



# LEAP

## Local Adult Education Policy

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Intellectual Output 2  
Trends & Dynamics in AE Local Policy Making

### FINAL REPORT Summary



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## Table of contents:

Executive Summary .....	3
____ About the LEAP project.....	3
____ Mapping Trends & Dynamics in AE Local Policy Making .....	3
____ Methodology for Research Work .....	3
____ The European Perspective .....	3
____ Trends and dynamics of policy making .....	4
____ UNESCO Learning Cities .....	4
____ Bottom-up Perspective .....	5
____ Recommendations for the Toolkit.....	6
Conclusions and Takeaways .....	7

## Executive Summary

### About the LEAP project

The LEAP “Local Adult Education Policy” project’s objective is to contribute to attaining the target of 15% participation rate of adults in learning as stated in Europe 2020 Strategy. To do so, better policies on adult education need to be promoted. With LEAP (November 2020 – February 2023), we are targeting local authorities to empower them to understand and appreciate the importance of the adult education and be prepared to draft local adult education (and/or skills) policy.

The main context for the project is in the Council Resolution on renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning that highlights the need to significantly increase adult participation in formal, non-formal and informal learning. Recently, there were adopted also the Council Conclusions on the key role of lifelong learning policies in empowering societies to address the technological and green transition. The OECD Skills strategies also call for improving the adult learning policy based on long-term adult learning strategy, as well as on co-ordination across ministries, levels of government and stakeholders.

### Mapping Trends & Dynamics in Adult Education Local Policy Making

The mapping of situation in project countries highlights the opportunities in local policy making for inclusion of adult education. The report from mapping is designed to study and analyse the local policies, especially the trends and dynamics that drive or inhibit the Adult Education (further "AE") policies on local level. The results and key findings of this work are summarised in this report.

### Methodology for Research Work

The basis of the research work was the establishment of the Common Methodology. First formal desk and policy researches were conducted in 2020 giving an overall snapshot about relevant trends and social dynamics pertaining AE and LLL in the given country, then interviews were realised in 2021 with the aim to map how AE policies are defined, designed and implemented at local level as well as what are the main funding means.

### The European Perspective

In this section the report provides an overview of the current status of AE and adult learning systems in Europe. While analysing how AE policies are defined in Europe, it should be kept on mind that the EU competence in the education area is just supportive. The main responsibilities for education, including the adult education, rest with the national authorities.

Numerous actions and initiatives have been implemented at EU dimensions to foster the upskilling and capacity building opportunities of adults. The Resolution on a Renewed

Agenda for Adult Learning adopted by the Council in 2011 clearly stems from Europe 2020, a major strategy established at the beginning of the last decade for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Throughout the last decade, the Council resolution has been complemented by several other major initiatives - Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways, ET 2020, European Skills Agenda.

The picture emerging from the analysis is that AE is stagnant in numbers, highly fragmented and self-referential to local contexts. On one hand, key policy recommendations from the EU for AE and adult learning give great flexibility to stakeholders established at local level; on the other, stakeholders struggle in embedding these same recommendations in their policy framework.

Based on the findings, this section provides specific takeaways for local policy makers, emphasising, among others, the importance of increasing: public awareness on AE opportunities, investments (financial and other) in adult learning, access opportunities / removing barriers to training and education, time-and social relevancy of the training programme offer, the quality of the training and education offer, the cooperation with other education and training settings.

### Trends and dynamics of policy making

This section gives an overview about relevant trends and social dynamics pertaining AE and LLL based on country snapshots analysing recent changes in AE policies and focuses on national and local level. In the context of this analysis, we also examined how the AE policies are defined and implemented at local level.

Comparing the experience of five European countries (ES, HU, IT, RO, SK), it can be said that AE and LLL is not sufficiently defined and recognised as a stand-alone policy, the term adult education is not widely used or understood. Often there is a lack of political consensus about the fundamental building blocks of the educational system. AE is a lost or rather to say forgotten child separated from public education, higher education and VET. The procedures are mainly over-regulated, but at the same time AE policies are not linked sufficiently to other policies (social, economic, integration).

