunities with Lifelong Learning in Finland relate to the identification and recognition of prior learning and an increased recognition that transitions from one education level to another and to the labour market should be as flexible as possible. The recognition of prior learning is also a policy concern in Slovakia. Due to the economic crisis in Greece the pressure on policy makers and education administrators to work upon improving the cost-effectiveness of public spending on education was increased. As a response to the economic crisis in Greece there is an increasing level of voluntarism among public education teachers to offer free supplementary teaching to pupils from low SES families. In Spain the economic crisis lead enterprises to consider more flexible forms of investments to training at local or sectoral level. In addition, in Slovakia the raise of the level of participation of the adult population in further/continuing education, with a systematic focus on those with a disadvantaged socio-economic background, is a crucial educational issue. Regarding the German and Slovak context, it was reported that a potential crisis may raise the participation in higher education and training. Poland, Spain, and Slovakia reported improvements in ICTs competencies at different educational stages or school levels.

In Germany, the private early childhood care institutions are becoming more popular; however, parents, particularly single parents, need financial support and more comprehensive public services. In Poland, with regard to compulsory education parents are encouraged to become more active but action should be taken so as to be more informed about planned reforms. Spain presents the highest share of participation in adult education and training. In Slovakia, reforms in the labour market are making it more inclusive for people of all backgrounds (e.g. Roma community, low educated, etc.).

Threats

The economic crisis poses common threats to the education and LLL systems but there are also differences in the threats faced by the members states represented in the MASON project related to country-specific circumstances or socio-cultural factors. The introduction of tuition fees in Finland might challenge equality in education; socio-economic and cultural factors related to the background of parents have an impact on students' school achievement and on the risk of early school leaving in Germany; the economic crisis in Greece has consequences to all education levels and sectors, more visibly experienced by drastic cuts in all types of public spending on education; the small number of kindergartens in Poland is a core problem; lack of coordination among the institutions at national, regional and at local level in Spain is posing a threat to the country-wide coherence of LLL policies; the availability of qualified workforce in specific job positions/sectors (IT, technical fields, R&D, etc.) is threatened by a brain drain trend in Slovakia, Finland and Greece.

Summing up, the main threats to education, training and participation Lifelong Learning are posed by the economic crisis and resulting cuts in public spending on education at all levels, by potential shortages in qualified workforce due to brain drain, and by the lack of close links between the world of education and the labour market demands which in turn could have a negative impact on the motivation of students to continue with their studies or on the motivation of low-qualified employees to receive formal vocational training.

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1 Introduction

The aim of this report is to identify and compare the prevailing socio-cultural elements in the national contexts of BG, DE, ES, FI, GR, PL and SK, that shape the “practices of action” that in turn intervene in the process of educational transformation. The results of the analysis undertaken in the context of this study constitute the basis for the identification of systemic dynamics that constrain or promote the effective implementation of national lifelong learning strategies.

With a view to the above the MASON project takes as a starting point the EU strategic policies in Education, Training and Lifelong Learning because these constitute the ground upon which EU Member States coordinate their efforts and monitor their progress and performance regarding lifelong learning. These policies and common benchmarks also offer the *tertium comparationis*, i.e. the common platform of comparison for reflecting upon the coherence and comprehensiveness of LLL strategies at national level.

Following the 2001 Lisbon strategy which aimed to make the EU the leading knowledge based economy in the world, the “Education and Training 2010” work program and the goals and the associated concrete objectives adopted in this program was anticipated to contribute greatly to the EU’s strategy for growth and jobs. The open method of coordination was an integral part of this work program and the E&T 2020 that followed. In order to guide progress on achieving the objectives set for education and training systems of the EU, the Council adopted in May 2003 five benchmarks to be achieved by 2010. As shown on the table below only one of the benchmarks was achieved on time (share of MST graduates) and this only partially because there was no simultaneous decrease in the gender imbalance in favour of girls.

| EU benchmarks for 2010 | Average EU level by 2010* |
|---|--|
| 1. No more than 10% early school leavers. | 14,1% |
| 2. Decrease of at least 20% in the percentage of low-achieving pupils in reading literacy. | Increase by 14% in 2006 ¹ |
| 3. At least 85% of young people should have completed upper secondary education. | 79% |
| 4. Increase of at least 15% in the number of tertiary graduates in Mathematics, Science and Technology (MST), with a simultaneous decrease in the gender imbalance. | 14,3 in 2009 from 10,1 in 2000 ² . No decrease in gender imbalance. |
| 5. 12.5% of the adult population should participate in lifelong learning. | 9,1% |

Table 1.1: EU benchmarks in E&T for 2010* Source: Eurostat.

The results on the benchmarks for the period 2000-2010 do not show the whole picture regarding LLL in EU. The “Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training” annual reports³ have repeatedly presented evidence that EU Member States differ considerably in their performance and progress on the basis of both the benchmarks and a set of 16 indicators upon which the Council agreed in May 2007⁴ as a means to supplement the analysis of education systems indicators.

¹ According to Eurostat, the EU(27) share of 15-year-old pupils who scored at level 1 or below of the PISA combined reading literacy scale was raised from 19,8% in the 2000 round of PISA to 22,6% in the 2006 round. However, in the “Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training” annual report for 2010/2011 it is stated that the 2000 round EU share of low achievers was 21,3%, was increased to 24,1% in 2006 and dropped to 20% in the 2009 PISA round. See: Commission staff working document, *Progress Towards the Common European Objectives in Education and Training, Indicators and benchmarks 2010/2011*, Commission of the European Communities, p. 7.

² Graduates (ISCED 5-6) in mathematics, science and technology per 1000 of population aged 20-29 (Source: Eurostat).

³ See, for example, *ibid*.

⁴ Council of the European Union, Council conclusions on a coherent framework of indicators and benchmarks for monitoring progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training, 25 May 2007. Available at: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/educ/94290.pdf.

With the introduction of the follow-up strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ("ET 2020") there is a renewed political, economic and social interest in deepening the coordination of Lifelong Learning policies. Policy coordination and sharing of good practices across EU Member States can become much more efficient and effective towards the devising and implementation of evidence-based coherent and comprehensive LLL policies by opening up a reflective dialogue on the factors that may be contributing to the performance and progress of EU Member States in the field of LLL. The underlying motivation of the undertaking of the MASON project is one fundamental question: **why, despite huge coordinated efforts at EU level for over a decade now, there is observed so wide a variation in the performance and pace with which different EU countries progress towards common and repeatedly re-affirmed objectives and associated reference levels of European average performance (benchmarks) regarding Lifelong Learning?** Answering this question requires taking a comparative, pluralist, multidimensional as well as context-sensitive perspective. It is common sense to expect that several, interrelated factors may be at play at various domains and levels (institutional, socio-historic and cultural, economic, administrative, political, geographic and so on) in shaping the openness, accessibility, quality, equity in education and training systems across Europe.

Deliverable no. 5b is based on comprehensive analyses of national lifelong learning systems of the seven EU countries named above, which are annexed in this document. The development of the annexed national reports was based on a common guidance frameworks and tools for documenting good practice examples and interviews with LLL stakeholders at each national context. These guidance frameworks and tools are provided in the Implementation Guide (Deliverable no. 2). From a wider perspective, the analyses conducted in each national context were oriented by the Orientation Framework (deliverable 5a) which performed an in-depth analysis of historic trends in the evolution of LLL conceptualisations, LLL policies and strategies at EU level and identified underlying socio-cultural factors which cut across education traditions, countries and regions.

Each of the national reports annexed in this document offers a detailed state-of-the-art and reflective overview of the national lifelong learning strategies. These reports follow a common format to facilitate thematic comparability. The first part of these reports offer an overview of all formal and informal levels of education and training, from early childhood and care to further education and continuing training for adults, and an institutional analysis of the national LLL systems (legislative frameworks, structure, and current LLL strategies). The second part of these reports include i) an overview of the major LLL issues that became the focus of public discourse during the last years, particularly between March 2011 and February 2012, ii) the documentation of a case study of good LLL practice in the national context, and iii) the documentation of 10 interviews taken by LLL stakeholders. The above are aiming to offer insights into deeper socio-cultural issues and perspectives framing the concerns of the civic society and LLL stakeholders. The national reports conclude with a detailed SWOT analysis of the national LLL systems, grounded on the results of the institutional analysis and empirical evidence.

2 Hot topics in LLL

This section takes into account news and public debates as broadcasted/published by the nation-wide media during the last four years (2009-2012) and particularly the last year (national initiatives regarding LLL strategies, national and regional newspaper, journals, internet, print and online advertisement, and TV reports), in order to perform an analysis of current LLL issues which will be named as “Hot Topics”.

The analysis will show the most important national Hot Topics of LLL issues which will include potential problems and challenges with different LLL target groups with regard of the implementation of LLL strategies as well as the handling with new structural or demographical difficulties in practical application of LLL measures.

2.1 Bulgaria

New legal framework

Public information space in 2010-2011 was dominated by the Government (Center-right political orientation, EPP member party GERB) initiative to modernise both Scholl education and Higher education Acts. Several drafts - 2 of each act - were proposed to public discussions and the media coverage was relatively intensive, but very partial. For example over 60 % of the media publications on the future Scholl education act are only focused on 2 of 6 proposed changes:

- *making the public financing available for private schools and*
- *extending the compulsory pre-school education to 5 years age group (from present situation – 6 years old children)*

Similar situation displays the media coverage of the Higher education act and the related act on Academic grades and careers. This package of key documents defining the legal framework in LLL was covered in 95 % by publications on abolishment of the High Scientific Attestation Committee (institution certifying Doctor's degrees since the communist regime) – largely approved by all stakeholders including those ones criticising the very slow implementation of the new procedures end underlying the risks of the decentralisation of this responsibility.

Under financing

At the beginning and at the end of the budget year another important issue traditionally dominates the media as hot topic – the financing of education and in particular the state budget investments in education. The global and EU financial crisis and the considerable economic stagnation combined with the specific requirements of the Bulgarian currency board regime (since 1999), fixed the state budget investment in education on 3.2% (in 2009-2012) which was the lowest rate in EU before the Greece budgets cuts up to 2.9% in 2012. The dominant points of view relayed by the media still unchanged since 2009. The stakeholders (e.g. experts, professionals of education and students) are arguing that the education needs and merits much more investments of public money and state establishment is explaining that this is not possible. No relevant data is published on the financing except the cumulated general figures for investment in school and higher education and the comparative %s in EU. That's why quite naturally the public opinion is largely dominated by the conviction that Bulgarian education is underfinanced but the government systematically escapes to discuss this important issue with the other stakeholders.

School drop-out

Each late spring and early autumn since 2006 the school drop-out issue erases in the media on the occasion of communication of the data from National Statistical Institute annual survey (April) or the data of Ministry of Education Science and Youth (October). Unfortunately the content of the media coverage is weak, because of the lack of relevant analysis of the phenomenon and the lack of coordinated policy for its prevention. All publications are limited to announcement of the status of drop-out for the current year, the

comparison with the previous 1 or 2 years and some general considerations on the important difference of drop-outs between the Roma students and the others. Taking in consideration the repetition of the forms and the poor content of the media coverage on this issue during several years it is justified to conclude that the drop-outs still an example of “true-false” preoccupation of the Bulgarian society, despite it’s important place in every strategic and programming document concerning the LLL of the young Bulgarians. The recently published report of the National Audit Office (March 2012) on the optimisation of the schools network in the period 2009-2011 could boost and refocus this hot-topic by one of its recommendations – e.g. evaluate the effect of the contraction by 15 % of the school network on the drop-out phenomenon.

“Educationally irresponsible” parents from Roma minority

This issue is frequently emerging because it is closely related to the drop-out issue (3 times highest drop-out level of Roma students compared to other students). But it is also mentioned in many publications on diverse social issues like: labour market problems, level of integration of the ethnic minorities in Bulgaria, criminal cases with Roma participation, child protection issues etc. Dominant opinions relayed is that Roma parents do not consider education as important and the sanctions to families non respecting their obligations in the enrolment of their children between 6 and 16 years are not sufficiently efficient for this particular group of Bulgarian citizens.

2.2 Finland

On 15th of December 2011, the Government adopted the new Education and Research development plan for 2012–2016. *According the development plan for 2011-2016 the education policy is built on the lifelong learning principle.* Education policy is built on the lifelong learning principle⁵. The development plan is based on the objectives set for education and science policy in the Program of Prime Minister Jyrki Katainen's Government. Public authorities must secure equal opportunities for every resident in Finland to get education also after compulsory schooling and to develop themselves, irrespective of their financial standing. One of the new improvements for next years is the educational guarantee defined in new development plan.

According *the new development plan for education and research;* the lifelong learning means learning throughout the lifespan and in all walks of life. It is vital that knowledge and competencies are made visible and knowledge and skills are valued to the full wherever, whenever and however they have been acquired. The identification and recognition of prior learning will make for a well-working education and qualification system and improve the motivation and progress of the individuals in education and in working life⁶. In a constantly changing society, favourable development of learning skills is of primary importance. Lifelong learning policy expects that *transitions* from one level to another and from education to the labour market are as flexible as possible⁵.

An adult education and training system comprising all the levels of education creates a basis for responding to the competence requirements in working life and for offering high-quality services for self-improvement, for instance, in liberal adult education. New development plan put emphasis to 1) level of education and competencies, Action Program for equal opportunities in education, for example operation environment to be taken into account 2) equal access to education, 3) targeting of education supply, 4) immigrants participation, 5) links between education and work, 6) group size, 7) stop bullying, 8) Intensified and special support in basic education, 9) educational guarantee as a part of social guarantee, 10) dropouts, 11) better opportunities for adults in education and training, 12) competence-based qualifications and 13) education evaluation⁵.

⁵Education and Research Development Plan 2011-2016, from <http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Julkaisut/2012/Kehittamissuunnitelma.html?lang=fi>

⁶ Education and Research Development Plan 2011-2016 Finnish version is to be found from web-page: <http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Tiedotteet/2011/12/kesu.html>

According annual report 2010 of the Ministry of Education and Culture many changes has been happened already concerning⁷: smaller teaching groups, curb on bullying, uniform quality criteria, accessibility to basic education, guidance counselling in the upper secondary school, VET increase of entrant places, VET 'Job Start' training, higher education reform (which has been started lot of discussions), committee proposals for eliminating bottlenecks in study progress, overall reform of adult education and training, a programme ensuring competent teachers, Immigrant education and training and favourable conditions for research and student financial aid.

There has been significant change in education concerning unemployed people. Since the beginning of the year 2010, on certain conditions, it has been possible to take full-time (self-motivated) studies without losing unemployment benefits. The subsidizing of studies is arranged with the Employment and Economic Development Office^{8,9,10}. Certain extensive structural reforms have turned into practice when the reformed university system and the new regional governance have been adopted at the beginning of 2010⁷.

According development plan 2011-2016 the level of education among the population will be raised in the future⁵. The Government will undertake comprehensive action to even out gender differences in learning outcomes, participation in education and completion of studies and to minimize the effect of the socio-economic background on participation in education. Finland commits itself to raising young people's level of education and reducing the proportion of early school-leavers. In the strategy, Finland sets a concrete aim to raise the share of 30-to-34-year olds who have higher education diplomas to at least 42 per cent⁵.

2.3 Germany

Early school leavers, the promotion of the vocational training and the situation of migrants are the most important Hot Topics. The media analysis has shown the national Hot Topics of educational issues has included potential problems of different target groups from primary to tertiary education. As this report summarized the most important LLL Hot Topics in Germany are the support of early school leavers, the promotion of the vocational training and the situation of students with migration background in school and university. We showed the current educational Hot Topics in the national context and the initiatives against these problems.

In addition we showed the inequalities in the situation of school leavers or students with weak performances in school with regard to find a job still exist. The newspaper articles emphasise the educational gap. However, students with migration background still are among the under-achiever at school in Germany. The media analysis of the newspapers has shown that the support for these students is strongly required. In the last years initiatives of the civil society became more important in the face of structural or demographical difficulties. Projects against school failure and for equal chances are playing a decisive role, e.g. "Lesestart" (Readingstart) and the "House of life chances" (Haus der Lebenschancen). The Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) also started a lot of initiatives to solve the current problems, e.g. the support programs "JOBSTARTER" and "Bildungsketten". Furthermore the quality of educational offers was promoted with the campaigns "Integration through Education" and "Praktisch unschlagbar". The public-private-financed scholarship "Deutschland Stipendium" supports students with difficult family background in getting through their studies.

2.4 Greece

There is little doubt that Greece's LLL system is facing the future ahead from a disadvantaged position when it comes to the capacity of the State and households to invest on education and training. In 2012 the

⁷ Annual report 2010, (Ministry of Education and Culture publications 2011:24). From http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Julkaisut/2011/vuosikatsaus.html?lang=fi&extra_locale=fi

⁸ Ministry of Employment and Economy, www-page: <http://www.tem.fi/?s=2623>

⁹ Ministry of Education and Culture, from www-page:www.minedu.fi

¹⁰ Key competences for lifelong learning in Finland. Education 2010 – interim report, www-page: <http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Koulutus/koulutuspolitiikka/?lang=en>

government is estimated to invest on education around 2.9% of its GDP, probably the lowest -by far- among the EU Member States. Cuts in public spending have a strong impact on Greece's public system of education and training and have stirred a wide discussion at various levels and channels (in the Parliament, the press, political parties, social media, teachers' unions etc.).

Public school teachers, who lost at least 3 monthly salaries per year as compared to year 2009, responded with strikes and demonstrations. Already before these cuts Greek teachers were, according to OECD, among the lowest paid in EU. Reforms in the pension system and restrictions on the hiring of new teachers in public schools (one teacher for every 5 new retired) sparked concerns about the impact of a shrinking teaching workforce. Between 2010 and 2013, 45,000 teachers will leave the system, resulting in an overall loss of 35,000 teachers. One of the measures that the Ministry of Education took in order to deal with the challenge of a shrinking teacher workforce in public schools and to increase the efficiency of the system was to close down a number of schools with small number of pupils and reduce the number of teacher posts in others. These reforms are estimated to directly affect around 15-20% of the primary schools in Greece.

2.5 Poland

Without a doubt school closings (300 in 2011 and a possible 800 in 2012) have made the news most often with fears of job losses among teachers and communities fighting to maintain their schools. Concurrently, in school year 2011/2012 parents were given the option of sending their six-year olds to start first grade (one year earlier than at present). It was planned that the following year this would be the mandatory age. Only 20% of parents accepted the option, many protest, and the reform is now to be put off until 2014. Higher education articles most often were concerned over the lack of jobs for graduates.

2.6 Slovakia

The debate about close future initiatives in reforming education has been very active since the onset of 2012. From many topics some are more salient. Pedagogical and non-pedagogical staff is expected to receive an average salary raise of 5.7%, much less than they asked for. Minister pushed for publishing of work loads of university teachers. In terms of EU support to education, Slovakia is far from using the funds efficiently. Furthermore the error rate of projects in education reached almost 70%.

The Ministry of Education put efforts into digitalization and the first e-textbooks on portal eaktovka.sk start to become available. Another effort is the compulsory English language teaching at primary schools.

In terms of enhancing the quality of university education, the following problems have been identified and scrutinized: orientation on quantity not quality, recruitment instead of strict selection of talents, ignorance of the needs of labour market, low practical dimension of teaching, unfinished reform of Bachelor level. Secondary school students do not know which university to choose. Helpful could be new pilot project of the Ministry of Education that should compare quality of universities - vs.iedu.sk.

Plan of the EU to raise number of university educated people to at least 40% might be not fulfilled as Slovakia has currently around 20%. There is prevailing aversion of students towards mathematics, physics or electro-technical schools. On the other hand, the students are not collecting enough practical experiences on internships abroad and they are poorly educated in languages. In Slovakia it is not necessary true as commonly abroad that expensive private university secures prestigious job with high salary.

Currently there are 7600 study programs on offer and there are too many university graduates. Full time study programs with most applications are general medicine, law, psychology, economics and management of companies, management and social work. Part time study programs with most applications are social work, law, teaching practical preparation and management. Socio-scientific disciplines at universities are most popular even though the labour market does not demand them and is signalling instead acute deficit of graduates from technical fields.

The launching of Central Register of Final Theses had mainly psychological effect, as students were more responsible in writing final thesis and more careful in using resources. Punishments for dishonestly acquired university titles or plagiarism will have to be solved by the new government.

As far as labour market is concerned, the companies lack the qualified blue collar workers and labour market chronically misses vocational professions. Education sector is criticized not having an overview about situation on the labour market not only in long-term but also in short-term horizon. Furthermore, the university degree 'mania' and minimal interconnection of schools with practice is destroying labour market in Slovakia. There are too many students of humanities and the labour market cannot absorb them. Another problem is abovementioned quantity at expense of quality. The more students are admitted at universities, the more money the universities accept from the state. Knowledge or even university diploma does not automatically guarantee job today as employers are searching for specialists, preferably already with an experience which the graduates do not have. The best starting position have IT graduates, as they are also best paid.

Vocational education and training does not reflect the current needs of the labour market. Employers criticize that schools do not prepare qualified workforce. The Ministry together with employers, employees and vocational schools prepared simplification of vocational system of study fields, thanks to this from next school year 171 study fields will be eliminated, leaving 454 study fields. It is necessary to connect two worlds – demand and supply of workforce mainly because of alarming high unemployment of university graduates. Study disciplines like social work, psychology or media communication are cheap ticket to world of university graduation but not an entrance to the labour market. Young people today study disciplines, which are not usable currently on the labour market.

Brussels is offering over 2 billion EUR to fight unemployment of young people. Situation is alarming as every third young person in Slovakia is jobless according to EU survey. In January 2012 are 72% of secondary and 20% of tertiary graduates registered unemployed on labour offices.

Other debates turn on the necessity to raise salaries at universities and in this way to maintain quality. Ideas include e.g. universities that have good or excellent research should receive more financial resources as those that do not carry out any research. Guidance is an important element that is seen to change things starting from kindergarten and primary schools. There is need to have at least few top Bachelor programs in different fields. Other disputes are about how much money will be given to technical, natural sciences and artistic fields. Also the criteria should be stricter not only for new universities but also for already established higher education institutions. All unsuccessful study fields with unemployed graduates should be closed. There is also need to internationalize Slovak higher education with foreign talented students that are fluent in English. Other topic is related to lowering of bureaucracy in relation to teachers, schools and state.

Graduates of secondary and tertiary schools should not only be able to memorize what is in textbooks, but should be able mainly to think abstractly.

IT professionals warn that if the society will not adapt sufficiently to new technologies there will be more unemployed. It is not enough to provide schools only with computers and internet. Secondary schools should be leaving graduates that should orient them self not only on social networks.

2.7 Spain

Among the key elements of the agenda proposed in Lisbon since 2000 by the European Council, it is observed the promotion of employability and social inclusion by investing in knowledge and skills of citizens in all stages of life. Under this context, the importance of lifelong learning and the transformation of education systems (into more open and flexible structures). The orientation of these bases is to contribute to employability, labour market mobility and social inclusion as a consequence of the need of increasing the competences and qualifications in all stages of life.

Action plans then seek to ensure that the competences needed to participate in lifelong learning are acquired and are recognized in all educational stages, including adult education.

In Spain we have to make an effort to improve participation, quality, financing and development of the sector. There are many examples of good initiatives undertaken by the authorities and civil society entities - in general with non-profit orientation-, but they suffer a noticeable dispersion and a lack of synergy between them. It is necessary therefore, a coordinated state-wide, at a national, regional and local level for improving adult learning, expanding and facilitating access, promoting adequate funding and ensuring efficient use of available resources.

In the education system, the adult education offer is covered in Chapter IX of the Educational Organic Law 2/2006, of May 3, 2006. Currently the Ministry of Education in their area of management, and the Departments of Education of the Autonomous Communities, through public schools, private schools or through agreements and grants with social initiative organizations taught mainly lessons (basic, post-compulsory, professional qualifications, entrance examinations, foreign languages, ICTs and job placement) for adults.

Regarding the workplace, the provision of training for the workforce is regulated by Royal Decree 395/2007 of Training for Employment, which includes both the training that companies organize themselves to workers, as well as those deal through the Plans of the Social Partners, There is also a training activities' offer preferably addressed to the unemployed target, through agreements between Public Employment Services and other institutions in the state or regional level. In 2010 more than 4,500,000 workers had accessed this training.

At the municipal level is remarkable the role played by local authorities and corporations which involve a non formal and informal educational intervention through adult education programs, gender equality programs and adult classrooms. There are also training offers for the adult population provided by other public (other ministries, universities, among others institutions) and private initiatives, especially with non profit (e.g. associations, ONG) according to the national statistics, such trainings are followed more by the older 45 years old population and the issues that are most widely accepted are those related to the incorporation of new technologies and the humanities.

The Government, the Autonomous Communities and other interested institutions and organizations should act in their respective areas, to ensure sufficient supply and quality in line with the objectives established in the Educational Organic Law (LOE), enhancing the access of adults to lifelong learning, providing guidance and accelerating the validation and recognition of basic competences or professional learning acquired through formal and non formal activities. Especially, it is necessary ensure learning opportunities that achieve key competences.

Lifelong learning is a tool of personal and social development for broad sectors of society, by acquiring those considered basic competences to live and work in the XXI century. The adult population cannot give up the acquisition and development of personal and social competences needed to exercise their right as active citizenship.

The LLL Action Plan 2012-2014 of the Spanish Government is oriented for increasing the professional, personal and social competences, complementing those acquired during the educational system. However, the Action Plan establishes a priority attention to groups with low or no qualifications, which should offer new opportunities for employment and social integration. With this prospect the Spanish policies focus their priorities on the population sectors with little or no skill, by offering new opportunities for integration and social work. For pursuing a coherence and comprehensiveness in the educational policies, the Action Plan is organized in 8 axis, those are in turn developed through 25 actions.

The actions for Lifelong Learning are attaching priority to those groups found in a disadvantage because of the lack of basic competences provided by the compulsory education, especially command of reading, writing or ICT, and also low or no professional qualifications. Indeed, these shortcomings limit their ability to get integrated to the labour market and with success in society. The use of ICT is now a basic tool for social and working life, so that people who do not have digital competition have added difficulties for personal and

professional development. The acquisition of these basic competences allows the preparation and updating of young people and adults in new professional and personal competences.

These groups are in Spain some of the immigrants, older people, early school leavers, people who remain precarious employment and have not upgraded their educational or professional profile in recent years and immigrants that need to learn the host language. The general objectives raised by the Action Plan for Lifelong Learning are:

- Identify strategic action lines that generate a greater coordination of resources at a national, regional (Autonomous Communities) and local level.
- Reduce the rate of adult population that lacks the compulsory education's diploma.
- Increase the professional competences levels of the active population particularly of the low-skilled workers.
- Provide new opportunities for young people who fail to graduate in the compulsory education (early school leavers).
- Reduce the poverty and social exclusion situations between certain groups, facilitating language learning, the formation in cultural patterns and social skills for the inclusion in the host society, helping them to assume an active citizenship.
- Enhance the culture of constant training as well as the participation and implication of the Citizenship and civil society in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies related to lifelong learning.
- Track the sector, increasing the quality and efficiency. For this a working group on indicators was created and monitoring reports will be delivered for updating the Plan with actions that emerged were observed as important in this analysis and results. In addition, a final assessment report will be presented as the basis for the planning of the second Plan of action.

Although Spain is not badly placed to achieve by 2020 a 15% of participation set by the European Union, the Spanish Government placed a more ambitious goal according to this Action Plan, closer to the more advanced countries (20%, establishing a 12% by 2014).

2.8 Summary

This section discusses and compares the findings of the media analysis on the national LLL-“Hot Topics”. Similarities and differences are identified when comparing the various national contributions.

The similarities can be seen on different action fields and between different countries. Finland and Germany emphasize that they want to achieve a better integration of migrants in primary school and secondary education and to improve vocational training. Germany and Slovakia have noticed a shortage of qualified professionals for practical occupations such as crafts. In Poland the number of schools was reduced. Greece, Poland, Spain and Slovakia have the problem that there are not enough jobs for university graduates.

Differences that are observed in the media and wider public discourse of education and LLL originate from variations in the education traditions and structure of education systems, but above all by the current economic and financial condition of each country. The influence of different administrative structures and traditions can be seen especially in the comparison of Spain and Germany on the one hand and Greece and Finland on the other hand. In Spain and Germany, traditionally the regions and communities are strong, and thus accordingly have a strong influence on the E&T system. This requires greater coordination and harmonization of individual interests and actors. As compared to Spain and Germany, Finland and Greece have a rather centralised education governance system and can therefore enforce country-wide reforms. In Greece, the economic situation is so critical that currently all efforts to reform the education system are challenged or driven by the resulting cuts in public spending on education and training.

3 Current statistics on LLL

In the following the main results and statistical data regarding the LLL measures in the national and in the European context will be demonstrated and evaluated. In this section, current educational issues that have impact on educational institutes and in this way also on the needs of the adult learners concerning LLL will be shown.

3.1 Bulgaria

The main government document dealing with the 2020 targets is the National Reform Programme 2011 – 2015. Four of its targets – children in ISCED 0, share of early school leavers, share of people with higher education and employment levels – coincide with the EU benchmarks. The main position of the government on the EU benchmarks is that the fact that the starting position of each country is very different needs to be taken into consideration.

As regards **children in pre-school education**, no specific targets are set but the main intention is to “widen the scope of the mandatory pre-school education” as well as to provide support for pupils in primary and lower secondary stage of education with learning difficulties and to raise the qualification of teachers. Most pre-primary institutions in Bulgaria are operated by local government authorities and access in large cities is frustrated by demand far outstripping supply.

The target will be achieved through measures for equal access to school education. A Strategy for the educational integration of children from minority ethnic backgrounds has been in effect since 2004. A number of factors contributing to inadequate access need to be addressed: aggression among students; programmes for children with special education needs, including those with disabilities; difficult access in remote or poorly populated regions.

Increasing the share of young people with higher education is targeted by a system promoting the motivation for better performance in education based on the provision of additional scholarships and grants. In addition, the implementation of the Student Loans Programme will increase the attractiveness of higher education by ensuring equal access to higher education to all candidates, regardless of their social status. Matriculation exams applied at the end of ISCED are increasingly being used as entry criteria for university which is also a way of boosting access. Encouraging distance learning – which is currently used by few universities – is also expected to contribute.

In anticipation of PISA 2012, the new SERs are about to be finalised, to be followed by consequent changes to school textbooks and teachers will be coached on the requirements for PISA 2012. Still, no national target is set to correspond to the EU benchmark.

3.2 Finland

Operating environment is changing all the time, since 2005, the number of those reaching working age have been smaller than the number retiring from the labour market. Many significant attempts must be made to secure access to the labour market for the entire workforce. According development plan 2011-2016 **availability of competent workforce must be ensured**⁵. For society, the availability of workforce will be a problem at least in two respects. First of all, the shortage of workforce will complicate the operation of growth business and undermine the availability of welfare services in particular.

The demographic development will worsen the care ratio significantly. **The demographic care ratio** means the ratio of the population under 15 and over 64 to the working-age population. In 2010 there were 51.6 persons under or above working-age per one hundred working-age persons. In 2020, this figure will be nearly 70 and in 2030 clearly over 70. Such an unfavorable development in the care ratio is problematic in terms of balanced national economy⁵.

The actions will be required to enhance the efficiency of the education system, **to speed up transition points and to shorten study periods**. Education policy means actions with 1) shortening the time spent at each

level of education, expediting transition phases, reducing unnecessary doubling in education and enhancing the recognition of prior learning, 2) Improving the completion rate in education, and 3) Improving the matching of education supply and labour demand. Inadequate matching of education and the labour market demand has an effect on not only the functioning of the labour market, but also the way young people find their place in working life and how long they study⁵.

Statistics in Ministry of Education and Culture Annual report 2010

Ministry of Education and Culture has been published lately Annual report 2010⁷. We can evaluate many important states of affairs issues concerning Lifelong Learning on the basis of Annual Report¹¹. The quality of basic education was enhanced. Vocational education and training was further increased. The universities started to work under the new Universities Act. Various reforms increased participation in adult education and training. Ministry of Education has listed work that has been done in all the areas of education in last three years:

Group sizes

According to a study, the average size of teaching groups has decreased in all year classes to some extent. In the spring of 2010, the average size in year classes 1–6 was 19.2 pupils, compared to 19.6 in 2008⁷.

PISA results

The PISA 2009 results were published in December 2010. Young Finns came third in reading after Shanghai-China and Korea. The result was not as good as earlier, but still the second best in the OECD. In mathematics, Finland was the second best OECD country and sixth among all the participating countries. On the science scale young Finns came second after Shanghai⁷.

Accessibility of basic education and increase entrant places in vocational education

The regional accessibility of basic education is good and has remained nearly at the same level according to a 7-year national review conducted by the regional administrations. The differences between municipalities were still large in all regions. Yet, nearly 97 % of school leavers continued in further education straight away. The provision of vocational education and training was increased by entrant places. The increases were made in accordance with labour needs and with emphasis on growth Centre. The aim was particularly to secure young people's entry to education and training, lower the youth unemployment rate, prevent the drift towards exclusion among young people and safeguard adults' opportunities for vocational education and training⁷.

'Job Start' training

The Ministry of Education and Culture authorized 49 training providers to provide 'Job Start' training on a permanent basis. Nearly 1,500 students participated in this training which guides and prepares for initial vocational training. In the autumn of 2010, 73% of the new 'Job Start' students were the same year's school-leavers, while a year earlier the figure had been 65%⁷.

Statistics Finland combines collected data with its own expertise to produce statistics and information services¹². Founded in 1865, Statistics Finland is the only Finnish public authority specifically established for statistics. It produces the vast majority of Finnish official statistics and is a significant international actor in the field of statistics.

Number of pupils transferred to special education hasn't changed from the past year. In all, 23.3 per cent of pupils, comprehensive school students received part-time special education during the 2009-2010 academic

¹¹ Child day care Act 36/1973 (Finlex), Child day Care Decree 239/1973 (Finlex), from <http://www.finlex.fi/fi/>

¹² Source: Education 2011. Statistics Finland Inquiries: Ritva Kaukonen (09) 1734 3311, Director in charge: Jari Tarkoma, from koulutustilastot@stat.fi

year. The number of pupils attending part-time special education grew by half a percentage point from the previous year¹².

According to Statistics Finland, **immediate continuation of studies was still more difficult** in 2010 than in the year before for both completers of the 9th grade of comprehensive school and passers of the matriculation examination (13 Dec 2011). 9 % of completers of the comprehensive school and 60 per cent of new passers of the matriculation examination failed to get a place for further studies. The share of those left outside further studies leading to a qualification or degree grew by around one-half of a percentage point from the previous year. Overall the **size of population with educational qualifications has multiplied many times over in 40 years** (02 Dec 2011). By the end of 1970, one out of four and by the end of 2010 two out of three in the population aged 15 or over had attained a post-comprehensive level educational qualification¹².

According to Statistics Finland, **the majority of recent graduates found employment more easily in 2010 than one year earlier (06 Mar 2012)**. The employment of graduates with upper secondary vocational qualifications has improved by 2 % points. Employment number was 86 per cent of those with polytechnic degrees, by 88 per cent of those with higher university degrees, such as master's degrees, and by 89 per cent of those with doctor's degrees. Of them one percentage point more were employed than one year before. Discontinuation of education decreased during the 2008/2009 academic year (15 Mar 2011). Discontinuation decreased most in vocational education. **At year 2010 35,4 % children aged 1-2 years (in municipally funded) were in full-time day care** (% of total population of same age in Finland). From children age group 1-5 years nearly 55 % (in municipally funded) were in full-time day care (% of total population of same age in Finland). **Compared to other Nordic Countries 0-6 years children participation to day care were weakest in Finland**¹².

The comparative OECD report on education, Education at a Glance, was published in September 2010¹³. The report reveals that 43 per cent of 20–29-year-old Finns participated in degree education in 2008, when the OECD average was 25 per cent. However, of the under-20-year-old Finns, fewer than average were in tertiary education. Half of Finnish students in higher education complete their degrees before the age of 27, when the corresponding OECD figure is 25 years.

OECD PISA Survey

The skills of Finnish students were among the best in all domains assessed in PISA surveys. The uniformity of students' performance is a special forte in Finland. The differences between the strongest and weakest results in Finland are among the smallest in the survey. Differences between schools and regions are also remarkably small in Finland. Differences in performance were very slight between various language groups in Finland, and the socio-economic back-ground has a lower impact on students' performance here than in the other PISA countries. A significant implication is that high performance can be achieved with relatively low differences in performance between students¹³.

3.3 Germany

Participation in Lifelong Learning in Germany increased slightly. According to the key figures of Eurostat (2011) based on Lifelong Learning the proportion of the surveyed persons in all 27 European countries on average was 9.3% in 2009. In 2004 the proportion for participants of all 27 European countries was the same (9.3%). With regard to the participation in different forms of Lifelong Learning in Germany a small increase from 7.4% to 7.8% could be detect. The proportion of men in Lifelong Learning remained the same (7.8%). In contrast, the share of women in Lifelong Learning measures has been increased from 7% to 7.7%. According to the data the highest proportion of participation regarding Lifelong Learning was achieved in Finland in 2009 (22.1%). However, it was remarkable that Bulgaria (1.4%) and Greece (3.3%) had the lowest share of participants in 2009.

¹³ The comparative OECD report on education, Education at a Glance
http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Tiedotteet/composite_news_bulletins/2010/september.html?lang=en

Participation in vocational training often depends on the level of formal education. In the Mikrozenus study of the Statistische Bundesamt an increase of participation in vocational trainings in all age classes could be exposed. The share of employees in vocational training measures increases with higher the level of formal education. The share increased from 2005 to 2008 in nearly all groups except the group of employees without a formal education degree. According to Powell and Solga (2010a) Germany's tertiary participation and numbers of graduations have grown less than in other countries over the last ten years. Based on the European benchmarks for 'Education and Training 2020' the proportion of all 30- to 34-year-olds who hold tertiary-level certificate should be at least 40%. Unfortunately, Germany's tertiary rate, in relation to 30- to 35-year-olds, in 2008 was only 28% (including professional schools, technical colleges and universities), while the EU-27-average showed a share of 31% (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung 2010, 11).

In Germany the continuing vocational training is a crucial part of lifelong learning. Different studies (IAB-enterprise panel; Continuing Vocational Training Survey, and studies of IW Köln) concentrated on the share of vocational training as well as on the participation rate on vocational training. The IAB panel has been considered those enterprises for the analysis that hired at least one employee who is subject to social insurance contribution. The analysis based on data of the years of 2001 to 2009. According to the IAB-enterprise panel study *the share of vocational training* is defined as the number of companies which were active regarding vocational training in the first half of the year in relation to all companies in Germany. The *participation rate on vocational training* is based on the quotient of the amount of all employees who participate on a vocational training measure in the first half year and the amount of all surveyed employees. That means amount of all employees who participate on a vocational training measure in the first half year is divided by the amount of all surveyed employees. Regarding the share of employees (linked to social insurance contribution) who participated in vocational training measures, it could be established generally that the proportion of trained employees increased from 36% in 2001 to 49% in 2008. In 2009 the proportion declined to 45%. This tendency is similar to both, new and old federal states of Germany ("Länder").

Currently, precarious or temporary agency employment has increased very dynamically in the German labour market. According to Dütsch (2011) atypical employment is defined by dissociation from employment "by normal work conditions". Further, atypical forms are limited labour contracts, temporary agency employment, freelance work, and temporary agency work. Atypical forms of employment become more and more important in Germany (Brehmer & Seifert, 2008). More than 30% of all employees work in a fixed-term employment relationship, have a part-time contract, work in 'marginal' part-time work or are temporary workers. These employment forms are categorized as precarious and inferior in comparison to standard forms of employment. In addition, the authors could reveal that part-time employees and those employed in 'marginal' part-time work have lower opportunities of participating in further training in their jobs in comparison to those persons are employed in regular forms. The results of SOEP study (2007) reveal that most of the temporary agency employers are between 25 to 54 years old. More than 20% are in temporary agency employment (26.56% of the 25 to 34 year olds, 22.92% of the 35 to 54 year olds, and 24.48% of the 45 to 54 year olds). With regard to school qualification the group of "lower" educational background (graduation degree from "Hauptschule" or "Realschule") is the biggest part of the temporary agency employees (51.67%). Dütsch (2011) summarizes that in particular temporary agency workers are disadvantaged with regard to salary, employment stability and health related risks involved, as well as to work satisfaction temporary agency workers are disadvantaged because of wage stability employment, involved health related risks, and of work satisfaction. In addition, temporary agency employment is precarious due to employment instability.

The unemployment rate in Germany is current issue regarding LLL and vocational education questions. Basic data about rather positive unemployment development in Germany as well as the unemployment rate in comparison to the rates of EU-27 will be illustrated in the following. A lot of dynamics with regard to the regional labour markets in Germany could be exposed for the last two decades. In this section the analysis of the unemployment data of 439 districts ("Kreise") from 1996 to 2004 will be illustrated (Patuelli, 2004; Mikrozensus). The data show a clearly decline of the unemployed persons. According to these data, the

unemployed population decreased from 8.1 % in January 2010 to 6.1 % in June 2011 (6.8% in June 2010) in total. With respect to gender, the tendency of a decline of unemployed male (8.7% to 6.1%) and female (7.4% to 5.9%) persons from January 2010 to June 2011 is similar to the whole group of unemployed population. In the group of 25 year-old to under 75 year-old unemployed persons the proportion were slightly smaller (7.7% in January 2010 and 5.6% in June 2010) in comparison to the group of all unemployed persons. The unemployment rate in the EU-27 was 9.1% in 2004 and declined to 8.9% in 2009. In contrast, the unemployment rate with 7.5% in Germany is rather low in 2009. With regard to youth unemployment the EU-27 rate, which describes the unemployed young persons under 25 years-old, reached an average from 19.6%. In comparison to this European average, the Netherlands, Austria and Germany had the lowest youth unemployment rates of 6.6%, 10%, and 10.4%.

Lifelong learning as instruments could reduce skills mismatch of under-qualified employees. Different Lifelong learning measures are provided for retraining of employees: first, a modular structure of a training which allows learners to take only the parts of a course they need to re-qualify. Second, high-quality systems are introduced to provide learning credits for skills that are transferable between two occupations. Third, offering part-time learning opportunities for persons who want to continue working. In addition, the results of the study by OECD (2011) showed that immigrants are substantially more likely to be mismatched according to their qualifications and skills in comparison to natives. Sometimes (high-skilled) immigrants do not hold a work contract before arriving in the country that could be a reason for the lack of recognition or equivalency of foreign qualifications could lead to over-skilling. Other European countries, e.g. Denmark had specific promoting measures for skilled immigrants like the “competence cards” that allow them to work in Denmark. Further, the centres also assist in finding employment that matches the immigrants’ skills (OECD, 2007c).

3.4 Greece

The current status of Greece regarding the E&T 2020 benchmarks is described in the table that follows:

| Field | Benchmark | Status of Greece |
|---|---|---|
| Adult participation in lifelong learning | By 2020, an average of at least 15% of adults should participate in lifelong learning | 3% (year 2010) |
| Low achievers in basic skills | By 2020, the share of low-achieving 15-years olds in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15 % | Low achievers in: Reading: 21,3% Mathematics: 30,4% Science: 25,3% |
| Tertiary level attainment | By 2020, the share of 30-34 year olds with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 40. %. | 28,5% (year 2010) |
| Early leavers from education and training | By 2020, the share of early leavers from education and training should be less than 10 %. | 13,7% (year 2010) |
| Early childhood education | By 2020, at least 95 % of children between 4 years old and the age for starting compulsory primary education should participate in early childhood education. | 52,4% of 4 year olds and 88% of 5 year olds (year 2008) |

Table 3.4.1. The current status of Greece regarding the E&T 2020 benchmarks

In the third quarter of 2011 the unemployment rate reached 17,7% from 9,3 % two years ago. In just one year more than a quarter of a million of Greeks lost their jobs. Overall, the number of Greeks in employment is much smaller than the number of those in unemployment or economically inactive. In the absence of affordable and employability-enhancing re-training and professional development opportunities for adults, consistently high unemployment rates coupled with a large share of long-term unemployed may lead to the explosion in the number of NEETs (acronym used for those not in education, employment or training), which is currently unrecorded in Greece. The establishment of such a condition among disillusioned unemployed is likely to further deepen problems of widespread social and economic exclusion. Overall, the above data indicate that the need for the establishment of a sustainable and efficient system of continuing education and training in close link to job centres, and counselling and guidance services. Despite the critical need for low cost training opportunities, public investments co-financed by EU funds earmarked to non-formal E&T are adsorbed with a very slow pace. Until August 2011 the absorption of public funds in training programmes falling under the Priority Axis 2 of the O.P. "Human Resources Development" was no more than 6% of the budget allocated for the period 2007-2013.

It should be pointed out that in Greece no nation-wide studies have been conducted on the level of participation in LLL each year. The only regular survey in the field is the one conducted by the Hellenic Statistical Authority in the context of the Labour Force Survey under the supervision of Eurostat (latest data available: 2010). No government body is responsible to collect and publish detailed comprehensive data of adult participation in LLL. In June 2011 the Ministry of Education announced that a number of large scale initial and continuing education and training projects in the context of NSRF 2007-2013 have been approved for funding, estimated to benefit around 409,000 adults up to year 2013.

The Institute of Continuing Adult Education (IDEKE), a public sector body governed by private law and supervised by the General Secretariat of LLL under the Ministry of Education provided us with the following data on participation of adults in its continuous education and training programmes for the academic year 2010-2011:

- Adult Education Centres: 48.090 participants.
- Parents Schools: 15.800 participants.
- Public Vocational Training Institutes (spring semester): 10.437 trainees.

- “Heron II” programme on basic ICT skills: 20.881 participants.
- “Ulysses” programme on Greek language for immigrants: 10.532 participants.
- Second Chance Schools: 5.000 participants.
- Distance learning programmes for adult trainers and administrators: 3.275 participants in year 2010 and 5.963 in 2011.

In total, the public programmes on continuing education and training managed by IDEKE benefited around 210,000 adults in the period 2010-2011.

It is estimated that around 8,000 students are enrolled in 37 Colleges and the laboratories of Liberal Studies and 15,000 in private Vocational Training Institutes. An unspecified number of young adults are participating in 270 Vocational Training Centres.

Within 2010, the training programmes offered by the National School of Public Administration and Local Government (ESDDA) were attended by 25,800 public sector employees of the central and regional administration and local government.

Within 2010 (July 2010), in the context of the programme “*Teacher training for the exploitation and implementation of ICT in teaching practice*”, around 3,100 teachers-trainees completed the Level B courses delivered by 360 teacher trainers. Around 330 teacher trainers were also trained on the use of whiteboards (Sept-Oct 2010). By July 2011 around 3,100 more teachers participated in the Level B training programme delivered by 254 teacher trainers.

3.5 Poland

Poland was the only EU country which before 2010 achieved the targets in 4 of 5 of the most important benchmarks for education in Europe in 2010 (achievements in reading, number of early school leavers, minimum secondary education, STEM graduates) and can therefore be said to be among the leaders in upper secondary education and among young adults (ages 18-24). However despite the success in formal education, Poland is among the lowest ranked in the EU in development of education preceding and after learning in schools and universities. Poland has the lowest level of pre-school participation (age 4 to compulsory age) in the EU (75% vs. the benchmark of 95%) and the share of adults between the ages of 25 and 64 and taking part in any form of education or training amounted to 5.3% in 2010 in Poland while the EU average is 9.1% and the 2020 target is 15%. The weakest point of Polish policy on LLL is building a system for recognition of qualifications attained outside of the formal system and a mismatch between the skills of vocational and university graduates and the job market with an unemployment as high as 60% and 24% respectively.

3.6 Slovakia

Unemployment

Graduates of gymnasiums have the lowest unemployment among secondary school graduates as their majority continues in studies at universities. Differences in unemployment among university graduates of different study fields can be also observed. Most successful in gaining employment were students of architecture, pharmaceutical sciences, art and artistic craft works, geological sciences, sciences about art, civil engineering, geodesy and cartography, technical chemistry, followed by informatics and computer science, pedagogy and medical sciences.(absolventi.iedu.sk)

Top graduate starting salaries were in the field of pharmacy (1066 EUR), information technology (975 EUR), accounting and auditing (899 EUR), telecommunication (899 EUR), insurance (863 EUR), chemical industry (853 EUR), advertising and propagation (836 EUR). On the other hand graduates in the field of education received only 535 EUR according to Platy.sk.

Pre-school education

Slow decline in number of children in kindergartens is visible since 1993. There is only limited growth in recent years, mainly in year 2011. (UIPŠ)

Primary Education

According to PISA 2009 results, the Slovak students have comparable skills in mathematical literacy to their peers from other OECD countries, on the contrary, in reading and science literacy the students are lagging behind. High share of low achievers in recent PISA studies highlights one of the problematic areas of compulsory education in the SR. (NÚCEM)

There is a growing trend in preventable repeating of school year at primary schools, mainly at lower level (grades 1-4) but also in upper level (grades 5-9). It reached its peak in year 2008, as 3,05% of pupils on lower and 2,16% of pupils on upper level had to repeat the school year. Since then there is some improvement. (UIPŠ)

Tertiary Education

The number of full and part time university students of Slovak nationality kept rising over the years since 1993 and in 2007 reached over 200 thousand. Since 1993 number of universities also grew to current 39 (February 2012). The lowest representation of women from STEM fields is in the fields of informatics & computer sciences (7%), mechanical engineering & metal-working production (16%), electrical engineering (20%).(UIPŠ)

Further/adult education

From the available data from 2006-2010 the highest number of citizens participating in the further education and also the highest number of graduates of further education courses were in year 2007. On the other hand the least data was provided by institutions (410) in 2007 and most institutions (596) provided data in 2010, as they are already now required by law to provide data. Own funding of courses by participants was until the year 2008 main source of funding of further education, as in the year 2009 higher amount of funding of further education came from EU funds. In the year 2010 the EU funds covered 70% of all further education expenses. In the private sector main source of funding of employees' further education is coming from their employers. The largest groups taking part in further education were formed by adults of following age groups: 30-34 years, 35-39 years and 25-29 years of age. (UIPŠ)

3.7 Spain

The current economic crisis is highlighting the importance of having unified policies in all the countries to meet the growing demand for guidance and adult learning. In particular, unemployed workers or under temporary employment and part-time workers appeal to structured learning, formal or informal, for improving their competences levels and then their qualification. In addition, early school leavers return to training and learning during unemployment's periods. The demand for career guidance is also growing as a tool to tackle the job and employment search.

The EU has not reached in 2010 the goal of 12.5% in participation of adults aged 25 to 64 years in lifelong learning. The benchmark, which in 2006 reached 9.7%, has steadily increased and has even fallen to 9.3% in 2009 and to 9.1% in 2010. In the same period Spain stood at 10.4%, between 2006 and 2009, rising to 10.8% in 2010. Hence the need to pool efforts and coordinate resources for adult learning in the period 2010-2020. However, some countries in 2010 have high percentages of adults who are being formed, as in the case of Denmark (32.8%), Sweden (24.5%), Finland (23.0%) or UK (19, 4%). Others are at the opposite end, such as Slovakia and Hungary (both 2.8%), Romania (1.3%) and Bulgaria (1.2%). In all countries except Germany, Greece and Portugal, the percentage of women receiving training is higher than that of men.

Through legislative means, described further, lifelong learning is encouraged in Spain, including young people and adults and providing opportunities for combining study and training within the employment and other activities.

According to the Spanish National Institute of Statistics (INE) three out of 10 people of age between 25 and 64 years old have participated in some learning activity during the year 2007 (i.e. 30,9% of the active population). The percentages are much higher within young people and progressively decrease with age, dropped from 39.6% of the population 25 to 34 years old to 8.0% of the adults 65 to 74 years old. Slightly more women participate in learning activities. Furthermore, 50% of adults with higher education have conducted training activities, while among those with a first stage of secondary education and lower this percentage drops to 15%. It is worth noting that 68.4% of those who take part in learning activities do so for reasons related to work. According to the labour Force Survey 2010, 10,8% of the 25 to 34 years old' s Spanish citizens participated in formal or non formal education. Even though this figure is upper than the EC 27 one (9,1%), policy makers stipulated that the reference point for Spain should be the more advanced countries as Sweden and Denmark that exceed the 25%. The European Lifelong Learning Index ranks Spain with 46, a very similar rate than Europe (45), while the more advanced countries of the community environment range between 65 (Finland) -66 (Netherlands) and 71 (Sweden) -76 (Denmark).

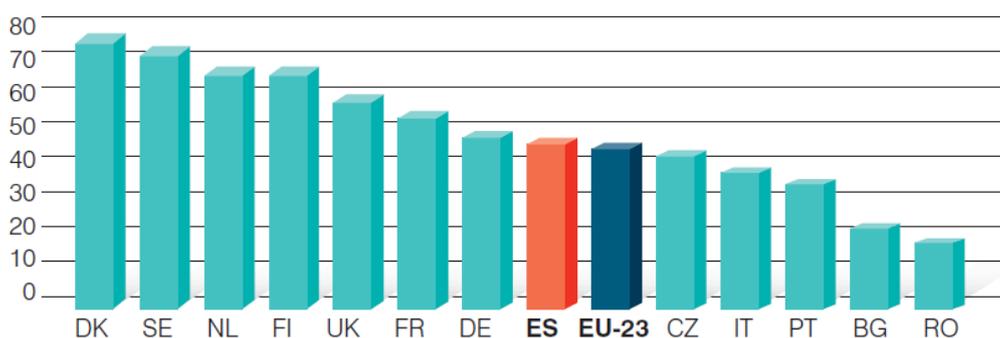
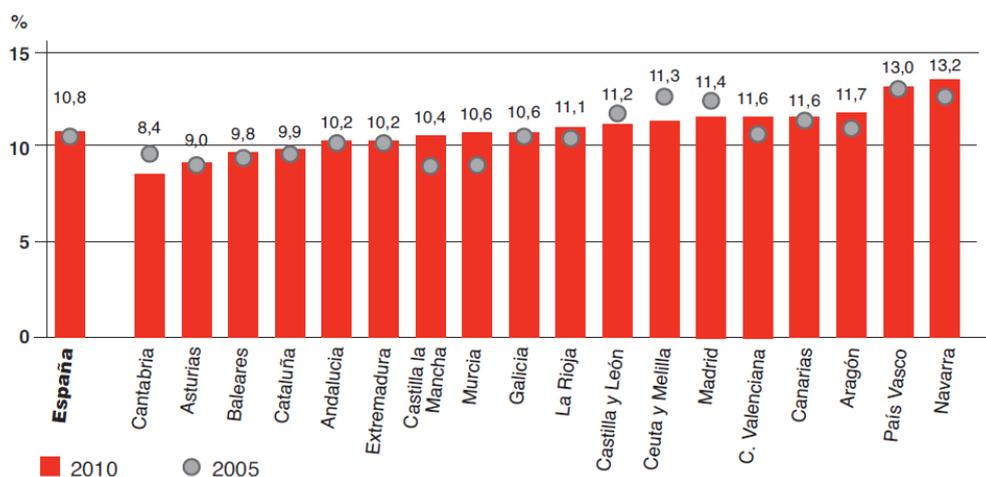


Figure 3.7.1 European LLL index (2010). Source: ELLI, 2010.

Spain has been at levels slightly above the European average regarding the participation of adults in education and training. Thus, in 2010, 10.8% of Spanish citizens between 25 and 64 years old participated in formal or non formal education while the corresponding figure for the EU 27 was 9.1%. However, it seems clear that the point of Spain should be referred to the most advanced countries, exceeding 25% (Sweden and Denmark).

In Spain there are differences in continuous training between the Spanish average (10,8%) and percentages showed by the Autonomous Communities, placing those with lower percentages in figures close to 9%, and those with higher percentages in figures close to 13%. However, the variation in 2010 compared to 2005 is as follows: in five communities it has been reduced the percentage with the maximum variation of 1.3% in Cantabria, and the rest, including Ceuta and Melilla, has been increased, with the maximum difference of 1.9% in Murcia. Catalonia is under the Spanish average and corresponds to one of the lower percentages as the following graphic shows (9,9%).



Adult participation in LLL, by Autonomous Communities, 2005-2010

The adult learning in these circumstances becomes a way of achieving improved the qualifications of the low-skilled or whose skills have been outdated, enabling them to acquire key competences at anytime of life. Lifelong learning has become an integral component of improving the competitiveness, encouraging the employability and adaptability of workers.

3.8 Summary

This section discusses and compares the main results and statistical data regarding the LLL measures in the national and in the European context. Here we show the similarities and differences of the various contributions.

If we take a look at the statistics, it is clear that there is one “Top runner”: Finland. They are leading adult LLL participation rate (23%), in teaching the basic skills (best European nation in OECD-ranking and PISA-leader. The Fins also have a low early-school-leaver-rate about 3% and their unemployment rate is at 7,5% (2012) quite good. Only the early childhood education rate is not so high: children age group 1-5 years nearly 55 % were in full-time day care. In this respect, Greece is with 88% of the 4 year olds a lot better than the most participating countries.

Germany is in all respects in the midfield: the rate of adult participation in LLL is only about 7,8% (EU-benchmark is 15% by 2020), the tertiary qualification rate is only 28% (EU-benchmark is 40% by 2020) and the rate of Early leavers is still too high 13,8% (EU-benchmark is 10% by 2020). But the German unemployment rate is with 5,8% the lowest rate of all participating MASON project partners. Because of the economic and financial crisis the unemployment rate reached in Greece 17,7% (2011) and in Spain it’s even about 23% (2012).

It is noteworthy that the education systems of weak states can nevertheless be quite powerful, as the example of Spain shows. 10.8% of Spanish citizens between 25 and 64 years old participated in LLL programs. In Finland it were about 23%.

4 Interviews with 10 key stakeholders

The scope of the MASON interviews is threefold. On the one hand they aim to highlight differences and similarities of four educational traditions in Europe, namely Anglo-Saxon, Mediterranean, Germanic and Scandinavian. On the second level the aim is to identify the prevailing socio-cultural elements in the national contexts of BG, DE, ES, FI, GR, PL and SK, that shape the “practices of action” that in turn intervene in the process of educational transformation. At the third level the socio-cultural elements –articulated as systemic dynamics that govern the orientation of the learning culture, are mapped onto the models of learning cultures. The results of the analysis undertaken in the context of this study constitute the basis for the identification of systemic dynamics that constrain or promote the effective implementation of national lifelong learning strategies.

Therefore, each partner conducted 10 interviews with stakeholders in the field of education, training and lifelong learning in each national context (including all levels and streams of education and training provision) aiming to shed light into socio-cultural elements and dynamics shaping practices and policy formation in lifelong learning. It is obvious that this research practice is of qualitative nature. The interviewees have been knowledgeable informants, people who are deeply involved and interested in education matters independently of their typical “position” in the wider system of education and LLL. They were teachers, local education administrators, high level policy makers or even students and parents.

The focus of the interviews was on the identification of the major issues according to a set of questions that was describes in the project’s implementation guide (deliverable 2). Given that LLL is defined as a cradle to grave process and that EU level policies targeting to the promotion of LLL are all-encompassing, including all levels and streams of education, training and beyond, interviews were conducted with knowledgeable informants in pre-primary education, compulsory education, tertiary education, vocational and adult education.

The aim of the interviews with stakeholders in education and training, from the perspective of LLL and the targets set in the context of the “ET 2020” strategic framework, is to explore interviewees’ views about:

1. What factors that may contribute to the goal of widening the participation in ESEC, the promotion of equitable access and the quality of ECEC, with special emphasis on
 - *systemic factors in early childhood and care provisions at local or regional level*
 - *role of the economic/employment background of parents in their chances to enrol their children in an early childhood and care facility*
 - *the role of cultural factors and discriminatory practices on the basis of parents’ cultural background and life-style*
2. What factors may contribute to early school leaving and low student performance at local/regional level, with special emphasis on
 - *socio-economic and cultural factors related to the background of parents and their impact on students’ school achievement and risk of early school leaving*
3. What factors may contribute to the goal of widening the participation in higher education, with special emphasis on?
 - *The potential impact of economic crisis in participation in higher education*
 - *Alternative routes to access to tertiary education as a means of increasing participation*
4. What factors may contribute to the goal of widening the participation in adult education and training?
5. What factors may contribute to the goal of widening the participation in higher education, with special emphasis on?

Overall, the goal of this section of the MASON’s national reports is to contribute with inputs from stakeholders on what may constitute important issues for discussion and reflection upon in devising and implementing coherent and comprehensive LLL strategies that are socio-culturally sensitive.

Fieldwork and methodology

The fieldwork was based on 10 interviews per partner that were based on a common interview framework and guide for all MASON partners and conducted between from December 2011 to February 2012.

We conducted interviews in terms of the national LLL context and with regard to the MASON questionnaire with stakeholders of early childhood care institutions, stakeholders of adolescence and school level, and stakeholders of the field of adult learning. (The first part of interviews includes one early childhood institution and Kindergarten as well as participant of a primary school.)

The second part of interviews exposes the situation of early school leavers. The third part of interviews describes the current opportunities of non-traditional-students and further education for adult learners in Germany.

The interviews were on average about 15 -50 minutes long and took place on telephone or face-to-face. At the start of the interviews, respondents were informed that their anonymity in the analysis was guaranteed and their statements would be used only for the purposes of the project.

The analysis of the interviews was based on establishing the specific contents and topics, and investigation of the views expressed. The main goal was to analyse how respondents perceive and discuss various factors related to widening participation at various levels and aspects of LLL and how they interpret them based on their own understanding and experience.

4.1 Bulgaria

Early childhood and care

Regarding the number of facilities available to serve all children aged 4-5 (public or private) the situation in Bulgaria seems to be very different in the capital and in the rest of the country. It is well known and also visible from the answers of the interviewees that the number of these facilities in the capital is insufficient and the problem persists for more than 10 years. In the rest of the country we find this problem only in a few other big cities where situation balances thanks to private facilities. Lack of enough early childhood and care staff in existing facilities is also to find in the capital and big cities where childrens' groups are big. This problem also affects the quality of the care provided. When it comes to the dispersion of early childhood and care facilities in the region the opposite picture is to find – such problem exists in smaller towns and villages. Still in bigger cities some parents have to send their children in distant facilities because there are not enough places in the near-by facility.

According to our interviewees parents with relatively low income do not have equal opportunities with wealthier families to enroll their children to a near-by early childhood and care facility formally. Still most of them share the opinion that as a matter of fact it is not like that because other factors intervene here. One of them is corruption (especially in the capital where there is a shortage of places in comparison with the number of children aged 2-6) which have been strongly reduced after the start of using an e-system for enrolling children to early childhood and care facilities. Another problem which affects very poor families (and in Bulgaria these are a very high percentage of the families) is that despite the fact that they have equal chances to apply they do not do it because they can't afford the price of the medical examinations and papers needed to enroll their children in the facility. Afterwards even if they do and are approved they can't afford the charge for using the facility no matter if it is a fair price. In Bulgaria low-income families do not have any priority enrolling their children to public early childhood and care facility because of their incomes. According to Bulgarian legislation priority has following groups of children: complete and half orphans; children from families where at least one member is with disabilities; children at risk; adopted children; children from families with three or more children; twins.

Formal school education

In Bulgaria one of the problems that parents from some local communities face is the difficulty to send their children to a near-by school because of the dispersion of schools in the region. This problem is mostly to find in small living places despite of the fact that public school transportation is provided for pupils from the formal school system. Concerning educational services for children with special needs the answers of interviewees in Bulgaria vary. On the one hand there are targeted services for these children but on the other there is still a lot to do in this direction. There are measures to undertake both to change the attitude against children with special need (communication prejudices etc.) and to improve the school environments (school surroundings, buildings, play-grounds etc.). All these measures are needed in order to better integrate children with special needs in Bulgarian formal school educational system. Even if not huge there are serious gaps between public schools in the quality of their structures (buildings, play-grounds etc), the qualifications and number of their staff and the safety of the schools in the locality/region. This is a complex problem where local authorities' policies, school management, the number of students (wherefrom public school's budget depends) play a significant role.

The role of private tuition grows respectively with the problems of the public school system in Bulgaria. According to most interviewees it is very important for parents to turn to private tuition to support academically their children and especially when it comes to preparation for university exams (Please, note that most Bulgarian universities have their own entrance examinations.). When it comes to students' everyday demands in public schools the need of private tuition is very much up to the child's talents and ambitions, the quality of education in the particular school and the individual teacher's motivation.

Higher (tertiary) education

Regarding the situation of the higher education education system in Bulgaria it is important to point out that it consists mainly of state universities and that these have experienced economic difficulties during the whole process of transition and not just in the last years of economic crisis. The situation became even more complicated as Bulgarian universities faced an overall budget cut of 21% in 2011 compared with 2009. As far as our interviewees observe any significant effects from the economic crisis on the quality of the education, number of students, types of subjects etc. these are labeled as negative only. Examples given are higher university taxes and reduced opportunities for Bulgarian students to study abroad because it becomes more difficult to find a job while studying, especially for Eastern European students. Facilities and resources of higher education institutions in Bulgaria have been insufficient anyway and some interviewees express their doubts that these might become even worse.

The crisis could widen the social gaps between the students in a broad sense since students from low-income families have to work during their studies and it is more difficult for them to concentrate on their studies or do internships. This effect is supposed to be observed more clearly in private universities than in state-owned universities. However the social discrepancies are getting always greater. For sure, the lack of employment will be a serious obstacle for some young people of families with lower incomes to start studying whether in Bulgaria or abroad.

According to all interviewees the crisis is used as a good "occasion" for cutting the budget for education. The current financing system of the state universities is not performance based and therefore ineffective and drives the universities to lower the quality of the education in order to attract and keep a maximum number of students, in order to receive state budget subvention credits per student enrolled. Under-financing an ineffective system which should have been reformed good 10 years ago will not make it reform by itself. Investments in education are finally valued as investment in the economic development of the state and therefore compromises in the sphere are not regarded acceptable.

Alternative routes to access to tertiary education as a means of increasing participation

Correspondence studies, on-line and distance courses are known as alternative routes to access to tertiary education. Still, the traditional form of higher (tertiary) education is the preferred one. Opinions expressed are that the correspondence form provides lower quality of education. Distance education is considered as a good opportunity for many disadvantaged groups as people living in small remote towns and villages who cannot afford to live and study in another city, or the capitol; people with disabilities; young people with children or such who have to work on a regular basis.

4.2 Finland

In Finland the early childhood daycare the subjective right for the day care requires local authorities to arrange day care for every child in most cases municipalities provide it¹¹. The legislation is intended to guarantee equal opportunity for all. Local authorities have a statutory duty to arrange care for children with special needs. There are no any serious gaps between public early childhood and care facilities in the quality of their structures (buildings, play-grounds etc.), the qualifications of their staff and the safety of the facilities in the locality/region. The child care decree has defined educational qualification and ratios of the responsible staff. The decree has been obeyed. In Finland the regional distances especially in sparsely populated areas provide a challenge, so far the situations has been managed by using also family day care.

Parents with relatively low income have equal opportunities with wealthier families to enroll their children to a near-by early childhood and care facility. All families have equal rights enrolling their children to a near-by public early childhood and care facility. All have the same opportunity to apply for a municipal or for the private day care. Day care fees depend on parents' income and are based by law. Finnish "Asiakasmaksulaki" Client Payment Act § 7a has decrees which determines the imposition of the payment; monthly payment, income limits and the upper limit of the fee charged by the municipality¹¹.

In secondary education interviewees agreed that the social and economic background may has influence to motivation and early school leaving. In Finland some students may think and believe in such a way that is easy to find a job without vocational education and training. This is affected by business cycles dramatically. When companies are working well and in need of manpower, the companies will recruit on-the-job training students directly from their study period to work, even if the study wouldn't be finished. For example, construction and hotel and restaurant industry are good examples of this. Dropping out will increase in the economic upswing, because students are lured to work. During the recession and downturn, the dropping outs from the schools will decline. Also a poor student financial aid may attract young people to go to work, because as employees they will manage better than with a poor student financial aid.

The school does not show up as relevant way to go. Accumulation of deprivation leads to differentiation. Possibly behind the early school leaving there might be found family background - a situation in which the strip of education is placed below. So, how to predict those students? The marks of early school leaving might be e.g. the student does not attend school, social problems, mental health problems. According our interviewees in local level symptoms of early leaving can identify and intervene by co-operation of school (over-administrative work). In every elementary school there will be working a **multi-professional student care team** (usually the principal, special needs teacher, social worker, nurse, psychologist, counselor), whose purpose is to act pre-emptively with children and young people who have seen the burgeoning problems, including also school absences. Early school leaving can be effect by, teaching resources, support lessons, teaching methods, class size, provide positive discrimination financing (finance that is provided to schools in the areas of difficulties like unemployment, immigrant background, etc.), (finance provided by positive discrimination money 10-20%).

The changes in our environments have made challenge for education. Computers and internet etc. interests children more than school. On the other hand our interviews were concerned about the computers/internet using of children. They said that some children are spending too much time with internet and they were doing that even too late at night. So this might be one excuse for absences. Teachers

have to find new solutions to get studying more interested. These can be pedagogical solutions, changes in learning environment, Information and communications equipment utilization in studies etc.

According to the Basic Education Act, **educational support** has to be given to all those who need it. We now speak of **support in three levels** (general, enhanced, special), and the need for support is always defined individually. In the curriculum, there are carefully defined the forms of pedagogical support, and what kind they are. (Changes in Act by year 2011).

Concerning possible good practices, interviewees mention the time which school teachers and other educational personnel have per week to use as common planning time. Other good practices in these schools are e.g. workshop days, "cell schools", theme weeks, reading groups divided by learning skills, interest groups, skill levels, and flexible teaching arrangements. The idea in these is to have different environments, group sizes and co-operation which enrich the school education. These are all methods which are not compulsory part of curricula; they are methods that single school may have to support motivation. In basic education there do have special needs schools for special needs students. Special needs schools/services vary from place to place and they are located on larger population centers. In many elementary schools do have in addition to general education also special classes to children with the special needs. There are also happened changes in ACT concerning Special Education in year 2011 which has in practice improved the situation of the student with special needs to get education. In addition, there are a preparatory education for immigrants (one year), small group education for immigrants (max 10 children), education for young immigrants special needs education in class scale, flexible basic education, small-group formatted private tuition, private tuition, small rehabilitative classes, hospital school education.

When we were talking about the change which has happened in last 10 years our interviewee said that the heterogeneity inside of student material has increased. The children starting point concerning the age when they start school varies more (one reason may be non-stimulating environment in problem families) and this will bring challenges to education (to same class e.g. few different learning groups). There has happened fragmentation into sub-groups.

The issue of gaps between the quality of different schools has been discussed a lot lately at least metropolitan area. Teachers' qualifications and quality of education is unlikely to have differences, but in the different areas they may have differences with students. In the metropolitan area there are areas that are immigrant victorious and this is of course to be seen in students' backgrounds of the school and learning outcomes. Some areas may have more than half of the students with an immigrant background and educational outcomes weakness are explained in that way. Also in safety issues there are some regional differences at least in the metropolitan area. There are the city's rental houses, owner-occupied territories and areas. In tenement areas, there are more distractions.

Tertiary education

In Finland the society and politicians used to be in strong agreement about the need for higher education to remain exclusively publicly funded, universities have now started to introduce tuition fees for international students. Our interviews didn't see there possibility that this might be the rear gate for tuition fees for Finnish students. Tuition fees are designed for foreign students. This issue will probably be solved as a specific question, and it has no effect on the rest. Finland cannot be collected tuition fees in university education, unless the political situation will not change dramatically. One interview from administration of the University didn't see tuition fees to have the actual connection to the economic crisis, but **it is a catalyst for the internationalization of universities**. Degree is seen as one of the export product.

When we take into account also that the proportion of tertiary graduates has more than 45%, concern is justified in some extent that Finland will produce **"too many" graduates**, in order to find jobs similar to these profiles. From the Finland's growth strategy point of view, Interviewees didn't see the proportion of graduates is too high. **The problem is more concern in the overlong studies**. Also lack of the lower higher education qualifications system is the Finnish oddity. Therefore, the polytechnic graduates seemed to take too long concerning the nature of the tasks.

Our interviews didn't fully agree that the situation in Finland to access to higher education through alternative routes is very common and easy. There are under-represented groups and social background continues to affect a lot to access to high education. For example, immigrants are underrepresented in this group. The issue is, however, aware of. Education and research 2011-2016 OKM's plan says: The Ministry of Education and Culture is preparing educational action program for equality of measures. The goal on this program is to significantly reduce the differences between the gender expertise and training as well as differences of the socio-economic background on educational participation and to improve disadvantaged position. The program strengthens each individual capacity for learning and creativity, skills and talents of various developments and rejects the sexual segregation of education and to promote gender sensitivity on education and training. Research project will be started. The Government accepts educational equality of measures to the end of 2012. Issues concerning higher education: (so there will be political willingness)⁵.

The other member who participated into interviews didn't see situation as narrow. He thought that in Finland, the route is in principle unlimited to all secondary school graduates and in some cases through the open path -for example, through the corridor that is not an absolute requirement. He thought we have transparency by only compare against Sweden. UK University of the status of the route is more selective. For the adult student in Finland, at least in our interviews opinion is a reasonable weak opportunities to access to university. **Ministry of Education and Culture's efforts to get younger students to the University may reduce the adult status as students**, if it is not an open fairway to be opened significantly.

Further education

Further education is provided in many organizations and fellowship in Finland. **Adult education Centres** in Finland directs their educations towards secondary vocational preparatory education, and performing co. qualifications. These educations cover all degree levels; the basic qualifications, vocational qualifications and specialist vocational qualifications (champion degrees). These degree titles exists nationally more than three hundred (300), and local Adult Education Centre have the right administration of justice to grant degrees in hundred thirty (130) academic titles. Degree titles can be found in National Board of Education's website.

Adult education Centres provides Employment training, vocational adult training for a qualification, vocational adult further training, and education made to order, apprenticeship training and Open University education. Preliminary training can be organized in Finland by any organization and almost for any kind of profession/relevant. The right administration of justice to grant degrees/qualifications for service requires a license and this process has been regulated.

Adults' competence-based qualification system provides students the exactly same rights and capabilities (recognition of qualifications) as the secondary school curriculum-based training (i.e., the basic qualifications). In further and specialist vocational studies the qualifications provide a capability for example to apply into teacher training in those occupations, where there is no Bachelor's degree, for example, security field.

The majority of the local Adult Education Centre's students come from three different form of education and also different source of funding. First group of students participate into education (unit-priced compulsory education/training), which has been financed by National Board of Education. Applying for this education has to be done on students own terms and students are entitled to a general student financial aid. The unemployed persons can also take part in these training, under certain conditions without loss of compensation.

Second group of students participate into education (self-motivated, further training) financed by the National Board of Education. This education has been aimed at persons who are employed and who needs occupational additional training (also unemployed persons can take part into training, under certain conditions without loss of compensation). This education consists of education aiming at vocational qualifications and specialist vocational qualifications, or parts of the examination.

Third group of students participate into education **the purchase of training**, financed by Labour administration /ELY. This education has been aimed at persons who are intended to out of work, or are in situation to a reduced risk below. Again, these educations are aiming mainly at diploma or degree. The training which has been purchased by the labour administration, there will exist no student fees for the students. The participation of the students is free of charge. In voluntary training there will exist so-called examination fees which cost- 58 euros - and in some training student fees vary between 100 – 300 Euros. Costs of staff training will be paid by student, or his background organization, the employer. Education and training that will be paid by the National Board of Education, the money comes from / directed to education providers. Our interviewees represented the North Karelia education and training consortium. Joint municipal boards of education are quite similar in different parts of Finnish. The labour administration courses/educations are purchased and going through open competitive bidding. Organizations participating in a competitive vary from one-person companies to universities and federations of municipalities.

4.3 Germany

In pre-primary education financial support of institution and a better organization is needed. The early childhood education and care-sector needs more financial support, so that the institutions can employ speech therapist, who can cope with the linguistic diversity in the day-nurseries. Private early childhood care institutions need financial support of the government for (single) parents, so that a “concept of the open house” can be offered. Another crucial problem is the small share of early childhood care places. For this reason a survey of parents’ demand of opening hours was implemented by the regional government.

In primary/secondary education the social and economic background of the families plays a decisive role. In general, a stronger support for improving the reading competencies of primary school students is needed. Regarding the support for private lessons children from well-off families have an advantage. Besides most of the parents with migration background are not able to help their children with homework themselves neither could they pay for private lesson. Thus, these students are more likely to have a double disadvantage regarding the equal education access. More German children will attend a high school after primary school. The different migration backgrounds should be considered.

The “Voluntary Social Year” is a specific feature of the German education system - between secondary and tertiary education. During the time between school and apprenticeship respective university adolescents can absolve a „Voluntary Social Year” in social institutions. Most volunteers are in a career orientation phase and hope to be inspired by this experience. For social institutions it’s attractive to work with those volunteers, because the employment of the volunteers is co-financed by the state.

In further education participants want practical and affordable services. Private academies offer opportunities for non-traditional students to achieve a nationally recognized diploma. There are high costs (ca. 8.000 €), but sometimes the companies of the participants are paying a part of the cost. The motivation of the participants is to fulfill the practical knowledge and the opportunities to achieve a higher salary. Consulting firms offer trainings about new processes or products via blended-learning and information systems for specific needs. A private-public-partnership provides teachers and headmasters with professional seminars and trainings. There are no additional costs for the participants. The motivation of the participants is that they want to implement pilot projects and use the new ideas and techniques in everyday school life.

4.4 Greece

The fieldwork was based on 10 interviews contacted following a common interview framework and guide for all MASON partners between December 2011 and mid of February 2012. Two interviewees were related to the field of early education and care (one mother of a child of 5 and one kindergarten teacher), two interviewees, both teachers, were related to the field of compulsory education, three interviewees (2 VET teachers and one working in the field of private supplementary teaching) were related to the upper secondary education field, 1 interviewee was related to the tertiary education sector (1 university professor

also involved in administration) and 2 interviewees were related to the continuing education and training sector (1 college teacher and 1 private sector employee). All interviewees live in the wider area of Athens. The interviews lasted 30 to 45 minutes; notes were taken by the field researcher.

The main findings are the following:

Early childhood and care

The number of public kindergartens offering early childhood and care is not satisfying the needs and demand from parents. It is particularly difficult for 4 year old children to secure a place in a public kindergarten. Quality differences between public kindergartens are highly dependent on the level of involvement of the parents. In kindergartens where parents are offered to undertake the expenses for extra learning materials, the purchase of new playground instruments or the employment of extra supporting staff, there is often a visible improvement in the overall quality of services provided. The public kindergartens need to extend their timetable so as to be more in-line with the needs of working parents.

Primary education

Schools differ considerably in the quality of the school infrastructure. Although schools have little autonomy to matters of curricula, timetables and staffing, the school head teachers, the teachers and the parents can make a huge difference into turning a “disadvantaged” school intake into a welcoming, good and caring learning and social environment for all.

Secondary education

There are two different worlds in the Greek system of upper secondary education: the world of schools offering academic orientation studies and the world of VET schools.

The pupil intake of VET schools is predominantly of very low prior academic achievement, while academic orientation studies are commonly attracting “better” pupils, aiming to continue with their studies at university level. During Gymnasium years pupils who show lack of engagement with school learning are directly or indirectly oriented by their teachers and parents to a less academically demanding path which they believe is offered by VET schools. This way VET schools become victims of academic segregation processes originating in earlier school years in the life of pupils and there is little VET schools can do to improve the pupils' academic achievement as a whole. Instead, most teachers focus on a small number of pupils who are really enjoying the kind of education offered in VET schools and have high aspirations regarding their professional future.

Academic orientation pupils preparing for the national exams have to spend 6 hours at school in the morning, another 2-3 hours daily in supplementary tutoring on exams subject matters and another 2-3 hours of home study. The average cost for private tuition in a group of 8 to 12 pupils at the “frontistiria” is around 400 euros per month. Pupils who do not get supplementary teaching for at least one year prior to the national exams they have no chance of succeeding to get scores which would be good enough to secure them a place in university departments that are in demand. Even getting average scores would be difficult to a pupil who does not receive supplementary teaching. Therefore, for families wanting to see their child to a university it is for decades now an imperative that they have to turn to private teaching services.

Tertiary education

One of the greatest challenges regarding increasing participation in tertiary education, is the economic crisis and the chronic and growing underfunding of universities by public funds. Given the rising cost of life and the high unemployment prospective low SES students, particularly those living in rural areas of Greece, will be unable to be financially supported by their families to study in universities located far away from the family home. For this reason able students coming from low SES families are threatened by exclusion from tertiary education.

The rapidly rising level of unemployment among university graduates and the widespread belief that there is mismatch between the programs of studies offered by universities and the demands of the labour market poses great challenges to the university sector. The labour market in Greece, at least in its current state, cannot absorb people with high level skills because of the shrinking economy. The offer of high level skills is clearly much greater than the demand and this is likely to be true for the next years as it is projected that the Greek economy will continue to contract. On the other hand, it may be also true that some existing demand for high level skills cannot be satisfied because of limited offer. Greece's universities are currently under criticism that they produce too many humanities and social sciences graduates with limited prospects of future employment. However, science and technology graduates are no less at risk of unemployment. The problem of graduates' unemployment is closely related to Greece's economic development, its heavy orientation to the service sector at the expense of the primary sector and the industrial sector and lack of incoming investments and R&D. The key to the reorientation of the university studies to the needs of the economy is the current and prospective students and their families, i.e. the "clients" of university services. The growing demand for certain programs of studies and the gradual diminishing of demand for others is a mechanism that can lead to a better adaptation of universities to the labour market needs; however, how effective this mechanism can be depends highly on the validity of information and projections about the needs in the economy and labour market in the medium to the long term.

Continuing education and training

The economic crisis has affected the capacity of households to invest on further education and continuous training. High profile studies in Colleges are too expensive for low SES families. Employers in the private sector, also because the vast majority of them are SMEs with less than 10 employees, are not investing on employee training. This situation is further worsened by the economic crisis.

4.5 Poland

Firstly, the participants described a separation of urban and rural realities which must be recognized in any discussion of policy or statistics on education in Poland (participation in ECEC, income/opportunities gap). Secondly, most of the participants spoke about a lack of self-motivation and individual responsibility for one's educational (and later career) path rooted in historical socio-economic legacies which are incompatible to the aims of lifelong learning (discouragement of mobility both geo and economic, low aspirations). Thirdly, respondents mainly viewed recent or upcoming educational reforms sceptically or cautiously at best for various reasons (lack of social dialogue). Finally, some respondents offered suggestions on how lifelong learning can be better supported and developed in Poland (Increased dialogue, media support of more positive images of both early childhood and adult learning)

4.6 Slovakia

Pre-primary education

Number of nurseries decreased and most exist only in regional cities and towns. Number of kindergartens for children in age category 3-6 is not sufficient, especially in regions of southern and eastern Slovakia. The current economic situation does not allow establishment of pre-school facilities in less populated regions of Slovakia, what prevents employed parents to place their children in the kindergartens. Children from age 2.5 years can enter kindergartens. Especially are favoured children in age of 5 to 6 years, in particular from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. In the interviews we didn't meet with the practices of discrimination based on cultural differences.

Primary and secondary education

In the case of primary and secondary school Personnel Criteria of Quality prevail over the systematic criteria. Pressure on measuring quality by the means of achievement grants criteria carries the risk of this resulting in a greater benevolence of teacher when he is evaluating pupil.

Primary and secondary schools offer the opportunity to tutor children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds in the form of fees. Furthermore there are no support programs for increasing the level of support for student of primary and secondary schools, this area is in the competency and responsibility of the child's parents. In regions of southern and eastern Slovakia, we found out number of cases in which after compulsory schooling, parents did not allow a child to attend a school. In the primary and secondary schools counselling tasks are performed by teachers that teach individual subjects and they do not have specific training in this area or work experience.

Tertiary education

The quality of education is continuously deteriorating. The quality of university management should be focused mainly on education and training, science and research and finally, on the management of universities itself. The impact of the economic crisis is notable not only in the regional, but also in the nationwide context. Due to the economic crisis, public funds provided for university education are relatively low, although the needs and demand for university education is considered a long-term priority in the SR. It is necessary that Slovakia has to approach qualitatively and quantitatively the benchmarks set by the EU.

Adult education

The most effective way of further education is if this education is based on modules, it is not one-off and clients have a chance to implement their skills and knowledge into practical outputs which are part of the trainings. Education for seniors is a perfect opportunity for sustaining, or building new social contacts which could have disappeared by retirement. In the field of further education we have found out that the effectiveness and number of participants is increased if the lecturer of a particular training is a well-known and educated personality with outstanding didactic and educational skills.

The best motivation for popularity of particular lifelong learning training is a fact that a client can get valid and accredited certificate. In the area of language education, there is relatively high demand for courses even without certificates. Interview participants stated that the main way how to gain clients for further education is mainly the combination of marketing activities (direct marketing, internet, advertisements, and references). Education for an unconventional student, particularly for seniors, is offered by the centres of further or lifelong learning at the universities.

4.7 Spain

From the interviews is highlighted the importance of communication, sharing good practices and learning experiences, to manage this and any project that involve the incorporation of new technologies in education. Pedagogical innovation happens as far as the teachers reflect critically on their practices and thus become active and creative actors according to their context.

Teachers need having a collaborative learning according to their realities and therefore needs, for becoming leaders of this change in teaching practices.

When there has been collaborative work and learning based on communication and exchange of experiences, a shared vision among teachers has been reach and then a more satisfactory lead for managing the Project and the changes that it involves.

Those implications are more described on the following outline of the study case proposed as a best practice.

4.8 Summary

The interviews were able to reveal differences and commonalities between the different participating member states with respect to the dimensions assessed. They will be summarized in the following

Pre-primary education

Pre-primary education is a field of attention in most participating member states. Yet, there are differences in the use and the costs for these services. In Finnish Laws provide equal day-care opportunities for all based on the parents' income while in Germany there are differences between the states and also with respect to funding. In Germany and Greece there are sometimes difficulties for finding appropriate places for children daycare and the facilities sometimes depend on further engagement by parents or additional funding. Slovakia offers daycare only in regional cities and towns and there are also not enough places to satisfy needs and also Poland mentions differences between urban and rural realities.

Primary and secondary education

In school education there is the social and economic background of the pupils that has influences in motivation, outcomes as well as in early school leaving in most of the participating member states. Pupils with a socio-economical bias are more likely to get a lower standard of education by choosing their educational pathway or by early school leaving, e.g. to fields like construction and tourism in several countries (e.g. Finland, Greece). There are also issues with schools in immigrant areas. For immigrants there often exist language issues in school in a way that they have difficulties to follow classes. They also may receive less support by their parents due to language problems. The interviewees report different approaches to face these issues, e.g. introductory courses, but such measures are always subject to financial resources. This also applies to pupils who need special attention or additional teaching.

Tertiary education

With respect to tertiary education, there are two main aspects: access/ enrolment and permeability. Regarding access/ enrolment there are big differences between the countries. In some countries, like e.g. Finland access to tertiary education has no specific barriers and therefore in Finland there are high participation rates about 45%. On the other hand, e.g. in Greece there are high obstacles for tertiary education and students have to take national exams that need a lot of extra efforts to be admitted to university. Yet, in several countries, e.g. Finland and Greece there are thoughts about how many university graduates can be absorbed by the labour market. This is also subject to the current economic crisis. With respect to permeability there is the issue to which extent students who did initially not choose to follow an educational path that allows university studies can enter universities later by additional qualifications. Regarding permeability there are different perspectives in the countries that reflect on the one hand the chance for permeability that means that students *can* go to university but on the other hand the real permeability that means that students also *do* it. The latter is often quite low as persons that are already working see often too many practical obstacles to choose a second educational pathway at university.

Further education

Further education is offered mainly by private institutions in most of the participating member states. This implies that there are costs arising for such kind of education and there is often the issue who pays for these costs, employee or employer. In some countries this issue got crucial during the economic crises in a way that the crisis also affected participation in further education and thereby institutions for further education.

5 Case studies on good practices

In the context of lifelong learning, as “good practice” could be identified as a purposeful activity resulting, either directly or indirectly, in enhancing the capacity of individuals, groups, organizations or other collectivities to engage effectively in learning without using inordinate resources to achieve the desired results, and which can be used to develop and implement solutions adapted to similar lifelong learning problems in other situations and contexts.

The term “good practice” does not necessarily imply perfection, excellence or exceptional quality and results. A good practice, as compared to other practices evidenced in the specific context and situation, stands-out for its goals, methods, processes, and outcomes which partially or wholly exhibit improved results. Results can be partial and may be related to only one or more components of the practice being considered. Indeed, documenting what does not work and why it does not work is an integral part of “good practice” so that the same types of mistakes can be avoided by other programmes and projects. From a wider perspective, the major rationale for documenting a good practice is to enable other people or agencies and stakeholders in lifelong learning at local, regional, national and cross-national levels share knowledge, experiences and lessons learned about cost-effective solutions to concrete problems and avoid the loss of valuable time and repetition of mistakes.

Any human activity as is the case of the good practice to be documented by the MASON project partners emerges within concrete political, economic, social, educational or cultural contexts, specific situations and circumstances. In a way it is the product and a response to needs and aspirations which are context-specific and therefore cannot be truly isolated or transferred “as-is” to other contexts and situations. For example, a practice that appears to work well in motivating Crete’s pupils at risk of dropping out of school may not be socially and culturally relevant to pupils at risk of dropping out of school in Berlin, in rural areas in Bulgaria or even in Athens. Apart from the dynamics of local learning and socio-cultural contexts, long established educational traditions may play a decisive role in constituting the adaptation and assimilation of a practice working well in one context as “impossible” to another. For example, a programme targeting to enhance the capacity of adults in Finland who have left school early to enrol to a university programme of studies is “unthinkable” in the context of Greece because only adults holding an upper secondary education leaving certificate can have access to tertiary education. In brief there’s no single one-size-suits-all practice, approach and method that’s going to work well for everyone across Europe. The above do not imply that sharing and reflecting upon good practices in LLL in Europe is a futile endeavour. One of the greatest challenges that are faced by efforts to effectively disseminate good practices in LLL in Europe is to identify and reflect upon underlying commonalities in economic, social, cultural and educational factors that shape both the problem(s) that a practice tries to address and the practice itself. It is possible, for example, that a practice that works well in attracting low educated unemployed adults living in rural areas in Poland to participate in training to be implemented with equal success in the same target group in rural areas of Spain because the underlying factors shaping the problem, the need and the solution are essentially common.

The following section presents the essence of seven case studies of good practices from the participating member states that were developed according to the template for case studies presented in the project implementation guide (deliverable 2).

5.1 Bulgaria

The Bulgarian case study documents a funding mechanism for adult learning in Bulgaria. It involves the provision of vouchers for various studies available to individuals.

As this practice in Bulgaria has been made possible funding from the European Social Fund, the description is preceded by some background analysis of the role of EU funding in national LLL policies. Funding from the European Union has been the most significant financial stream in Bulgarian education since the country became a member of the EU. Thus, its structural effects, relationship to national education policies, rates of “absorption” and other aspects of its impact are briefly reviewed.

The reviewed practice concerns the issuing of government vouchers to employed persons in Bulgaria used to finance training for acquiring professional qualification and training for acquiring key competence. A training voucher, a kind of individual training account for each employee who decides to take up training, may be used for acquiring first, second or third qualification level or by a part of a profession, and the trainings for key competences are defined according to the European Qualification Network. Training vouchers are registered securities with fixed par value enabling their holders to enrol in training courses. The National Employment Agency is the only entity authorized to issue vouchers maintain a public register of the provided vouchers. There is no requirement concerning the formality of the training funded through vouchers. Given the requirement that the voucher holder must have attained the educational level corresponding to the vocational field and the fairly low nominal value of the vouchers, most vouchers are used for non-formal E&T. The scheme is national, i.e. applies on the territory of the whole country.

The voucher scheme has been met with considerable interest and has the potential to increase significantly adult participation rates in LLL. It is also quite efficient as it forgoes costs associated with public procurement, reporting, etc. Vouchers have a number of advantages for employees, such as no cost for the learner, except in time invested, choice in selecting a provider, choice in area/subject of training, etc. For employers the benefits include no co-financing required (as in some supply side schemes) and the fact that training takes place in the individual's leisure time. Drawbacks of the scheme are associated with the difficulty in matching the government labour market policies with the interest and needs of learners.

5.2 Finland

Finnish case study represents one best practice example of co-operation in counselling and education services in Finland from the perspective of the enterprises. Case study gives overall picture of SME's perspective into education and lifelong learning. The Lifelong learning should consist of both counselling, and providing good education and training services. Case study will present SME's educational environments and operators providing those services.

Adult education is planned and organized education and training. It can be divided into voluntary training, staff training and labour market training. The Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for self-motivated education, Ministry of Employment and Economy is responsible of labour market training, and personnel training by employers.

The regional training courses will be organized by vocational training centres and vocational schools, which will give information of Employment and Economic Administration. Education is trying to be provided as multi-form learning, so that workers can participate in studies and the acquired professional skills can be taken into account obtained by various means¹⁴.

The Ministry of Employment and Economy directs ELY-centres services for SMEs competence development. The Ministry of Employment and Economy also monitors the quality of services and is responsible for the reform. *Services can be divided to a) the SME's Business skills development Services and b) the SME's Staff Development Services e.g. so-called Joint purchase training.*

Development Services are divided in national training programs and consultancies (the so-called productized services). Education and training programs are targeted for SMEs key personnel and their topics include leadership, sales and marketing, and internationalization. Productizing services analysis and development tools has been developed to be targeted to different life stages of SME's.

The education of SME's is organized by both the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Employment and Economy. Case study represents the SME's customer counselling, guiding SME's to those services provided by ELY's. In local area people in different fields work together to guide customers to educational services.

¹⁴ Ministry of Employment and Economy, from <http://www.tem.fi/index.phtml?s=4095>

Problem

Guidance is an equally vital part of lifelong learning as the provision of education. Citizens and workplaces in different parts of the country should have equal access to guidance services, even if their practical implementation varies⁵. Cooperation between the labour and education authorities, work life representatives and different educational institutions is necessary for the arrangement of guidance.

Best practice has been developed and evidenced while providing business services to SMEs and facing the fact that SME's are lacking the counselling, training and education in area. Most of this education is targeted to SME's and is specified as counselling, mentoring, tutoring and analysing educational needs and guiding to right education.

In local business environment small and medium enterprises are working with customers, subcontractors and other operators. Many times small and medium enterprises are working so hard on their daily business and development, only close operators are able to recognize educational needs. ELY-Centres are supplying educational services. Most of SMEs are not monthly or even yearly contacted to ELY-Centre if they are not doing development or investments.

There is a problem to get SMEs right on time to ELY-Centre educational services. Education should be continuous process but for SMEs it's usually time out of production and business. That is why also other counselling and non-profit organizations contacted with SME's should know about ELY-Centre educational services.

Regional development companies and Employment and Economic Development Companies are working together in areas to recognize SMEs needs and guiding them to right service provider. This counselling work needs all of these service providers and organizations co-operation and communication.

Case study gives idea of development companies best practices providing 1) high-quality business counselling, mentoring and training services, free of charge. It also describes Development Company's 2) role as a representative company for small entrepreneurs to be able to apply financially supported educations. Besides the role of counselling advisors have a role 3) to identify education and training needs and to guide customers to local educational providers.

Customer-oriented training or consulting procurement needs often arise quickly, and these acquisitions will respond promptly. Prolonged training procurement complicates the company's training participating and decision making process and the final cost of the training data is a factor of uncertainty for companies. Regional development company business consultancy and ELY- Centres officers are working co-operation and communication development in such a way that it supports the corporate training and consulting needs.

LLL counselling and guiding for early daycare, comprehensive school and vocational education and training and higher education belongs to the Ministry of Education and Culture and counselling and guiding is planned in all organizations. The small and medium enterprises are target group which doesn't belong to any of those mentioned above.

All participants of this network work with same target group; small and medium enterprises SMEs. All of them reach and get contacted with some SMEs. The guiding and counselling have to carry out together to contact right target group, identify the most significant education and training need/area. ELY provides financing to those educational needs which are forecasted to be most important in business. Other operators have remarkable role help with financing and enable also private enterprise to have education and training.

5.3 Germany

The "Qualifizierungsoffensive Hessen" is a LLL program in the federal state Hessen which aims at the enlargement of qualifications of young people and the offer of vocational training support. This means young people were accompanied in the job orientation in school as well as in the application process for an apprenticeship place. In Germany, many pupils graduate from school after attending 9 or 10 school years –

and often they have a lack of qualification for the job-entry. The next educational level after the secondary school (Hauptschule/ Realschule) is the “dual system” of a vocational training with combine training-on-the-job and school. Most of the pupils start this educational phase by 15 or 16 years. This school is called “Berufsschule” and the vocational training form is “Ausbildungsplatz” (apprenticeship place). The pupils have to apply for such vocational trainings or apprenticeships in companies but many graduates did not get a place. Different factors could be established why the young people are not successful: some have not the work competencies, some did not decide what they are interested in, or others are overextended by the application process.

The qualification offensive is focused on quality standards for optimizing the local training – the Olov strategy aims at promoting young graduates to increase their maturity for an apprenticeship. Since 2008, the qualification offensive is more focused on quality standards for optimizing the local training placement of young employees in the region of Hessen. According to the new strategy, which is called “Qualitätsstandards zur Optimierung der lokalen Vermittlungsarbeit”, thus the strategy is abbreviated to into „OloV“. This strategy is developed in collaboration with stakeholders of vocational training market which aims at promoting young graduates to increase their maturity for an apprenticeship as well as to support them to find a vocational training place. Further, the Olov strategy is set to combine the three main work areas of improving the occupational orientation of young people by enhancing the apprenticeship maturity, acquisition of apprenticeship and internship positions, and the final matching and placement process to support the graduates to get a vocational training place which aims at pursue an holistic approach of LLL. In this way, young people could develop their maturity for a vocational training, reflect their interest for a further job, and receive professional support for the application and apprenticeship placement process at the same time.

In the year 2010/2011, a significant success of the qualification offensive and Olov strategy was noted: Only 18.690 graduates were still unemployed in Hessen. In the period of 2009/2010 many of the graduates did not get an apprenticeship place or were rejected based on lack of qualifications or vocational maturity of the graduates. The Federal Institute for Employment (2011, Statistik der Bundesagentur für Arbeit) reported that in 2009/2010 551.944 applicants were registered for training place and only 483.519 got a place. Thus, 68.425 positions were still available. In the period of 2010/2011 the situation was getting better: Only 18.690 graduates were still unemployed.

Current beneficiaries are graduates from Hauptschule and Realschule as well as local companies. Prospective beneficiaries could be other groups of unemployed people (lower-skilled employees). The employment agencies of Hessen will be supported in a figurative sense by avoid “double” work during the matching and placement process of graduates who are looking for an apprenticeship place. Double means that they have to deal with vacancies of companies and the request of the young people. If the government of Hessen adapted some of the measures like the intensive training in terms of maturity for the workplace or self-development the Olov matching and placement approach could support also other unemployed people in the region of Hessen.

The implementation of the Olov strategy was accomplished by the stakeholder of vocational training market. With the expertise and commitment by these stakeholders the Olov was successfully applied und has been improved the opportunities of a vocational training place for many young graduates of the region Hessen. Further, the Olov implementation is based on general quality standards and on quality standards with regards to content.

5.4 Greece

The 2009 PISA assessments showed that a sizable portion of 15 year olds in Greece is performing very low in reading (21,3%), math (30,4%) and science (25,3%). These results show that many of Greece’s pupils are in need for extra teaching support and for improved quality of public education provisions. Another pressing education problem is early school leaving, which particularly in the region of Aegean Islands and Crete reaches the levels of 21,7%. Many of Greece’s pupils, in order to improve their performance in school, are

turning to private supplementary teaching services that are offered at a fee either by private enterprises known as “frontistiria” or by individual tutors. Private supplementary tutoring to pupils in secondary but also primary education level is a long-standing reality in Greece, representing a hidden form of privatisation of education. The economic crisis in Greece and the austerity measures taken, on the one hand reduced the central government budget on education and on the other the capacity of households, particularly the poorer ones, to spend extra money for the education of their children. Therefore, action should be taken to ensure that all pupils, independently of the economic situation of their families, have access to supplementary teaching in order to be able to improve their performance in core curriculum subjects. The above realities led us choose as “best practice” in the field of LLL in Greece an initiative undertaken by secondary education teachers in Rethymnon, a small city in the island of Crete, to organise free supplementary teaching to secondary education pupils.

The goal of the practice is to enhance equity in learning outcomes in core curriculum areas and in parallel to increase overall pupils’ performance in the public secondary education schools of the Rethymnon city area in Greece. The specific objective of this practice is to improve secondary education pupils’ school achievement in core curriculum subjects with no extra cost for the families.

The key initiator of the practice is the Rethymnon branch of the Secondary Education Teachers’ Union. In November 2011, around 50 teachers volunteered to participate in the project and this number is increasing. Parents who are active members of local parents’ associations have also been involved to support the administrative and secretarial work needed for the day-to-day operation of classes. The local school authorities are cooperative by allowing the operation of supplementary courses to be organised in the classrooms of public schools.

One of the major challenges was to make sure that these supplementary classes are organised and delivered in a timely and professional manner throughout the school year. The organising team was flooded by applications from volunteer teachers. This was encouraging but also challenging because the organisers had to make sure that all these teachers are not driven by mere enthusiasm of the moment but are indeed committed to the project for the whole school year.

This practice can be proved highly effective in tackling problems of pupils’ underachievement and enhancing equity in school learning outcomes for several reasons. There is no “hard evidence” to support the above because the initiative is only a few months old. Volunteering to working extra hours for free to help weaker pupils is already a very good sign of teachers’ sense of duty and is likely to promote to all teachers and school leaders in the locality an even stronger sense of personal responsibility and collective commitment for the benefit of their pupils. The teachers involved in supplementary tutoring are all experienced and highly motivated. Apparently the parents’ associations in local schools are also very positive towards sending their children to the free classes organised by the Rethymnon branch of the Secondary Education Teachers’ Union. This synergy between teachers and parents is likely to create a wider positive climate and trust for the development of sustainable collaboration at school and local level with the aim to improve the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning at school. Pupils also are likely to develop a more positive attitude towards their school teachers and the teaching-learning processes taking place at school. Therefore, it can be expected that this initiative will benefit not only the pupils attending to the free supplementary teaching classes but also the wider school community in the locality.

5.5 Poland

The European goal of lifelong learning strives to engage people of all ages in enhancing their knowledge and skills in directions that will lead to their both economic and personal satisfaction. With the demographics of Europe sharply ‘greying,’ it is increasingly important to include older citizens within any strategy - lifelong learning is no exception. With 2012 both the year of Active Ageing throughout the European Union and the Year of the Universities of the Third Age in Poland, this case looks at universities of the third age in Poland, their development, scope, and social attitudes towards them. In particular the Wrocław University of the

Third Age is referenced for its support of senior learning in smaller towns based on support from local public administration.

5.6 Slovakia

Continuing education of teachers in Slovakia is implemented in the context of lifelong learning on the basis of Lifelong Learning Act no. 568/2009 Coll., Act no. 317/2009 Coll. on Teaching Staff and Professional Staff, Act no. 437/2009 Coll. on qualifications and specific qualification requirements for different categories of the teaching staff and professional staff, Act no. 445/2009 Coll. on continuing education, credits, and attestation of teaching staff and professional staff and Act no. 390/2011 Coll. that changes and complements Act no. 317/2009 Coll. and some of the laws.

Teachers after the completion of continuing education or training receive a certificate and they are awarded credits, and on these bases they complete first and second attestation exam. Teachers are motivated to enroll in such study, as after acquiring attestation they will receive according to the law the salary increase. Continuing education is oriented on pre-primary, primary and secondary school pedagogical and non-pedagogical employees, and it is carried out across the whole Slovakia. Presented are good practices from universities and institutions that are carrying out such accredited continual education and focus is placed on attestation.

5.7 Spain

In Spain, one of the main reasons for passing the new Act on Education (LOE) was, among others, the need to adapt Spanish educational policies to the specific objectives for education systems established by the European Union for the year 2010. The first one is to improve quality in education and efficiency in the system, which should be achieved by raising standards in teachers' qualifications and skills, developing the required abilities for the new knowledge society, guaranteeing access to information technologies for all, and increasing the number of students enrolled in technical, scientific and artistic studies. The second objective stated by the law is to facilitate access to education to everyone, with especial emphasis on equal opportunities. Finally, it also mentions the need to strengthen the relationships between educational institutions and the labour market, research fields and society in general, so as to open the education system to the world.

In order to attain the objectives the first step was to regard learning as an ongoing, lifelong process, which will be facilitated by paying special attention to the need for young people to acquire basic competences, by raising the standards in adult education and by making the connections between different types of formal instruction more flexible. The second measure is to grant educational institutions a greater level of autonomy, so as to allow them to adapt to and to cater for the specific needs of their students. Finally, in order to accomplish the desired objectives, it is absolutely essential to improve the quality of teacher training, by reviewing current initial training programs so that they meet European standards.

The Spanish study case presented in this document, addresses many of these aspects. Based on good practices found on a educational Project of Catalonia, the eduCAT 2.0, it is analyzed how the integration of ICT can promote lifelong learning through the acquisition of key competences in the primary and secondary schools.

The Government, the Autonomous Communities and other interested institutions and organizations should act in their respective areas, to ensure sufficient supply and quality in line with the objectives established in the Educational Organic Law (LOE), enhancing the access of adults to lifelong learning, providing guidance and accelerating the validation and recognition of basic competences or professional learning acquired through formal and non formal activities. Especially, it is necessary ensure learning opportunities that achieve key competences.

Lifelong learning is a tool of personal and social development for broad sectors of society, by acquiring those considered basic competences to live and work in the XXI century. The adult population cannot give up the

acquisition and development of personal and social competences needed to exercise their right as active citizenship.

From the Mediterranean tradition, the problem of early school leaving in Spain is one of the highest in Europe (almost 30%) and one of the key benchmarks of the LLL policies in Europe.

The case study presented here, is related to the Spanish government LLL action plan for the 2012-2014, launched in November 2011 in which the acquisition of new competences is one of the strategic goals. Under this frame, promoting and obtaining the digital competence -the basic competence for the XXI century- constitutes an effort of best practice.

These strategies are attaching priority to the lack of key competences provided by the compulsory education, especially command of reading, writing or ICT, and also low or no professional qualifications. Indeed, these shortcomings limit their ability to get integrated to the labour market and with success in society. In this context, the use of ICT is now a basic tool for social and working life, so that people who do not have digital competition have added difficulties for personal and professional development. The acquisition of these basic competences allows the preparation and updating of young people and adults in new professional and personal competences.

This case study is about the implementation of the program eduCAT 2.0, which intends to make the whole compulsory educational system digital, massively using computers, digital handbooks, integrating them into traditional practices and promoting new ones.

The geographical coverage of this case is Catalan, although the strategy analyzed is regional and national, promoted and funded by the Spanish Ministry of Education, and takes different names according to the regions. In terms of localization, it covers all type of schools; taking into account the particularities of the Spanish educational system, the case covers both public and semi-public schools (private schools funded publicly).

The axis of the promotion of the education 2.0 is that students (then teachers also) acquire the digital competence and contribute to the development of transversal competences, such as learning to learn, to help them a more independent and personalized learning. This approach also requires different roles of teachers. This leads, in many cases, significant changes in organization and teaching methodologies. This process of extending the uses of digital technologies has led to the collective reflection on the strategies to be taken to improve student learning.

The problem area regards the promotion and integration of ICT for a lifelong learning through the acquisition of digital competence, one of the key competences established by the CE for the strategies and policies of lifelong learning.

The case concentrates on improving the quality of education provisions through the development of the digital competence for preferably pupils and teachers, diversifying educational resources and the educational system (through formal, non formal and informal activities that the integration of ICT might allow) and eventually increasing motivation and learning to learn through the innovation in the teaching and learning practices. Then, the program attempts to increase the learning performance and tackles in the long run the problem of early school leaving in Spain, which rate is one of the highest in Europe (almost 30%).

The current beneficiaries of this project are mainly the pupils and the teachers of the schools (primary level representing 1710 centres) and 574 institutes (secondary) involved in the Program are the direct beneficiaries. While the prospective ones could be the school headers, administration staff and pupils families could be receive a positive multiplier effect. Then, in an ideal situation, all the educational community.

As the implementation of the best practice supposes getting key competences, especially the digital one and enhancing the educational achievement for lifelong learning, the frame to describe the implementation of the LLL practice underlines the question, how to ensure that these key competences are developed through the use of ICT?

The interviews' analysis of actors involved in this program set the reflection of a new scope on the teaching-learning process. It is observed that some actions and changes are needed not only at a) a technical level: new resources and tools; but also at b) an organizational-institutional level: new teachers and pupils' roles/responsibilities and c) a pedagogical level: new methodologies and activities.

The aim of diversifying the learning environments (getting over the formal and traditional contexts) for acquiring and/or transform the knowledge beyond the educational institutions and achieving the key competences refers to changing the educational paradigms: from contents to activities, ergo new interactions and learning practices for obtaining new competences. This means to understand and promote a 360° learning approach based on communication, collaboration, teamwork and the participative action-research strategy, where the active involvement of the actors, for example the teacher, is the main experience for innovating in learning practices and reaching these competences.

In conclusion, the Spanish case study presented can be observed as a promising best practice, because the following topics should be achieved: a) at a technical level, new infrastructure, connectivity, resources, materials and tools; b) at a organizational-institutional level, new teachers and pupils' roles and responsibilities, work and tasks based on the collaborative approach; and c) at a pedagogical level, new methodologies, methods and activities (uses).

This program is a good practice when it is set the reflection of a new scope on the teaching-learning process, and it realized that actions and changes are needed in these dimensions –considering the particularities and need of each organization, i.e. a socio cultural scope- for getting and provided to beneficiaries an innovation environment. These seem to be the bases for the effective (and real) integration of ICT for lifelong learning through the acquisition of digital competence. In this context, for changing paradigms and getting the new competences, it is central to recognized and commit in the experience all the actors of the educational community.

Digital competence is increasingly important not only as a skill in itself, but also as a facilitator of other skills (becoming a transversal competence) such as teamwork, learning to learn, and so on. In this sense, the practice documented is related to the socio-economic, cultural and educational needs and then respond to the global and specific strategies as a nation and European-wide response for the Information or Knowledge Society.

5.8 Summary

The case studies presented show quite different aspects and realizations of good practices to meet the countries issues regarding lifelong learning. By this Bulgaria provides training vouchers for participation in further education to increase participation in lifelong learning. The Finnish case focuses on the partnership approach and describes particular centres that counsel companies to find appropriate trainings for their employees, particularly for SMEs. The German case aims at the qualification of young people in VET to facilitate their smooth job entry while the Greek case describes the set up of supplementary lesson for poor pupils with low learning outcomes. The Polish case deals with learning of elderly persons and enabling them university access while the Slovak case focuses on teachers' professional development by a credit system. Finally, the Spanish case describes an approach to mainstream digital learning to the educational system.

All these practices, even though very heterogeneous show that there is the need and the will to work on current issues in Lifelong Learning. By this, the practices and their implementations relate to different targets and are also funded differently, e.g. the Greek case that relates to teachers initiatives to give extra lessons for disadvantaged pupils till the Finnish case that aims at providing equality throughout the country with respect to further education.

6 SWOT Analysis

The interviews with policy makers and beneficiaries in the area of lifelong learning and continuing education aimed at identifying positive and challenging aspects of the lifelong learning strategy implementation in the participating member states. Their answers were focused on weak points and challenges related to the lifelong learning strategy implementation, as well as on suggestions for its improvement.

The SWOT analysis can be used to derive, analyze, and focus research results with other factors (e.g. socio-cultural factors, capacity building factors) that impede or facilitate the implementation of LLL strategies. It extends the analysis to an internal and an external perspective. The internal perspective takes up aspects that are within the control of an organization, like strengths that can be developed and weaknesses that can be worked on. The external perspective considers aspects that are out of an organization’s control like opportunities that might appear or threats that may come up. Table 6.1 gives an overview on the perspectives and guiding questions for each dimension.

The identification of positive and challenging aspects of the lifelong learning strategy implementation can be developed on the basis of a SWOT analysis. In general, this approach aims at the identification of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) of a given field of interest. According to the German Federal Ministry of Internal Affairs, the SWOT analysis is a strategic management tool which allows the identification of strengths and weaknesses of an organization (internal view) and the chances and threats of its environment (external view; see BMI, 2009; Lee & Ko, 2000; Lombriser & Abplanalp, 1998). The aim is the identification of solutions and strategies which are necessary for the achievement of the organization’s goals. The SWOT analysis can also be used for the evaluation of specific organizational projects. In the context of the MASON project the SWOT approach can be applied for evaluating the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of implementing the lifelong learning strategy to get a more differentiated overview about the individual statements made by the interview partners with a focus on good practices and challenges in the process of lifelong learning strategy implementation.

| <i>„Internal view“ on country specific LLL policies</i> | |
|---|--|
| STRENGTH | WEAKNESSES |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reasons for success? • Synergies? <p><i>e.g. special programme for funding adult education</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak points to consider? <p><i>e.g. current strategy excludes older age groups</i></p> |
| <i>“External view“ on factors that influence LLL</i> | |
| OPPORTUNITIES | THREATS |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future trends worth following? <p><i>e.g. companies become aware of opportunities related to education of older workforce</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Situation in economy and society? • Existing regulations? • Changes in policy? <p><i>e.g. impact of financial crisis: workers might not want to stay away from work too long</i></p> |

Table 6.1. SWOT matrix with guiding questions according to BMI, 2007 (see <http://www.orghandbuch.de>, Chapter 6.3.4).

By its structure, the SWOT analysis can be fed with data from the indicator analysis as well as by further data like e.g. interviews or further research. To use it on the policy level for evaluating LLL strategies, the empirical results mainly cover the areas of strengths and weaknesses while opportunities and treats can be derived from forecasts about future developments.

6.1 Bulgaria

Positive and challenging aspects of the national lifelong learning system of Bulgaria are assessed in this chapter on the basis of a SWOT analysis. In general, this approach aims at the identification of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) of a given field of interest. The SWOT analysis can be used to facilitate the implementation of coherent and comprehensive LLL strategies in Bulgaria. It extends the analysis to an internal and an external perspective. The internal perspective identifies long-established realities, dominant dispositions and customary practices in the system of education, some of which constitute strengths that can be further developed and some others constitute weaknesses that can be worked on. The external perspective considers aspects that are to a high degree out of the control of the vast majority of the members the education system, i.e. those involved in the day-to-day management of schools and directly engaged in school life (school administrators, teachers, pupils and parents), like opportunities that might appear or threats that may come up. The aim of this exercise is to support the identification of solutions and strategies for the achievement of increased participation in LLL, improved learning results and other general goals that have been set such as social inclusion and the establishment of quality assurance mechanisms in all aspects of the LLL system of Bulgaria.

| Strengths | Weaknesses |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a well-trained teaching workforce with professional studies in their respective field. According to 1st OECD TALIS research, Bulgarian teachers benefit in plus of over 30 days in-service training (2008-2009) – one of the best rates between EU counties. • There are wide networks of teachers at all levels of education that use the internet to share learning materials and ideas. • All public educational institutions have delegated budgets – a form of relative financial autonomy based on the principle “the money follow the student” (as far as the state budgets credits are concerned) • All public educational institutions have access to broadband internet connections and 97% of schools have computer laboratories. • National external evaluation exams of students achievements are conducted yearly in 4th, 7th (Bulgarian language and literature and Maths) and 12th grades (Bulgarian language and literature and 1 compulsory-optional discipline) since 2007. • Education is highly valued by the society at large. • The national network of tertiary education institutions is extremely dense – 55 colleges and universities for 7.3 mln population. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers are ageing professional community – 65% are over 45 years old, and the interest to the teacher’s career between the young generations is alarmingly low. A huge HR crisis is prospected by trade-unions in education for 2018-2020. • There is over-centralisation of the decision making in the Ministry of Education, Sciences and Youth. All contents in formal education – curricula, programmes and school-books of pre-school and school education are defined on national level and their uniformity affronts increasing difficulties to meets the specific needs and priorities in the field of education of the deepening regional differences. The above leave little autonomy to schools to design and implement school development plans adapted to the needs of pupils and the local community. One major implication is that school head teachers have limited leadership capacities or training. • Overall, the central or regional education planning, administration and policy implementation units do not publish reports documenting their activities; results obtained and plan for the future. Public accountability is minimal to non-existing. • The introduction of evaluation practices in the national LLL system is incoherent and non-comprehensive. Some practices like annual external evaluation of students’ achievements in 4th, 7th and 12th grade were introduced with major difficulties in 2007; some others were partially introduced in aim to secure salaries differentiation – like annual teachers in-service evaluation on school level. Many others were planned but not introduced without known reasons – like the school self-evaluation or external evaluation (of the schools like institutions). Combined with the lack of publication of data form the already effectuated evaluation, this situation contributes to the general misunderstanding on the current status and the quality of the formal education. • Guidance and counselling are not integrated as part of basic services offered to the pupils’ population. The choice of academic and future careers of pupils is not based on any systematic processes at school level that would identify pupils’ interests and aptitudes and valid information about trends in the labour market. • Schools buildings are not adapted to meet the needs of teachers out of the strict duration of the class hours. That why almost half of the teaching shift is out of the school facilities and it has many implications on the overall operation of schools and the quality of teaching and learning (for example in missed opportunities for collaborative work between teachers, informal professional development, development of learning activities or materials for the next day, contact with parents, etc). • Education is of highly academic nature with little links between theory and practice; there is a disconnection between learning at school and “outside” realities in the world of work, and society at large. • Vocational and technical education programmes still be focused mainly on professions needed in the previous (socialist) national labour market and despite a numerous political declarations of intention to establish a sustainable platform of co-operation between the business and the VET networks – no progress was registered during the last 12 years on this issue. |

| Opportunities | Threats |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The students' population decrease (by natural demographic decrease and also by educational and economic emigration). This could be interpreted as a tragedy, but could also be taken as opportunity to increase the quality and invest the free resources in more effective forms and methods of teaching and training. • The above mentioned reason could be a great booster for developing the distance learning – field in which Bulgaria is considerably late compared with the other EU countries. • The economic crisis has increased the pressure on policy makers and education administrators to work upon improving the cost-effectiveness of public spending on education. As a large optimization of the education institutions network and in the institutions themselves was already undertaken (2007-2009), new ways of fundraising are now to be explored – parents' participation, public-private partnerships or other variations of closer cooperation with the business. • There is a growing public pressure to establish a culture of accountability at all levels of the system of education. This will be a significant accelerator of the process of publication and analysis of data in education field. • A rising level of voluntarism among public education teachers to offer free supplementary teaching to pupils from low SES families. In particular in the small towns | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall, the very low share of public spending on education as % of the GDP is likely to lead to a full-scale education crisis, because: • It increases inequalities in opportunities, access, quality of learning experiences and learning outcomes to the disadvantaged students. • Shrinking of public investments in school infrastructure (renovations, maintenance, ICTs etc) is already treating the overall quality of the schools as learning environments. • Stagnation of teachers' annual salaries (not-revaluated since 2008) affect their motivation. Overall, school teaching is considered by many teachers as "part-time" job. This is largely the case in tertiary education, but is also very frequent in the school education. • Persistent high unemployment rates among the highly educated youth is discouraging many students to become high achievers at school and continue with their studies at tertiary education level. |

Table 6.2.1 Bulgarian SWOT analysis

6.2 Finland

| Strengths | Weaknesses |
|---|---|
| <p>Government and legislation support Lifelong learning in Finland in different stages of life and provide training facilities to people in different kinds of life situations. (Acts guaranteeing Lifelong Learning Education)</p> <p>The Finnish education system offers everybody equal opportunities for education, irrespective of domicile, sex, economic situation or linguistic and cultural background. The school network is regionally extensive, and there are no sex-specific school services.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Equal opportunities, 2. Comprehensiveness of education 3. Competent teachers, 4. Student counselling and special needs education, 5. Encouraging evaluation, 6. Significance of education in society, 7. Co-operation, 8. A student-oriented, active conception of learning <p>Basic education is completely free of charge</p> | <p>Government changes every fourth year and National Education and Research development plan which describes objectives and strategies of learning may vary every fourth year.</p> <p>There are changes in economic life</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - education and workforces skills needs to develop according these economic changes. <p>Efficiency demand</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - too much time spent at each level of education, completion rate in education - transition phases, - unnecessary doubling in education - the recognition of prior learning, - Inadequate matching of education supply and labour demand has an effect on not only the functioning of the labour market, but also the way young people find their place in working life and how long they study. |
| Opportunities | Threats |
| <p>The identification and recognition of prior learning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It is vital that knowledge and competencies are made visible and knowledge and skills are valued to the full wherever, whenever and however they have been acquired. <p>Transitions from one education level to another and to the labour market should happen as flexible as possible.</p> <p>New development plan put emphasis to</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. level of education and competencies, 2. equal access to education, 3. targeting of education supply, 4. immigrants participation, 5. links between education and work, 6. group size, 7. stop bullying, 8. Intensified and special support in basic education, 9. educational guarantee as a part of social guarantee, 10. dropouts, 11. better opportunities for adults in education and training, 12. competence-based qualifications and 13. education. <p>Education has become more and more essential tool</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to increase the efficiency of production, - prevent and reduce unemployment, - introduction of technology, and - maintenance and improving international competitiveness. | <p>School education doesn't provide all skills needed in working life.</p> <p>Many significant attempts must be made to secure access to the labour market for the entire workforce.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lack of competent workforce <p>The shortage of workforce will complicate the operation of business growth and undermine the availability of welfare services in particular.</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">→ business will suffer, also national economy</p> <p>If companies want to preserve their competitiveness they need to be able to respond in good time to structural challenges.</p> <p>Fear that educated people will migrate to work abroad.</p> <p>Threat of mismatching of education.</p> <p>The introduction of tuitions might change equality in education.</p> |

Table 6.2.1 Finnish SWOT analysis

Strengths

In general, there are strategies and infrastructures for lifelong learning. Government and legislation support Lifelong learning in Finland in different stages of life and provide training facilities to people in different kinds of life situations. (Acts guaranteeing Lifelong Learning Education). Public authorities must secure **equal opportunities** for every resident in Finland to get education also after compulsory schooling and to develop themselves, irrespective of their financial standing. One of the new improvements for next years is the educational guarantee defined in new development plan.

Weaknesses

The weaknesses in education and lifelong learning in Finland relates largely to Government changes every fourth year. Involved to these changes with Parliament and the Government also National Education and Research development plan (which describes objectives and strategies of learning) changes with Government and may vary every fourth year. Also efficiency demand weaken the lifelong learning in some cases.

Opportunities

The opportunities with lifelong learning and development with these issues in Finland relate e.g. the identification and recognition of prior learning. Also new development plan consist many opportunities from the lifelong learning perspective.

Threats

The threats in lifelong learning issues relates **many times to same issues where the actions will be required in future these are e.g. transition points and length of studies, matching of education supply and labour demand**. Education policy means actions with 1) shortening the time spent at each level of education, expediting transition phases, reducing unnecessary doubling in education and enhancing the recognition of prior learning, 2) Improving the completion rate in education, and 3) Improving the matching of education supply and labour demand. Inadequate matching of education and the labour market demand has an effect on not only the functioning of the labour market, but also the way young people find their place in working life and how long they study⁵.

6.3 Germany

| Strengths | Weaknesses |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private-public-partnerships can provide teachers and headmasters with the opportunities to take part in professional seminars and trainings with no additional costs for the participating teachers and headmasters. • The voluntary social year can be classified as a specific feature of the German education system <i>between</i> secondary and tertiary education. • Alternative routes to access to tertiary education are means for increasing participation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The generally small share of early childhood care places, particularly in former Western Germany, hinders to enrol children in such institutions. • Lack of financial support for skilled-personnel (e.g. speech therapists for German language). • Parents with migration background have often problems with the German language. Thus, they need someone who translates for them. • The refunding of training costs for further qualification and training because of regional differences and different employers. |
| Opportunities | Threats |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private early childhood care institutions need financial support of government for (single) parents to provide comprehensive services. • Concept of the open house in early childhood care: free choice of young children in which room they will be (artistic, reading, outdoor, English room etc.) might be beneficial for young children’s development. • Stronger support for increasing the reading competencies of primary school students (with and without migration background) by volunteers. • The potential impact of economic crisis may raise participation in higher education. • Most of the companies in metal and electronics industries in Bavaria wanted their employees to learn the required knowledge about new processes or products in a shorter time period. Therefore, blended-learning systems are becoming more and more attractive for companies. • The opportunities to achieve a high salary with this further education diploma encourage participation in Lifelong Learning. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial support by the government will be too few that early childhood care can support parents’ demands of opening hours. • Private institutions of early childhood care may exceed the financial background or support of communities and parents of low- and medium social-economic status. • The economic background also has a decisive role regarding the support for private lessons during school. Besides most of the parents with migration background are not able to help their children with homework themselves neither could they pay for private lesson. Thus, these students are more likely to have a double disadvantage regarding the equal education access. • Socio-economic and cultural factors related to the background of parents have an impact on students’ school achievements and the risk of their early school leaving. |

Table 6.3.1 SWOT analysis of the German system

Strengths

In general, there are means and infrastructures for all stages of Lifelong Learning. Yet, due to the federal structure of Germany there are big differences between the single states. Early childhood care is much more developed in states that belonged to former Eastern Germany while outcomes of international school comparisons are in favour of southern states. That means that good practices are available in Germany – yet, not distributed evenly.

Furthermore, Germany has great experiences in social services, having its origins in the former compulsory community service. These social services allow pupils to have experiences in different kind of professions between secondary and tertiary education and therefore give hints and guides for career choice. Furthermore, the German education system has a defined degree of permeability that means that also pupils from vocational education may obtain university admission after some additional schooling.

Weaknesses

The weaknesses also lie in the federal system in the way that it is hard to support mutual learning and good practices between states. This is often subject to state-political issues, too, e.g. the low share of early childhood care in the catholic south. This has also impact on pupils with migration background that are not able to attend early childhood care because they often have difficulties to learn German at home. Furthermore, there are often too few financial resources and too less skilled personal to support children with language or learning disabilities in integrative classes. Furthermore, the federal structure also provides incoherencies regarding the funding opportunities for means of lifelong learning.

Opportunities

The opportunities in Germany relate to coherence and financing. Because the country has good practice examples for several aspects of Lifelong Learning, federal efforts to provide coherency and appropriate means provide good chances for high quality implementation. Growing industries like metal and electronics have a culture of continuous learning and motivate their employees for participating in Lifelong Learning.

Threats

The threats mainly relate to political and financial issues. The grown structure of German federalism may inhibit the exchange and effective implementation of good practices between states – particularly if a good practice is associated with particular views of a political party. The other issue is how far the different states have the financial means for supporting good practices. Discussions e.g. about changes in the financial equalization scheme between the Federal Government and the Länder may have effects on the financial power of the poorer states. Thus, it also affects financial means for the support of Lifelong Learning strategies in German context. These threats regarding financial support may particularly affect persons with lower socio-economic status and migrants that are highly dependent on such kind of support with respect to attend to a further educational training measure to improve their rather low social status.

6.4 Greece

The SWOT analysis can be used to facilitate the devising and implementation of coherent and comprehensive LLL strategies in Greece. It extends the analysis to an internal and an external perspective. The internal perspective identifies long-established realities, dominant dispositions and customary practices in the system of education, some of which constitute strengths that can be further developed and some others constitute weaknesses that can be worked on. The external perspective considers aspects that are to a high degree out of the control of the vast majority of the members the education system, i.e. those involved in the day-to-day management of schools and directly engaged in school life (school administrators, teachers, pupils and parents), like opportunities that might appear or threats that may come up. The aim of this exercise is to support the identification of solutions and strategies for the achievement of increased participation in LLL, improved learning results and other general goals that have been set such as social inclusion and the establishment of quality assurance mechanisms in all aspects of the LLL system of Greece.

Because we identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that cut across the entire LLL system in Greece, we first performed a SWOT analysis at global LLL system level. Then, SWOT analyses are performed separately for each level of the LLL system of Greece, excluding the threats that are essentially identical to those described in the system-wide SWOT analysis.

| Education system-wide SWOT analysis | |
|--|--|
| Strengths | Weaknesses |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a well-trained teaching workforce with professional studies in their respective field. Pre-primary and primary education teachers are graduates of 4-year university studies offered by the 22 pre-primary and primary education university departments in operation in Greece. Secondary education teachers are graduates of university or higher technological education institution’s departments (subject-matter specialists) and have also obtained formal teacher qualifications through participation in accredited teacher training programmes. • There are wide networks of teachers at all levels of education who use the internet to share learning materials and ideas. • All public educational institutions have access to broadband internet connections and most schools have computer laboratories. • Education is highly valued by the society at large and securing the conditions for academic achievement for their children is one of the main goals of families. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Furthermore, local, regional and central school authorities have no monitoring mechanisms on the regularity of pupils’ participation that would help establish early-warning systems for pupils showing irregular participation and being at risk of dropping out of school. • Guidance and counselling are not fully integrated as part of basic services offered to the pupils’ population. The choice of academic and future careers of pupils is not based on any systematic processes at school level that would identify pupils’ interests and aptitudes and valid information about trends in the labour market. • Although school teachers at all levels have to be present at school during their whole shift and not just for teaching hours of each day, it is customary for many teachers to leave the school premises immediately after their last teaching hour and not by the end of their shift. The above reality has many implications on the overall operation of schools and the quality of teaching and learning (for example in missed opportunities for collaborative work between teachers, informal professional development, development of learning activities or materials for the next day, contact with parents, etc.). • Some public school teachers work extra hours doing private supplementary teaching for a fee. This practice, apart from its ethical dimensions, may have implications on how well they prepare at home for their normal duties at school. • Education is of highly academic nature with little links between theory and practice; there is a disconnection between learning at school and “outside” realities in the world of work, and society at large. Study visits to places of work or other places of high educational value are occasional and do not form an integral part of the typical education of students. Vocational and technical education programmes are strictly separated from general education programmes. Students following a general academic education path, which represent the majority of the student population at upper secondary education level, may never have the opportunity during school to use their hands to do something for learning. |

| Opportunities | Threats |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The economic crisis has increased the pressure on policy makers and education administrators to work upon improving the cost-effectiveness of public spending on education. • There is a growing public pressure to establish a culture of accountability at all levels of the system of education. • A rising level of voluntarism among public education teachers to offer free supplementary teaching to pupils from low SES families. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall, further shrinking of the already very low share of public spending on education as pct over the GDP is likely to lead to a full-scale education crisis. Some of the most critical aspects of this threat are described below: • Low public spending on education is likely to increase inequalities in opportunities, access, quality of learning experiences and learning outcomes to the disadvantage of students coming from families of low socio-economic status. • Shrinking of public investments in school infrastructure (new school buildings, renovations, maintenance, ICTs etc.) may threaten in the medium to long term the overall quality of the schools as learning environments. • High early retirement rates coupled with restrictions in the number of new teachers that can be hired (5 to 1 rule) are likely to create shortages in teachers. • Reductions in teachers’ annual salaries are likely to have affected their morale, given also that they are comparatively low paid. Overall, school teaching may result to be considered as “part-time” job for some school teachers. • Drastic reductions in the income of families are likely to affect gravely their capacity to invest in the education of their children. • Persistent high unemployment rates among the highly educated youth may discourage many students to become high achievers at school and continue with their studies at tertiary education level. |

Table 6.4.1. Education system-wide SWOT analysis (Greece)

| SWO analysis of the early childhood and care system (ISCED level 0) | |
|---|--|
| Strengths | Weaknesses |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is an large number of “all-day” kindergartens which are more aligned to the needs of children and the employment conditions of parents (almost 51% of the total), serving around 35,5% of the public kindergarten pupils. • There is growing awareness at top-level policy making and parents about the benefits kindergarten years for the future learning performance of children. • Enrolment of children aged 5 to kindergartens is compulsory. • There is a wide political and social consensus that priority should be given to the development of pre-primary education. • The merging of small kindergartens into larger units has the potential to increase the efficiency of the system through better allocation of resources. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a considerable gap between the demand for kindergarten places and the public provision, particularly for the 4 year old children. The public system of ESEC provision is underdeveloped. Only around 1 in 2 children aged 4 (52,4%) in Greece are enrolled in a kindergarten, while the EU27 average is 90,5%. • The large number of small kindergartens operating in isolated and remote areas around Greece reduces the efficiency of the whole system because it requires a disproportionate allocation of resources, particularly of teachers. |
| Opportunities | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New curricula have been developed and are piloted to 21 kindergartens this year. | |

Table 6.4.2. SWO analysis of the early childhood and care system (ISCED level 0)

| SWO analysis of the compulsory education system (ISCED level 1 & 2) | |
|---|---|
| Strengths | Weaknesses |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teacher/pupil ratio in primary schools is 1:9,6. The teacher/pupil ratio in Gymnasiums is 1:8,1. These ratios indicate that in many classrooms there is enough time for personalization of teaching according to the needs and interests of individual pupils. In primary schools personalization is further supported because teachers in all grades teach all core subjects to the same group of pupils. • “All-day” programmes operate in around 83% of the public primary schools (in 4,329 out of 5,227), currently benefiting 21,3% of the pupils’ population (126,000 pupils out of around 590,000). • In 18% of the primary schools, all of them “all-day” schools, the new “Comprehensive Reformed Educational Programme” is implemented (in 963 schools, currently benefiting 44,000 pupils). • Schools are welcoming places for all children. Incidents of bullying, inappropriate teacher behaviour (such as use of violence for punishment) and of racist or discriminatory behaviour are extremely rare. • Compulsory education is attended by 98% of the population of children aged between 6 and 14. As a system it is open to all children of school age (up to 16) who want to enrol. It is welcoming to immigrant children who arrive in Greece irrespectively of their legal status. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The institution of “all-day” primary schools needs considerable improvements in the way compulsory and non-compulsory classes are organised in a coherent whole in terms of curricula and actual quality of the learning experience for the pupils. Head teachers and the teaching staff working in non-compulsory classes after the normal school day have to change the perception that the extended time that pupils spend at school is just for keeping them occupied until its time to go home. Head teachers have to make sure that teachers working in the noon shift of “all day” schools are present in the school not just for their actual teaching hours but throughout the whole duration of their shift. • The large number of small schools operating in isolated and remote areas around Greece reduces the efficiency of the whole system because it requires a disproportionate allocation of resources, particularly of teachers. • Primary schools with less than 60 pupils enrolled and less than 15 pupils wanting to participate in the extended programme are not entitled to operate as “all day” schools. Furthermore, if during the school year the number of pupils enrolled in the extended programme falls below 15, the programme has to be terminated. The above rules established by the Ministry of Education makes it difficult for small schools to qualify as “all day” primary schools, negatively affecting the learning opportunities of the pupils’ population living in remote and isolated areas. • There is a huge gap between the curricula and the ways school learning is organised between primary and lower secondary education. For example, while classroom tests are infrequent in primary schools, in Gymnasiums pupils have to take tests in most subject matters taught on a regular basis. |
| Opportunities | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New curricula have been developed and are piloted to 96 primary schools and 68 Gymnasiums this year. • The new reformed programme with the new curricula are planed to be implemented gradually to the whole system of primary education. • The merging of small schools into larger units has the potential to increase the efficiency of the system through better allocation of resources. • The introduction of pilot programmes for the evaluation of schools and teachers may help improve the acceptance of evaluation as standard practice across the system and ultimately promote the quality of teaching and learning. | |

Figure 6.4.3. SWO analysis of the compulsory education system (ISCED level 1 & 2, Greece)

| SWO analysis of the upper secondary education system, Unified Lyceums (ISCED level 3a) | |
|--|--|
| Strengths | Weaknesses |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unified Lyceums attract the vast majority of pupils who are high academic achievers in their Gymnasium years. • Most of the pupils are planning to continue their studies at tertiary education level and therefore they tend to perform reasonably well in their Lyceum core curriculum subjects. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High competition among third grade students who want to get access to a university or technological institution results in devaluing of any school activity that is not directly linked to the national exams. It is particularly the third graders in Unified Lyceums that tend not to pay attention to curriculum areas taught in school which are not part of the national exams content. • An important factor of success in the national exams is private supplementary teaching. Many students prepare for the national exams already from their second grade year, turning to private supplementary teaching services for targeted instruction on the national exams subjects. Private supplementary teaching services are thought to be much more important than school teaching on the same subjects for success in exams. An estimated average of monthly fees for the full package of private teaching in groups is no less than 400 euros. This is a considerable financial burden for many families of low socio-economic status. It is highly likely that this long-established reality affects negatively the opportunities that students from low SES families have to continue with their studies at tertiary education level, as well as their chances to actually get the scores needed for entrance in university departments of high demand. |
| Opportunities | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the first grade of Unified Lyceums reformed curricula are planned to be introduced for Sciences (Physics, Chemistry, Biology), Mathematics (Algebra, Geometry) and Greek (Ancient Greek and Literature, Modern Greek and Literature). It is also planned the introduction of a course on “research projects”. | |

Figure 6.4.4. SWO analysis of the upper secondary education system, Unified Lyceums (ISCED level 3a, Greece)

| SWO analysis of upper secondary vocational education level (ISCED level 3b & c) | |
|--|---|
| Strengths | Weaknesses |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The infrastructure available by Vocational Schools and Vocational Lyceums for the training of their pupils to a large variety of technical/technological oriented specialties is generally up-to-date and in accordance to techniques and technologies used in modern workplaces. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a widespread prejudice that vocational education in Vocational Schools and Vocational Lyceums is aimed for students who are academically weak. These schools do tend to attract many students who are among the low academic achievers during Gymnasium years, with the result of confirming the negative image that these schools have in the eyes of parents, students and the wider society. Overall, vocational education is doubly devalued, first at the level of dispositions of students, parents and the public and secondly at the level of the capacity of such schools to cultivate a positive learning culture. In the labour market the studies and expertise of vocational education graduates in some specialties is devalued because no formal professional qualifications are established by law for them. Vocational Lyceums offer minimal opportunities for practical training in real workplaces. There is a superficial link between academic and laboratory-based parts of the Vocational Lyceums curricula. This often results in the perception among pupils that academic courses taught in ordinary classrooms are of little value to their learning and future career prospects. Classrooms dedicated to academic subjects tend to be poor as learning environments because the school head teachers and the teaching staff prefer focusing their efforts in improving the laboratories. Pupils have little information regarding the demands of the labour market to base their choices of specialty studies. The catalogue of specialties offered by Vocational Schools and Vocational Lyceums is not formed on the basis of sound analyses of labour market needs and its future trends. There are specialties which continue to be offered for years although there are not more in high demand by the labour market. Large changes in the specialty catalogue on offer would lead to the under-use and devaluing of existing infrastructure of obsolete specialty programmes. In parallel, there will be challenges on how to deal with permanent teachers in obsolete specialties. These two issues effectively represent obstacles to the flexibility needed in the organisation of studies in vocational education in accordance to labour market trends. |
| Opportunities | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technological Lyceums are planned to replace the Vocational Lyceums and Vocational Schools. The planned reform gives hopes that the quality and status of vocational education will be upgraded. The formal recognition of the professional qualifications of vocational education graduates of all specialties offered by the Technological Lyceums will be a huge step, if realized, in improving the status of vocational studies in Greece. | |

Figure 6.4.5. SWO analysis of upper secondary vocational education level (ISCED level 3b & c, Greece)

| SWOT analysis of tertiary education (ISCED levels 5&6) | |
|---|--|
| Strengths | Weaknesses |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly expanded range of quality programmes of study at undergraduate and postgraduate level. • High demand for tertiary education (including the Open University for adults). • University education is highly valued by the society at large. • During the period from 2008 to the first semester of 2011 65% of the University departments have delivered an internal evaluation report to the HQAA (186 reports out of a total of 281 University departments) and 54% of the ATEI departments (126 reports out of 233 ATEI departments). Despite limitations in budgets, during this period 87 departments have also completed external evaluation reports with the involvement of academics from foreign universities. Regular internal and external evaluation is becoming a standard process. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The entrance exams system leads many students to departments that were not among their first choices. The result is that many departments which are not among those in high demand enrol students that did not really wanted to study there. The implication is that these students may not be very interested or motivated to fully commit themselves to their studies. • There are programmes of studies offered by some ATEI departments in the periphery which are actively attended by a much smaller number of students as compared to those who are actually enrolled. • The vast majority of ATEI departments' teaching staff is employed on the basis of short-term contracts; this situation is likely to negatively affect the commitment of the teaching staff and the capacity of the ATEI departments to attract and keep high quality teaching staff. Most short-term teaching staff in peripheral ATEIs is long-distance commuters, present in the ATEI buildings only while teaching or during their student support hours. • There are little opportunities for tertiary education institutions to draw funds from the private sector. Private sector R&D projects and funding are extremely limited. Tertiary education institutions are almost 100% dependent on public funds. • The huge expansion of the tertiary education sector during the last three decades with the establishment of large number of new universities/ATEIs and their departments in small cities in the periphery of Greece was predominantly dictated by political party interests at regional and local level. This situation has created huge challenges regarding the efficiency of the system and its effectiveness in relation to Greece's economic development needs. In universities/ATEIs located in Athens and Thessaloniki there is lack of enough buildings and infrastructure while in peripheral universities/ATEIs the infrastructure available is underused. There is also a wide variation in the teacher/student ratios between departments of similar programmes of studies. • There is a wide lack of supporting staff for teaching and technical purposes. • The number of new entrants in programmes of studies in some fields is not justified by the labour market needs. For example, the number of doctors per 1000 inhabitants is among the highest in EU, while the number of nurses is among the lowest. • The cost per student varies widely between universities of comparable range of studies. • There are programmes of studies whose graduates cannot be registered to the relevant professional associations with the result that they cannot fully practice what they have studied. Overall, inconsistencies are observed between some programmes of studies and the professional rights of their graduates. |

| Opportunities | Threats |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The tightened university budgets may push universities to be more actively involved in international research projects. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young researchers as well as accomplished ones may seek for better employment opportunities abroad. There are fears that a brain drain is underway because of diminishing employment prospects for young PhDs and meagre salaries for professors. |

Figure 6.4.6. SWOT analysis of tertiary education (ISCED levels 5&6, Greece)

| SWOT analysis of further education and training | |
|--|---|
| Strengths | Weaknesses |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All providers in the field have to employ as teachers only those registered in the adult educators registries maintained by the Ministry of Education. Further education and training providers are more easily adaptable to the training needs of the labour market and have a strong tradition in offering training programmes on emerging fields in the economy or fields that are neglected by the formal public training system. Initial vocational training students are entitled to receive public aid through vouchers in order to finance their studies in public and private IEKs. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The teaching staff in further education institutions is comparatively in the worst position in terms of pay and work conditions as compared to teachers in school education. Most of them work on short term contracts and on a teaching-hour basis; in effect for most teachers in the field, teaching is no more than a part-time job. Particularly those working in programmes that are run by public providers in the context of NSRF are facing huge delays in their pay checks, from months to reportedly over a year. Overall, the above realities in the conditions of employment of many adult education and training teachers is likely to result in lack of commitment, low levels of motivation and low levels of engagement in professional development activities. The field in its current state is difficult to maintain a fully dedicated professional teaching workforce. The large share of very small enterprises in Greece employing just 2 to 5 people is a limiting factor to the size of investments that can be made by individual enterprises to personnel training. |
| Opportunities | Threats |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The government has promised that the absorption rate of NSRF funds earmarked for adult education and training will be accelerated. The establishment of formal licensing procedures is raising the level of quality control by the Ministry of Education in a field which has been unregulated for several decades. The economic crisis may drive some enterprises to invest on skills development in order to become more competitive in the market. Enterprises may also be driven to consider investing in less costly but more effective forms of training. The economic crisis may also lead enterprises to consider more flexible forms of investments to training at local or sectoral level. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The economic crisis may lead many enterprises in Greece to cut their budgets for training. Increased lay-offs are likely to increase the workload of those in employment thus limiting their prospects for training. Many KEKs which offer short-term training are almost entirely dependent on the funding received by large-scale programmes implemented in the context of NSRF 2007-2013. Delays in the absorption of NSRF 2007-2013 funds earmarked for adult training have a strong negative impact on the actual survival capacity of many public and private KEKs. The whole sector is much more exposed to the dangers of the economic crisis because it is much less supported by public funds as compared to the formal education and training system. |

Figure 6.4.7. SWOT analysis of further education and training in Greece

6.5 Poland

| Pre-primary | |
|--|---|
| Strengths | Weaknesses |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation has grown (from 58% in 2000 to 75% in 2011) • Urban families report full access | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lowest level of participation in the EU (75%) particularly in rural areas where currently many compulsory schools are being merged • Mandatory funding is provided only for five-year olds at the local commune level; belows this age provision is entirely discretionary for the local government • Expenditures in relation to GDP are higher than the EU-19 and OECD averages • Low employment rate of women raising children which affects social acceptance of ECEC • Lack of awareness of the benefits of ECEC particularly in rural areas |
| Opportunities | Threats |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public debate over the earlier starting age for compulsory schooling could lead to greater awareness of the benefits of ECEC • From 2014, all four-year-olds will have a guaranteed right to pre-primary education, which should lead to creation of new facilities both public and private to meet demand • Employers can be encouraged to set up ECEC facilities as part of a 'family-friendly' workplace environment • Social partners including the church and media can assist in promotion of the benefits of ECEC • Subsidies can support low income parents and communities in provision of ECEC | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of public kindergartens and nurseries is currently insufficient to meet the 2014 reform and without increased supply the gap between rural/urban participation may increase further disadvantaging rural children • Falling employment of young mothers or grandmothers encourages families to keep children at home |

Figure 6.5.1 SWOT analysis of pre-primary education in Poland

| Compulsory | |
|---|--|
| Strengths | Weaknesses |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poland has a very low percentage of Early School Leavers (5%) (best in the EU 2008) • The number of people aged 20-24 with at least secondary or compulsory education is 91% (best in the EU 2008) • Number of pupils with low achievements in reading was reduced by 30% (2006-2008 PISA) • The number of graduates in maths, natural science and technical fields increased 123% from 2000-2006 • The programs are unified at national level • New curricula and exams (2012) are based more on critical thinking and practical competences • New compulsory 1-2 semesters of practical training in vocational education • The EUROPASS – Certificate Supplement has been used in Poland since 2006 and provided by Regional Examination Commissions. This document is given to the graduates of upper secondary vocational schools who have passed an exam validating their professional qualifications • Social consultations about the European Credit Transfer System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) were held and are now under review for implementation of the system • The duration of comprehensive education at the level of lower secondary school has been extended to prevent early segregation • Work has already started on implementing the National Qualifications Framework on top of the national register of qualifications affecting vocational curricula | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Living standards for children in Poland are among the lowest in the EU or OECD • 2009 PISA measure of low achievements in maths reached 20% with a benchmark of 15% • One of the lowest levels in the EU of the use of ICT in school education. Poor preparation for schools to use ICTs in the education process and poor preparation for teachers to use ICT in their classes • A weak tradition of practical training and active learning: in schools textbooks play the greatest roles rather than practice, focus is on memorization and not on the development of useful skills such as creativity and critical thinking, self-organization, communication or teamwork • Low level of educational and vocational advisory services at all ages • Rigid hiring and employment rules for teachers • Frequent public dissent at policy implementation stage due to a perceived lack of public dialogue • Frequent back-tracking on policy implementation has lead to a low level of public confidence • Low level of involvement of social/community partners • High number of school closures due to budget cuts, demographics (800 possible in 2012, 300 in 2011) deflects attention from long-term challenges • Serious difficulties in providing adequate skills required by the labour market reflected by high unemployment (as much as 60%) for vocational graduates • Low progression of recognition of the value of a diploma on the job market from the level of completion of compulsory schooling • Low access to tailored and individualised support programmes, including dedicated training and apprenticeship programmes leading to a first vocational experience |

| Opportunities | Threats |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newly merged schools will be more functional and efficient • Increased dialogue with social partners and parents should increase accuracy and perception of reforms. Parents become more active and this is encouraged. • Access to remedial tutoring and/or scholarships (transport or housing) can be more equitably distributed across lines of income and/or urban-rural divides • Vocational education is more tightly linked to the labour market needs with increased vocational school autonomy and large employers or business clusters involved in the curriculum dialogue • Compulsory 1-2 semesters of practical training in vocational education should lead to better employability of vocational graduates • Employment of teachers may become more flexible (as in the case where schools are run by a non-public association) making it a more competitive market • Surplus of teachers after demographics-related school closings may populate | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School closures adversely affect quality or morale • Compulsory 1-2 semesters of practical training in vocational education leads to a glut in the market of low-qualified workers as employers take advantage of the 'free labour') • Increased vocational school autonomy impedes mobility between schools (varied curricula, paths to outcomes) • Decreased hours in non-profile subjects impedes mobility between profiles even at a later age • The gap between those who can afford private remedial tutoring and those who cannot increases impeding later equitable access to post-secondary education based on academic performance • Continued lack of vocational guidance leads to poor choices by pupils |

Figure 6.5.2 SWOT analysis of compulsory education in Poland

| Tertiary | |
|--|--|
| Strengths | Weaknesses |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High level of participation (137% increase from 2000-2008 for those aged 30-34) and attainment rate of 35.3% in 2010 slightly above the EU average of 33.6% • Social approval for the attainment of higher education • Recent reform (2011/2012 academic year) for curricula based on learning outcomes • EUROPASS – Supplement to Diploma has been used obligatorily by universities since 1 January 2005 • Regulations of 2007 obligate the faculty in a degree program to implement an internal system of quality assurance • Significant progress in increasing the number of STEM graduates, for which the growth rate has been almost three times the EU average | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued pre-dominance of humanities fields and low participation in sciences • Conservative, slow-to-change public institutions and a rigid layer of hierarchical bureaucracy hinder innovation in didactics • Little flexibility in the forms of education including a lack of higher education learning cycles which are shorter than the traditional paths while better adapted to the needs of the economy • Low level of accessibility – alternative paths (tertiary is seen as a bastion of the young) • Low level of outbound long-term mobility (1.8 % of students per year) below the EU average (2.8 %), while short-term mobility under the EU Erasmus programme (0.5 % of students in 2008/09) is also below the EU average • Low level of cooperation with employers, business environment leading to high unemployment among graduates (22% in 2011) • Low employment in technology and intense applied knowledge sectors (EU Regional Competitiveness Index 3.2% 2007) • Relatively small size of the ‘basic creativity layer’ in Poland (5.8% in 2007) (EU Regional Competitiveness) does not provide a wealth of potential cooperation in research |
| Opportunities | Threats |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternative paths are created which make higher education more accessible to non-traditional students opened (HSECs, e-learning formats) • Universities open up to the provision of non-formal adult education including closer cooperation with public administration entities and businesses • Learning outcomes-based programs lead to the attainment of skills and competences more easily recognized on the job market • Falling demographics create competition weeding out lower quality providers • Need for increased revenues from research drives innovation • Increased number of programs offered in foreign languages leads to internationalization of higher education | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued high unemployment among graduates leads to social devaluation of higher education • A lower number of students in general and at private institutions in particular makes the cost of higher education prohibitive • Bureaucracy in the form of the upcoming required detailed syllabi for each teacher and subject leads to stagnation in the face of changing technologies, methods, etc. • Low employment in technology and intense applied knowledge sectors (EU Regional Competitiveness Index 3.2% 2007) leads to low demand for higher education in these fields |

Figure 6.5.3 SWOT analysis of tertiary education in Poland

| Adult Education | |
|---|--|
| Strengths | Weaknesses |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the average age in Poland at 38 and increasingly higher numbers of those with tertiary education who are most likely to continue learning, the demographics support demand • Work continues on an ESF project 2010-2013 on development of a National Qualifications Framework which will make outcomes of adult courses more transparent • The strategic document 'Perspective on Lifelong Learning' which will provide a mandate is pending inter-ministerial review | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very low participation (5.3%) • Understood as 'Post-Compulsory' rather than 'Adult Learners' and is focussed on formal education for those aged 25-35 with little reference to non-formal or informal learning or non-traditional learners • Lack of a system for recognition of qualifications attained outside of the formal education system • Lack of a system for assurance of quality services in non-formal education • Lack of any definition or understanding of 'training' in the legal acts on education • The tools of accumulation, transfer of qualifications, educational accounts and others which function in many EU countries are entirely unknown here. • One of the highest percentages in developed countries of people ages 25-29 unemployed and not participating in any educational programs or training • VET have used only 19 % of EU funds for 2007-2013 provided for the modernization of their educational offer • Low level of involvement of employers in organizing training for employees • Lack of financial incentives for either employers or individuals (recently re-introduced VAT on IT courses, etc.) • Lack of a lifelong learning tradition - low level of social • A high degree of variation in participation of adults in LLL, strongly linked to their education levels (the highly educated continue) |
| Opportunities | Threats |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standardization of learning outcomes within the National Qualifications Framework will lead to new paths to skills recognition • Increased use of ICTs provides easier access to adult education in user friendly methods • Dedicated vocational training and education programmes for older workers and low-skilled workers • More time spent in the workforce (increased retirement age) motivates adult learners to enhance and upgrade skills • Closer partnerships are fostered between education/training providers and employers, for example by reinforcing work-based learning in VET • As increasingly complex skills are required, more employers see the value of VET over the long term; financial incentives may encourage • Media and other opinion leaders enhance the image of the learning adult • Increased ICTs in daily (non-work) life as well as travel and active leisure activities creates demand for learning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certification needed for low-skilled jobs limits prospects for those unable to keep up (Poland currently has the highest number of jobs in the EU for which certification is required – 380) Underachievers drop out in discouragement • Continued perceived lack of incentives or social motivation • Social models in which individual motivation and responsibility are lacking are maintained. Mobility continues to be seen as unnecessary and undesirable • A sense of economic crisis drives workers to devote all energies to current jobs with no time for additional development • Lack of quality assurance and linkage to market demands continue to devalue non-formal learning |

Figure 6.5.4 SWOT analysis of adult education in Poland

At pre-primary level, most important is the gap between urban and rural access, linked to how provision is voluntary at the smallest local administration level for under age 5 compounded by factors of proximity and social acceptance in rural areas. At the Compulsory level recent performance and participation is high except for in Math and in use of ICTs. Current reforms aim to provide more accurate career paths with recognition of skills and more hours of practice; increased vocational guidance would facilitate this. Mergers and more flexible employment policies will streamline budgetary efficiency. Reforms require increased social dialogue for acceptance. In Higher Education the focus is also on matching market demand with graduate skills. The creation of alternative paths for non-traditional students would compensate the falling demographics if the existing low levels of individual responsibility and motivation could be surmounted. With a very low rate of adult learning participation, increased provision based on ICTs or employer-driven needs in non-formal situations would increase uptake as will financial and social incentives.

6.6 Slovakia

| Strengths | Weaknesses |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The last year of pre-school education is supported especially by government/state/local authorities, before the start of compulsory education. It should be made compulsory, in order to fully include also children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds that show signs of low/insufficient performance during compulsory education, mainly from the Roma community • The Slovak education system offers everybody equal opportunities to primary, secondary and tertiary education • All primary and secondary schools have access to broadband internet and computer laboratories thanks to the project Infovek. Universities have access to high speed internet through SANET network • There is high attendance during compulsory education (age 6-15) as there are also financial reward programmes introduced mainly to Roma community • Introduction of compulsory English language from the 3rd grade of primary school (2011) • Establishment of portal with free available e-textbooks for the public (2011): eaktovka.sk • Simplification of vocational system of study fields. From the next school year 2012/13, 171 study fields that produce unemployment graduates and no longer respond to labour market demand will be eliminated, leaving 454 study fields • Recent establishment of competition among primary, secondary and tertiary institutions via the promotion of information on specific educational institutions which allows a comparison of selected indicators and elimination of information inequality: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ MapaSkol.iedu.sk ◦ Skoly.ineko.sk ◦ NemajNasalame.sk ◦ Abolventi.iedu.sk • High demand for full-time and part time tertiary education • Accreditation framework for higher, further and continuing (continual - teachers) education is in place and should continue to focus on the improvement of the quality of education provided • Establishment of higher education anti-plagiarism system - Central Register of Final Thesis (2010): www.crzp.sk • Establishment of mandatory employment register of university teachers and researchers by law (2012) • Legislation framework that should support Lifelong learning in Slovakia in different stages of life is in place: Lifelong Learning Strategy (2011) builds on Strategy of Lifelong Learning and Lifelong Guidance (2007). Number of required new laws has been approved in this respect • There is an effort to improve participation, quality, financing and development of the further education sector. A special focus is given to the people from a disadvantaged socio-economic background, the lower educated, elderly, and the Roma community (supported mainly by EU funding) • Establishment of information portals National System of Occupations - Sustavapovolani.sk and Integrated System of Typical Positions - ISTEP.sk, that need to be filled with required information • Established are Summer Universities for Children • Universities of Third Age - education of seniors is an opportunity for sustainment and building of new social contacts that will have disappeared with aging | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in politics from parliamentary elections affect the creation and sustainability of set strategies. Apart from that since the establishment of the SR in 1993 in less than 20 years, 10 ministers for education tried to implement their vision for the Slovak education system. Number of new laws has been amended. There seems to be a lack of political coordination due to all these factors • Financial support by the government for early childhood care is insufficient in supporting parents' demands. Early childhood care institutions should receive further financial support from the state, especially for single-parents, low/income groups and parents from a disadvantaged socio-economic background • Lack in pre-school care provision in southern and eastern Slovakia and in rural areas, as they are mainly situated in towns and regional cities. Drop in number of children in kindergarten since 1993 • Guidance and counselling are integrated only partially in primary and secondary schools often as insufficient services. This is often done by class-teachers who perhaps lack a given qualification and training; and then through by initiatives from the Local Labour Offices. Absent is a guidance system in education and training for employed citizens • Formal education is rather focused on memorization except of creativity, critical thinking, entrepreneurship, teamwork, project work and digital literacy. Our students' weaknesses lay in the areas that require critical thinking. Fluency in English or other foreign languages is low. On the other hand, memorization is important in studies of e.g. medicine (anatomy), law – depending on study field • High share of low achievers in the recent PISA studies and a growing trend in the repetition of school year during compulsory education resulting in prolongation of end studies • Secondary schools do not have to trust recommendations of primary schools so they implement their own performance measurements to candidates • There are no support mechanisms for students of primary and secondary schools. This area is in the competency and responsibility of the parents • In South and East Slovakia, there is a number of cases when parents do not allow children to continue with studies after finishing the compulsory education • High bureaucracy requirements placed on shoulders of education institutions (primary and secondary schools) shift a focus away from provision of quality and implementation of innovation in didactics • Outdated educational methods are prevailing in the school system and there is a weak emphasis on the development of students' key skills • Too much time spent at each level of education and low recognition of prior learning • Slovakia's investment into education and R&D ranks among the lowest in the EU and OECD. Underfinanced system of education, with below average salaries of teachers and their low social status is actually a great |

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| | <p>weakness and barrier to the more dynamic development of society. Teachers' financial reward mechanisms do not take into account real performance. Teacher's salary is prescribed by national salary categories and a number of credits gained in continual education. System of continuing education for teachers is not adequately motivating, as they choose training according to number of credits for participation and not according to real demand</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low adaptation of vocational and tertiary education to economic changes and insufficient respond to the labour market needs – missing connection between <i>world of education</i> and <i>world of work/labour</i>. Graduates of universities are employed in positions where one does not require a given university degree, or whatsoever university degree • University entrance examination leaves many students with alternative choices of study in departments which are in lower demand at the labour market. This is seen as an obstacle creating a lot of labour force not relevant for the labour market. It is also because of an insufficient guidance mechanism at the lowest levels of education. As a result there is a high number of students in humanities in comparison to insufficient number of students in technical fields (low inclusion of women, mainly in IT) that do not respond to labour market needs. The problem can be solved in practical motivation of students for mathematics, physics or electro-technical schools. There is seen to be rather quantitative expansion of Slovak higher education without harmonization to the needs of economy. Over 70 thousand graduates yearly obtain diploma but only a small share of them fulfil the expectations of employers • Poor quality of education provided by some universities, together with mass education and mediocrity • There are many PhD. students at universities but their scientific activity is often insufficient • Low interest of Slovak university students in mobility (Erasmus) in education and internships • Shortage of financial support for qualified workforce (e.g. teachers, public employees) in connection with further/continuing education. For low qualified and citizens without qualification price of education program is the main obstacle to further education • Lack of lifelong learning tradition, together with weak interest and motivation of wider public in continuing/further education, if not taking into account necessary training in development of professional skills connected with performance of job tasks • Development of National Qualification Framework (NQF) in accordance with European Qualification Framework (EQF) has been slow as initial expectation has not been met • Very low use of available EU funds in OP Education and OP Informatisation of Society for the period 2007-2013. Error rate of projects in OP Education reached almost 70% |
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| Opportunities | Threats |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflection on legislation measures implemented in school system reforms before further amendment of original laws • Introduction of cross-cutting subject in the form of experiential learning in the 7th - 9th grade of primary school level with a focus on guidance in the area of professional orientation and career guidance • Merged secondary schools will be more efficient • Implementation of relevant 21st century curricula (development of required knowledge, skills and competences) in primary, secondary and tertiary education. Creation of rising sustainable system of communication between educational institutions and employers for an exchange of information on 'knowledge, skills and competences' needed on the labour market • Identification and recognition of prior learning. It is vital that knowledge, skills and competencies are acknowledged in whatever way they were gained • Financing mechanism should be put in place that will, according to acquired data, provide lower funding allocation from public finances to the study fields, university departments/faculties that are unfortunately producing unusable graduates • Transitions from one education level to another one and to the labour market. • Guidance services for orientation in career and educational paths should be accessible to all that will express interest • Education has become more and more essential tool to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ increase efficiency of production and development, ○ prevent and reduce unemployment, ○ introduce technology, ○ maintain and improve international competitiveness. • Use of available EU funding (over 2 billion EUR) until 2013 for solving unemployment of the youth, with further funds available in next program periods over next decade, as youth unemployment becomes an increasing issue across the EU • Increasing number of study programs offered in English language lead to internationalization of higher education • Implementation of results from project AHELO (OECD) that focuses on direct evaluation of quality at universities internationally • As tertiary education is the only level that is implemented by law public-private partnerships (PPP). It should focus primary on R&D and PPP should be implemented across the whole education system in order to bridge the gap between the <i>world of work</i> and the <i>world of labour</i>. There is a need for creation of communication forum between universities and companies which will be an asset. • System of youth protection which would ensure that those unemployed for 3-6 months would be offered a job position, internship or further education • Some university career guidance centres provide a good model that should be further developed for the needs of secondary schools with career orientation in mind according to current and future labour market demands. Better communication of schools with employers for effective preparation of graduates for practice is needed • Create conditions so that employers would acknowledge the Bachelor study in general. Creation of a system of internships and a half-year practice during university studies should be promoted, and the beneficiaries will also be the employers in general • The talents have to be supported already from the lowest | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of kindergartens is currently insufficient with a provision gap between rural/urban is increasing • Unfavourable socio-economic factors and cultural backgrounds have an impact on students' school achievements and the risk of their early school leaving • The economic background has a decisive role regarding the support for private tuition from primary to tertiary education. The low salaries and high prices definitely will shrink the space for participation in lifelong learning, and also have inconvenient impacts on learning culture creation potential • Shortage of qualified workforce for specific job positions/sectors (IT, technical fields, R&D, etc.). • Mismatching of education outputs with labour market demand • Outflow of educated/qualified people abroad – brain drain of talented students with Bachelor, Master and PhD. degree who often decide to establish their careers abroad because they do not see opportunities in their homeland • Introduction of tuition fees at universities might change equal access to education especially when the salaries are among the lowest in EU (and OECD) countries • Lack of coordination/cooperation among the institutions/stakeholders at national, regional and local level to develop programs of LLL in demand (need to support partnerships and collaboration) • Economic crises with the implementation of fiscal financial policy will also have negative effect on the area of education and LLL • Low recognition of acquired skills and competences through non-formal education • Large number of providers of further education depends on EU funding |

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| <p>level of school system. It is not enough to create perfect universities now, if students that will be arriving at them will not be prepared enough. When public finances are concerned, the state has a right to decide how many professionals are needed. Even though it might be seen as an intervention into economy, it might actually be of an asset</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tightening university budgets might push universities to be more involved in national/international research • Fast internet access that would support e-learning to “ALL” not only to citizens of large regional towns and universities. In rural areas there is a need to look for cheaper alternatives to fibre connection • Development of digital literacy competences of citizens (apart from ECDL, also specific software training that is in demand – open source and paid version) and bridging the digital divide • Best practices from Slovakia and abroad should be implemented and supported by EU funding in order to bring needed changes to the education paradigms • Build on current framework of continual education of teachers with a focus on quality, increase of soft skills and hard skills (ICT) • Since universities already offer further/continuing education courses through their lifelong learning centres it is necessary they continue in this trend, with offering more specific module oriented courses in demand, with certification on the NQF/EQF. Rest of the institutions offering further/continuing education and training will compete • Raise low participation of adult population in further/continuing education in accordance with EU 2020 benchmarks with a systematic focus on disadvantaged socio-economic background, low educated people, older citizens, Roma community, etc. Further training in required skills should be supported on the local/regional/national/international labour market, but especially in IT and foreign languages. • Globalisation and introduction of new technologies motivates adult learners to enhance and upgrade skills • The economic crisis may drive some companies to invest into skills development of current and prospective employees in order to become more competitive on the global market • The potential impact of economic crisis may positively affect the need for lifelong learning resulting in eventually better participation in higher and further/continuing education • The opportunities for higher salaries after gaining certificate from accredited and accepted (by employers) courses in further education would encourage participation in lifelong learning • Implement changes to make labour market more inclusive for workforce of all backgrounds (Roma community, low educated, etc.) • Further awareness raising for LLL through established and new portals, and media campaigns • Creation of a functional knowledge economy is a precondition for a long-term increase of living standards and competitiveness of economy when based on training in required skills, entrepreneurship and R&D | |
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6.7 Spain

| STRENGTHS | WEAKNESSES |
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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There is an official qualifications framework for recognizing the professional experience as academic titles (NQF = Marco Nacional de Cualificaciones). National agreements are relevant for the Spanish regional communities. 2. The Action Plan for Lifelong Learning of the Spanish Ministry is the realization in our country of the Action Plan 2007 of the European Commission “always is a good time to learn”, and the Renewed European Agenda about adult learning for the 2012-2014 periods. The Plan’s aim is increasing the participation rate of the adult population in the education and training, coordinating resources available to facilitate their integration into learning activities. 3. There is an effort for improving participation, quality, financing and development of the LLL sector. A special focus is set on people from socially deprived target groups, low educated people, older employees, people with migration background. 4. . There is a particular concern of fighting the early school leaving given the gap in the European context 5. To achieve the objectives of the Action Plan for Lifelong Learning the Government of Spain proposed to the authorities, regional governments, social partners and organizations or entities interested in the sector, the coordination of their actions and resources, and their participation in the strategic actions of the Plan. 6. The Action Plan generalizes the recognition of professional competences as a mechanism to increase the skills of the workforce, particularly the low-skilled workers. 7. It is oriented to promote the possibility of combining the work and the study for young people who leave prematurely and strength the update and acquisition of new skills to successfully meet the changing labour market. 8. The Action Plan promotes the access of adults to high school, VET and University. 9. The Action Plan encourages the formal, non formal and informal learning environments (i.e. diversification of training areas/ more opportunities for learning at any time of life), as well the introduction of ICT, the digital competence (one of the key competences established by the CE for the strategies and policies of lifelong learning) and from this, contribute to the development of transversal competences, such as learning to learn, to help them a more independent and personalized learning. 10. Set the concern and propose mechanisms for a periodic assessment of LLL policies for increasing the policies quality. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There is no tradition of lifelong learning policies devoted to the general public, while LLL is mostly thought to be focused to professional training. 2. There has been little dialog and mechanisms to connect the professional development and the academic world, so the LLL policies are difficult to plan and implement in a coherent way. 3. A common understanding would need to be developed within the regional communities to support the exchange of information between the regional communities. 4. Educational offerings for adults have traditionally sought to offset the problems of education not widespread (sectors of the population who had no opportunity to pursue a formal education), or a frustrated education (sectors of the population who had failed to overcome successfully passing through the education system). This can be observed as a weakness in terms that traditionally the LLL policies have been focused on the adult population, then a lack of preventive actions. 5. Observe the reality/practice is crucial to harmonize government policies and administrative stage and educational evidence, and thus pursuing the achievement of the desired educational innovation. Many policies are lack of this empirical scope. It is crucial to identify and be aware about the basic conditions of, for example, the educational centers, its socio cultural context as well as the actors’ needs and expectations for a good implementation of a project/strategy. 6. Excess of specific training linked to the job |

| OPPORTUNITIES | THREATS |
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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The different educative action lines, both national and European level, are framed, and then prioritized and articulated under this definition. 2. Spain has been at levels slightly above the European average in adult participation in education and training. Thus, in 2010, 10.8% of Spanish citizens between 25 and 64 years participated in formal or informal education while the corresponding for the EU 27 was a 9.1%. 3. Since the publication of the Action Plan on Adult Learning has been made in 2007 several projects of the European Commission were established to develop national level priorities. In particular there have been four regional meetings, one in Madrid in October 2009 where involving seven countries (Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain and Turkey). 4. The economic crisis may drive some enterprises to invest to skills development in order to become more competitive in the market. The economic crisis may also lead enterprises to consider more flexible forms of investments to training at local or sectorial level. The crisis may also drive people that are currently economically inactive to consider participating in training in order to enter the labour market. New forms of informal learning networks may grow as a response to limiting spending power by individuals and households. 5. During the last decade University Departments, mainly Education Departments, introduced courses related to adult education in their undergraduate or post-graduate curricula. During the last decade there was a huge expansion of institutions providing E&T for adults. 6. Institutionalization and budget management are important tools for linking the formal education system and non-formal/informal lifelong learning. 7. Management and guidance by policies is necessary to ensure cooperation across different education areas with differently distributed responsibilities. As far as education is concerned, the Autonomous Communities have the power to develop State regulations from a legislative point of view and to regulate the non-basic elements of the education system. In addition, they have executive and administrative powers which allow them to administer the education system within their own territory. Possible synergies are possible between actors, associations and institutions for future collaborations and feedback towards the Educational Administration. Thus could encourage a better implementation of policies and increase the multiplier effect of good practices. 8. Improve the quality of teacher training, by reviewing current initial training programs so that they meet European standards. 9. Improvement of technical infrastructures, facilities and | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of coordination among the institutions both at national, regional at local level, to design specific programs for LLL (more partnership work and collaboration is needed and the coherence and comprehensiveness of a national LLL strategy.). 2. There is a little dialogue and mechanisms to connect the professional development and the academic world (connection that should be directed to a system promoting LLL policies). 3. In Europe the qualification of the production system is based on a 48.9% average qualification, while in Spain is dominated by low qualifications (42.4%), with a clear deficit of medium-skilled to the needs in 2020 (more key competences are needed to be achieved). The human capital in Spain has been insufficient to reach the convergence with the EU. The fact that almost 40% of the young people aged 20 to 24 only have either primary or the lower level of secondary education (23.4 in the EU15), and the low level of vocational education puts difficulties for any kind of lifelong learning policy. 4. Changes in the labour market at a global level set higher levels of medium and high qualifications requirements. There is predominance in Spain of low qualifications (42.4%). The 33.5% of population older than 16 years old lack accreditation of the basic skills. Regarding the workforce, a 58,2% lack of their professional qualifications recognition. In addition, there is a 31,2% of young early school leavers (between 18 and 24 years old). 5. The role of teachers and students must be transformed: promotion of new teaching strategies, methodologies and teaching activities focused on learning (a new educational paradigm is faced). 6. Instances of collaborative feedback were highlighted by teachers as the most effective training process. There is a lack for teachers and (others) learners to have the opportunity of learning from each other and from this, internalizing the elements needed to manage this new context of teaching and learning (no time, no support, no coordination: formalizing the request of collaborative reflection is needed). 7. Spain is in the middle of a grave economic crisis. This crisis hits at the very core of public finance policies and is likely to have a very negative impact on public investments, particularly though the Regular Budget. |

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| <p>access to fast Internet connection, which allows for more education and training opportunities at home and in face-to face.</p> <p>10. The integration of ICT can promote lifelong learning through the acquisition of key competences in the primary and secondary schools. In Spain in 2006, with the Educational Organic Law, the <i>Information Processing and Digital Competence</i> became part of the prescriptive curriculum. Thus, is considered, along with the other seven core competencies as essential to reach by the students at the end of the compulsory schooling.</p> <p>11. Best practices and sharing experiences might be encouraged for understanding, assimilating and replicating new habits in the educational/trainings contexts and thus promoting and incorporating new teaching and learning dynamics. The aim of diversifying the learning environments (getting over the formal and traditional contexts) for acquiring and/or transform the knowledge beyond the educational institutions and achieving the key competences refers to changing the educational paradigms: from contents to activities, ergo new interactions and learning practices for obtaining new competences. This means to understand and promote a 360° learning approach based on communication and collaboration. The focus cannot be on the technical (instrumental) actions. Any techno-educational initiative should also address pedagogical and organizational aspects.</p> <p>12. For facilitating the reincorporation of the early school leavers in the educational system, the reflection is set on giving more flexibility to the curricula and educational programs. Under this context the recent reform of the vocational training system –launched in June 2011- is welcomed.</p> <p>13. Improve the chances of employability of young people by facilitating their transition from educational system to the labour market and then preventing underemployment's situations.</p> <p>14. In order to improve the employability of graduates, links with the private sector should be higher and then improved. Specifically, it would be advisable to carry out mandatory practices in certain disciplines which ones could give to students experience, specific knowledge and expertise. As in the case of VET, higher corporations or institutions' complicity in developing training programs and funding of the learning period would be welcome</p> | <p>8. The current economic crisis may increase the demand for new learning as a means to increase the employability prospects of those in employment in the private sector or the unemployed people.</p> <p>9. Awareness rising for adult education is required on learner and policy level.</p> <p>10. The accreditation of non-formal and informal learning is not well considered.</p> <p>11. The use of ICT is now a basic tool for social and working life, then people who do not have digital competition have added difficulties for personal and professional development. The acquisition of these basic competences allows the preparation and updating of young people and adults in new professional and personal competences. The digital competence becomes a priority as far as lifelong learning strategies are concerned.</p> <p>12. Lack of recognition of non formal education at the professional level (as a way of lifelong learning).</p> |
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Figure 6.7.1. SWOT analysis of the Spanish system

6.8 Summary

The research described in this report, including interviews with policy makers and beneficiaries in the area of Lifelong Learning and continuing education, aimed at identifying positive and challenging aspects of the Lifelong Learning strategy implementation in the participating European member states of the MASON project.

The summary of the SWOT results illustrates similarities and differences in the major strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats between each participating country. Based on this SWOT analysis a final conclusion from a comparative perspective is provided for further investigation and implementation of improved Lifelong Learning strategies at European level.

Strengths

In this section the strengths of the member states is illustrated and similarities as well as differences between them are emphasized.

Similarities

The governments and legislation of Finland, Germany, and Spain are reported as being supportive regarding implementation of Lifelong Learning strategies at different stages of life. In Greece and Slovakia, the pre-school education is supported especially by government, before the start of compulsory education. It will be made or is currently compulsory in both countries. In Spain, the Action Plan for Lifelong Learning of the Spanish Ministry was renewed for adult Learning for the period of 2012-2014. The Plan's aim is increasing the participation share of the adult population in the education and training. This participation rate in all Lifelong Learning stages seems to be also important in Greece and Poland as well (for more details of the strengths in each educational stage from pre-primary to tertiary education see figure 6.4 and 6.5).

Differences

Based on the variety of each partner country's educational system there are a higher amount of different strengths. The main differences will be reported in this section.

In Finland, the education system offers everybody equal opportunities for education, irrespective of domicile, sex, economic situation or linguistic and cultural background. The school network is regionally extensive, and there are no sex-specific school services. Thus, the educational system aims at enhancing equal opportunities, comprehensiveness of education, competent teachers, student counselling and special needs education, encouraging evaluation, significance of education in society, co-operation, a student-oriented, and active conception of learning.

In Germany, the government of Germany is divided in 16 federal states which make their own decisions with respect to educational issues. Due to the federal structure of Germany there are big differences between the single states. Early childhood care is much more developed in states that belonged to former Eastern Germany, while outcomes of international school comparisons are in favour of southern states. That means that good practices are available in Germany – yet, not distributed evenly. Furthermore, Germany has great experiences in social services, having its origins in the former compulsory community service. These social services allow pupils to have experiences in different kind of professions between secondary and tertiary education and therefore give hints and guides for career choice.

In Greece, the “all day” implementation of institutions for Kindergarten children and school students are one of strengths in the educational system. Further, the enrolment of children aged 5 to kindergartens is compulsory. In Germany, the children's attendance of a kindergarten is on a voluntary base.

In Poland, the percentage of Early School Leavers is very low (5%) and at the same time they are the best in the EU in 2008. Similar results regarding the share of people aged 20-24 with at least secondary or compulsory education is 91% (also best in the EU 2008).

In Spain, additional issues of the Action Plan for Lifelong Learning were emphasized e.g. the reduction of early school leavers, the recognition of lower-skilled employees' competencies, and the promotion of access of adults.

Weaknesses

This section will focus on the weaknesses of the member states' Lifelong Learning strategies and will show the characteristics of commonalities and differences between the European countries participating in MASON.

Similarities

In terms of commonly shared weakness aspects, there could be reported some similarities between the member states regarding the Lifelong Learning background.

The lack of vocational guidance leads to poor choices by school students in Poland and Slovakia. This lack could be also established at schools in Greece where the guidance is not fully integrated as part of the offered basic service.

Differences

In the following, the crucial differences of the member states' weaknesses in terms of Lifelong Learning strategies will be identified. In general, the differences are based on the country specific Governments and their Education Ministries.

In Finland, the weaknesses in education and Lifelong Learning relates largely to government changes every fourth year. Involved to these Parliament and Government changes is also the National Education and Research development plan (which describes objectives and strategies of Learning); this plan may vary every fourth year. In addition, efficiency demand could weaken the Lifelong Learning aims.

In Germany, the low share of early childhood care in the catholic south is one topic. This has also impact on students with migration background that are not able to attend early childhood care because they often have difficulties to learn German at home. Thus, educational issues and supporting children with migration background become more and more important in Germany. In addition, there are often too few financial resources and too less skilled personnel to support children with language or learning disabilities in integrative classes. Furthermore, the federal structure also introduces a degree of incoherence regarding the funding opportunities for Lifelong Learning.

In Greece, the monitoring of the participation of students is one current issue in terms of Lifelong Learning. Local, regional and central school authorities have no monitoring mechanisms on the regularity of pupils' participation that would help establish early-warning systems for pupils showing irregular participation and being at risk of dropping out of school. Further, education is of highly academic nature with little links between theory and practice; there is a disconnection between learning at school and "outside" realities in the world of work, and society at large. Study visits to places of work or other places of high educational value are occasional and do not form an integral part of the typical education of students. Vocational and technical education programs are strictly separated from general education programs.

In Poland, regarding the tertiary education, the conservative, slow-to-change public institutions and a rigid layer of hierarchical bureaucracy hinder innovation in didactics. Further, there is little flexibility in the forms of education including a lack of higher education learning cycles which would be shorter than the traditional paths and in parallel better adapted to the needs of the economy. Also there is a low level of accessibility – alternative paths regarding tertiary sector is seen as a bastion of the young.

In Spain, Lifelong Learning policies are not familiar to the larger share of the general public: there seems to be no tradition of Lifelong Learning policies in Spain devoted to the general public, while LLL is mostly thought to be focused to professional training. Moreover, there has been little dialog and mechanisms to connect the professional development and the academic world, so the LLL policies are difficult to plan and

implement in a coherent way. In addition, educational offerings for adults which traditionally sought to offset problems of early school leaving or low education attainment level are not widespread. This can be seen as a weakness also because there are not yet enough preventive interventions at formal schooling years.

In Slovakia, a high share of low achievers in the recent PISA studies could be established and a growing trend in the repetition of school year during compulsory education is resulting for some students in prolonged years of formal studies. Moreover, Slovakia's investment into education and R&D ranks among the lowest in the EU and OECD. Underfinanced system of education by public sources, with below average salaries of teachers and their low social status is actually a great weakness and barrier to the more dynamic development of society. Further, there is a low adaptation of vocational and tertiary education to economic changes.

Opportunities

The Lifelong Learning strategies in European context provides various opportunities that generate new perspectives in terms of future Lifelong Learning strategies.

Similarities

Similarities regarding the opportunities of Lifelong Learning will be the focus in this section.

The opportunities with Lifelong Learning and development with these issues in Finland relate e.g. the identification and recognition of prior Learning. This recognition of prior knowledge is also a subject of policy in Slovakia.

Due to economic crisis in Greece the pressure on policy makers and education administrators to work upon improving the cost-effectiveness of public spending on education was increased. In Spain and Greece there are some aspects in Lifelong Learning that should be considered in relation to the economic crisis. The crisis led enterprises to consider more flexible forms of investments to training at local or sectoral level. It may drive people who are currently economically inactive to consider participating in training in order to enter the labour market. New forms of informal Learning networks may grow as a response to limiting spending power by individuals and households.

In addition, in Slovakia the increase of participation of the adult population in further/continuing education in accordance with EU 2020 benchmarks with a systematic focus on those with a disadvantaged socio-economic background is a crucial educational issue as well as in Greece. Thus, Greece had an increasing level of voluntarism among public education teachers to offer free supplementary teaching to pupils from low SES families.

Further, for the German and Slovak context, it was reported that potential crisis may raise the participation in higher education and training.

Regarding the ICT competencies, Poland, Spain, and Slovakia could report improvements for different educational stages or school levels.

Differences

Difficulties regarding the opportunities of Lifelong Learning will be the focus in this section.

In Finland, transitions from one education level to another and to the labour market should be as flexible as possible. Further, education has become more and more essential tool to increase the efficiency of production, prevent and reduce unemployment, introduction of technology, and maintenance and improving international competitiveness.

In Germany, the private early childhood care institutions are becoming more popular based on the relatively individual approach of education for parents; these parents, particularly single parents, need financial support from government to get access to comprehensive services. With respect to school students'

competencies, stronger support by volunteers may increase the reading competencies of primary school students (with and without migration background). Regarding adult or vocational learning, most of the companies in metal and electronics industries in Bavaria wanted their employees to learn the required knowledge about new processes or products in a shorter time period. Therefore, blended-learning systems are becoming more and more attractive for companies. The opportunities to achieve a high salary with this further education diploma encourage participation in Lifelong Learning.

In Greece, one opportunity is in particular interesting in terms of innovative promotion of children from lower socio-economic status (SES): an increasing level of voluntarism among public education teachers to offer free supplementary teaching to pupils from low SES families could be established in Greece.

In Poland, with regard to compulsory education the following aspects could be emphasized more: Parents should become more and better informed about reforms. Parents should become more active and this is encouraged. The improved access to remedial tutoring and/or scholarships (transport or housing) can be more equitably distributed across the lines of income and/or urban-rural divides. Vocational education should be more tightly linked to the labour market needs with increased vocational school autonomy and large employers or business clusters involved in the curriculum dialogue. In addition, alternative paths are created which make higher education more accessible to non-traditional students opened (HSECs, e-Learning formats). Besides, as increasingly complex skills are required, more employers see the value of VET over the long term, therefore, financial incentives may be considered.

In Spain, the highest share of participation in education and training among adults is evidenced as compared to the other countries in MASON. Thus, in 2010, 10.8% of Spanish citizens between 25 and 64 years participated in formal or informal education while the EU 27 average was 9.1%. Further, management and policy guidance is necessary to ensure cooperation across different education areas with differently distributed responsibilities. As far as education is concerned, the Autonomous Communities have the power to develop State regulations from a legislative point of view and to regulate the non-basic elements of the education system.

In Slovakia, it is important to devise and implement reforms in order to make the labour market more inclusive for employees of all backgrounds (e.g. the Roma community, low educated, etc.).

Threats

The measures in terms of Lifelong Learning aim at increasing the participation of learners across Europe and through all ages but in this context problems or potential threats needs to be taken into account. In the following paragraphs different threats will be illustrated for the member states represented in MASON.

Similarities

In the following section, the commonalities of member states' threats will be summarized.

To sum up, in most of the countries there are fears that fees will be introduced (or already are planned) for education services (see Finland or Slovakia); reductions in public spending in education caused by the economic crisis (see Greece, Spain, Slovakia) have been evidenced; increased unemployment and "brain drain" caused by highly skilled employees leaving the country to work abroad (see Finland, Slovakia and Greece) are also challenging issues. Further, the links between professional development and the academic world are not adequately developed, resulting in mismatching between education outputs and labour market demands (see Spain and Slovakia).

Differences

In this section, the most important differences between the states will be revealed.

The introduction of tuitions in *Finland* might change equality dynamics in education. The threats in Lifelong Learning issues relates to same issues where actions need to be undertaken in future such as transition points and length of studies, and matching of education supply and labour demand. Education policy means

actions with 1) shortening the time spent at each level of education, expanding of transition phases, reducing unnecessary doubling in learning content and enhancing the recognition of prior learning, 2) improving the completion rate in education, and 3) improving the matching of education supply and labour demand. Inadequate matching of education and the labour market demand has an effect on not only the functioning of the labour market, but also on the ways young people find their place in the labour market and the duration of studies.

In *Germany*, socio-economic and cultural factors related to the background of parents have an impact on students' school achievements and the risk of their early school leaving. The threats mainly relate to political and financial issues. The grown structure of German federalism may inhibit the exchange and effective implementation of good practices between states – particularly if a good practice is associated with particular views of a political party. The other issue is how far the different states have the financial means to support good practices. Discussions e.g. about changes in the financial equalization scheme between the Federal Government and the Länder may have effects on the financial power of the poorer states. These threats regarding financial support may particularly affect persons of lower socio-economic status and immigrants that are highly dependent on such kind of support.

The crucial current topic in *Greece* is the economic crisis which leads to cuts in public spending on education and training. Thus, shrinking of the already very low share of public spending on education is likely to lead to a full-scale education crisis. Some of the most critical aspects of this threat are related to: increased inequalities in opportunities, access, quality of learning experiences and learning outcomes to the disadvantage of students coming from families of low socio-economic status, a shrinking of public investments in school infrastructure (new school buildings, renovations, maintenance, ICTs etc.) which may threaten in the medium to long term the overall quality of the schools as learning environments. In addition, the reductions in teachers' annual salaries are likely to have affected their morale, given also that they are comparatively low paid. Further, reductions in the income of families are likely to affect gravely their capacity to invest in the education of their children. Also, the fact that the highly educated youth faces a high unemployment rate may discourage many students now at school to become high achievers at school and continue with their studies at tertiary education level. In the absence of affordable and employability-enhancing re-training and professional development opportunities for adults, consistently high unemployment rates coupled with a large share of long-term unemployed may lead to the explosion in the number of NEETs (acronym used for those not in education, employment or training), which is currently unrecorded in Greece. The establishment of such a condition among disillusioned unemployed is likely to further deepen problems of widespread social and economic exclusion.

In *Poland*, the number of public kindergartens is currently insufficient to meet the 2014 reform; without increased supply the gap between rural/urban participation may increase further, disadvantaging children in rural areas. Linked to this challenge is the falling employment of young mothers or grandmothers which encourages families to keep children at home. Regarding school, the gap between those who can afford private remedial tutoring and those who cannot increases impeding later equitable access to post-secondary education. In addition, a continued lack of vocational guidance leads to poor choices by pupils. With respect to tertiary education, there are some changes concerning the popularity of programmes of studies or fields that are connected to potentially good employment prospects in Poland: the continued high unemployment among graduates leads to social devaluation of higher education; changing technologies, methods, etc., low employment in technology and intense applied-knowledge sectors (EU Regional Competitiveness Index 3.2%, 2007) leads to low demand for higher education in these fields.

In *Spain*, lack of coordination between LLL institutions at national, regional and at local level was reported on the design of specific LLL programs (more partnership work and collaboration is needed and emphasis in the coherence and comprehensiveness of a national LLL strategy). In Europe the qualification of the production system is based on a 48.9% average qualification, while in Spain is dominated by low qualifications (42.4%), with a clear deficit of medium-skilled to the skills needs forecasted for 2020 (more key competences are needed to be achieved). The human capital in Spain has been insufficient to reach convergence with the EU. The fact that almost 40% of the young people aged 20 to 24 only have either primary or lower level of

secondary education qualifications (23.4 in the EU15), and the low level of vocational education creates huge challenges to any kind of Lifelong Learning policy. In addition, changes in the labour market at a global scale demand higher levels of medium and high level education qualifications. Regarding school, the role of Spanish teachers and students must be transformed: promotion of new teaching strategies, methodologies and teaching activities focused on learning performance (a new educational paradigm).

In *Slovakia*, a shortage of qualified workforce for specific job positions/sectors (IT, technical fields, R&D, etc.) is identified. In the tertiary education section, an outflow of educated/qualified people abroad – brain drain of talented students with higher degrees who often decide to establish their careers abroad- is to be expected because they do not see opportunities in their homeland. In addition, the introduction of tuition fees at universities might change equal access to education especially when the salaries in Slovakia are among the lowest in EU (and OECD) countries.

7 Conclusions

This comparative analysis of the national-level SWOT results showed the similarities and differences between each participating country. In this final section the main SWOT aspects will be illustrated and discussed, with the aim of providing further suggestions for investigation and development of new Lifelong Learning strategies in the European context targeting to the widening of participation and equity in education and training in all of their forms and at all phases in the life of people.

Strengths

Most of the national LLL policies studied are evaluated as supportive with regard to the implementation of Lifelong Learning strategies at different stages of life. Differences between the strength points per country stem from the particular traditions of their education systems. In Spain and Germany participation in early childhood and care (ESEC) is widespread. Interesting cases are these of Greece and Slovakia, where public pre-school education is supported, being compulsory in both countries. Finland and Bulgaria although still lagging behind, they have made huge progress with regard to participation in ESEC. In Finland the education system offers everybody equal opportunities for education, irrespective of domicile, sex, economic situation or linguistic and cultural background, coupled with an overall high level of school performance in core subjects. Finland is the top achieving EU country in the PISA 2009 assessments and in parallel the most equitable in terms of the impact of the socio-economic background of students on their performance. Poland is also among the top achievers, specifically in reading and science. Finland has one of the largest shares in tertiary attainment level among 30 to 34 year olds, along with Spain; both are above the EU27 average. Finally Slovakia, Greece and Bulgaria have among the lowest shares of early school leavers in EU27.

Weaknesses

Weaknesses according to government particularities can be identified in Finland, Greece and Germany. In Finland and in Greece changes in governments are also accompanied by changes in the Lifelong Learning strategies; the implication is that introduced reforms may not have the necessary time to establish. In Germany the federal system could hinder mutual learning and exchange of good practices between the states. The gap between those who can afford private remedial tutoring and those who cannot increases impeding later equitable access to post-secondary education based on academic performance. This is an important issue in Germany, in Greece and in Poland. One further weakness is a lack of vocational guidance at schools, particularly in Slovakia, Greece and Poland.

Various other aspects of weaknesses in LLL systems could be reported depending on the national context. In Germany, the low share of early childhood care institutions and voluntary attendance have an impact on students with migration background: that are not able to attend to early childhood and care and they often have difficulties to learn German at home. In Greece, the monitoring of the regularity of participation of students by educational authorities is one current issue preventing the establishment of an early warning system for students at risk of dropping out of school. In Poland, regarding the tertiary education, the conservative, slow-to-change public institutions and a rigid layer of hierarchical bureaucracy hinder innovation in didactics. In Spain, Lifelong Learning policies are not known to a large part of the public: there seems to be no tradition of Lifelong Learning policies in Spain devoted to the general public, while LLL is mostly thought to be focused to professional training. In Slovakia, a high share of low achievers in the recent PISA studies could be established and a growing trend in school grade repetition during compulsory education results in prolonged duration of schooling. In Bulgaria one of the major weaknesses in the large share of low achievers in reading, maths and science as evidenced in the PISA 2009 assessments.

Opportunities

In this section, the main opportunities for Lifelong Learning systems will be identified.

The opportunities with Lifelong Learning in Finland relate to the identification and recognition of prior learning. The recognition of prior learning is also a policy concern in Slovakia. Due to the economic crisis in Greece the pressure on policy makers and education administrators to work upon improving the cost-effectiveness of public spending on education was increased. In Spain there are some aspects in Lifelong Learning that should be considered. The crisis lead enterprises to consider more flexible forms of investments to training at local or sectoral level. In addition, in Slovakia the raise low participation of adult population in further/continuing education in accordance with EU 2020 benchmarks with a systematic focus on disadvantaged socio-economic background is a crucial educational issue as well as in Greece. Thus, Greece had an increasing level of voluntarism among public education teachers to offer free supplementary teaching to pupils from low SES families. Regarding the German and Slovak context, it was reported that potential crisis may raise the participation in higher education and training. The ICT competencies Poland, Spain, and Slovakia could report improvements for different educational stages or school levels.

There are also some differences between the countries. One innovative measure regarding the support of children of lower socio-economic status could be found in Greece: one opportunity is in particular interesting in terms of promotion of children from lower socio-economic status (SES): an increasing level of voluntarism among public education teachers to offer free supplementary teaching to pupils from low SES families could be established in Greece. In Finland, transitions from one education level to another and to the labour market should be as flexible as possible. In Germany, the private early childhood care institutions are becoming more popular based on the relatively individual approach of education for parents but these parents particularly for (single) parents need financial support of government to provide comprehensive services. In Poland, with regard to compulsory education the following aspects could be emphasized more: Parents should increase accuracy and perception of reforms. Parents become more active and this is encouraged. In Spain, it highest share of participation in education and training of adults could be found. In Slovakia, providing implement changes to make labour market are more inclusive for workforce of all backgrounds (e.g. Roma community, low educated, etc.) could be considered

Threats

In most of the countries there are fears that fees will be introduced (or already are planed) for education services (see Finland or Slovakia); reductions in public spending in education caused by the economic crisis (see Greece, Spain, Slovakia) have been evidenced; increased unemployment and “brain drain” caused by highly skilled employees leaving the country to work abroad (see Finland, Slovakia and Greece) are also challenging issues. Furthermore, the links between professional development and the academic world are not adequately developed, resulting in mismatching between education outputs and labour market demands (see Spain and Slovakia).

Differences in the threats faced by the members states represented in the MASON project are related to country-specific circumstances or socio-cultural factors. The introduction of tuition fees in Finland might challenge equality in education; socio-economic and cultural factors related to the background of parents have an impact on students’ school achievement and on the risk of early school leaving in Germany; the economic crisis in Greece has consequences to all education levels and sectors, more visibly experienced by drastic cuts in all types of public spending on education; the small number of kindergartens in Poland is a core problem; lack of coordination among the institutions at national, regional and at local level in Spain is posing a threat to the country-wide coherence of LLL policies; the availability of qualified workforce in specific job positions/sectors (IT, technical fields, R&D, etc.) is threatened by a brain drain trend in Slovakia.

Summing up, the main threats to education, training and participation Lifelong Learning are posed by the economic crisis and resulting cuts in public spending on education at all levels, by potential shortages in qualified workforce due to brain drain, and by the lack of close links between the world of education and the labour market demands which in turn could have a negative impact on the motivation of students to

continue with their studies or on the motivation of low-qualified employees to receive formal vocational training.

8 References

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