### UNESCO Learning Cities

The project also embraces the UNESCO's concept and network of Learning Cities. A learning city promotes lifelong learning for all. It is a city that effectively mobilizes its resources in every sector to promote inclusive learning from basic to higher education, revitalizes learning in families and communities, facilitates learning for and in the workplace, extends the use of modern learning technologies, enhances quality and excellence in learning, and fosters a culture of learning throughout life. In doing so, the city enhances individual empowerment and social inclusion, economic development and cultural prosperity, and sustainable development. In the framework of the project, we present the case of the city of Pécs as a good practice, which was the first Hungarian city to win the honorary title in 2017.

## Bottom-up Perspective

In the frame of the Common Methodology interviews were also conducted. While not statistically and scientifically representative, the interviews provide interesting insights and perspectives on the dynamics of AE, policy making at local levels directly engaging the participants in the system of policy making for AE at local level. We examined the main groups of questions below.

### *How is LLL and AE local policy making shaped and formulated*

Learning needs of adults are constantly changing and adapting to the existing economic and social context. One of the main focuses in AE and LLL policy making is to give everyone the opportunity to improve their skills, to succeed in the job market, and to maintain constructive relationships in society. Nevertheless, the term adult education is not widely used or understood. Some changes in attitude of decision makers can be experienced in AE policies, but on the other hand unfortunately there is a lower demand for training from potential beneficiaries. The focus should be on inspiring proactive groups of local responsible citizens to create progressive community initiatives in accordance with new topics and forms of AE and LLL emerged due to the changing global trends.

### *Local views and perception of EU policies in LLL and AE, reflection of EU Strategies in Local AE Policies*

The European Agenda is the central initiative of EU policies in the field of adult education, besides which the interviewees mentioned three other elements to promote adult learning in the new budgetary period of the EU in between 2021 and 2027: the Europe 2020 strategy, the new Skills Agenda and the potential formation of a new European Agenda on Adult Learning. Unfortunately, these EU documents are not considered by the local stakeholders as leading instruments shaping the future directions, only the funding possibilities are mentioned. Local policy makers and AE practitioners indicated that EU and national policies are too complex for their realities, it is difficult to understand the principle of subsidiarity which starts from the EU cohesion policy. In order to promote EU policies more effectively, cooperation between cities and regions, as well as between different sectors, must be strengthened, and more emphasis must be placed on high-quality training programs that meet the needs.

### *Qualitative and Quantitative Underpinnings of Local AE Policies*

When developing any policy or initiative, quantitative and qualitative elements are also considered. The most common quantitative indicators which were mentioned: an analysis of expenditure funds, number of trainings, library equipment, programs introduced, consultation hours, number of participants, number of trainees and trainers, number of equipment, number of course hours, number of course materials, number of programs provided, number of persons certified. As for the qualitative elements, methods were much

more diverse. This is completely understandable since this is a much more abstract concepts including categories like improved social inclusion, enhanced citizenship which are very hard to measure.

### Recommendations for the Toolkit

Based on the research and findings of this report, the next stage in the project is to compile the Toolkit for policy-makers, including a training module. The Toolkit shall contain resources such as examples and cases, guidelines, good practices and glossary to enhance the understanding, adoption and integration of EU priorities, strategies and programmes as well as national strategies based thereof in the field of Policy Making for AE. This part of the report formulates recommendations in this context, emphasizing among others the importance of better understanding of EU policies, awareness of local authorities, collection and presentation of concrete, practical good examples, e.g. the Learning Cities UNESCO initiative, and some specific topics like green, digital and civic competences.

## Conclusions and Takeaways

Having scrutinized the recent developments and evolution of AE and LLL with a special attention to local and regional dimensions, we aim at pointing out the following conclusions. AE and LLL is not sufficiently defined and recognised as a stand-alone policy, the term adult education is not widely used or understood. Often there is a lack of political consensus about the fundamental building blocks of the educational system as such. Sometimes we feel that AE is a lost or rather to say forgotten child separated from public education, higher education and VET. We could also establish that still most attention is paid to education and training for employment, not so much for civic or interest education. There were no concrete examples of local cooperation, networking partnerships for adult learning and education identified.

There is no real ‘tradition’ of policy making at local level, the process remains mainly centralised, local authorities are not heard by the central authorities. The procedures are mainly over regulated, but at the same time AE policies are not linked necessarily to other policies (social, economic, integration). National level does not sufficiently communicate with the lower levels about the adult learning and education issues. Even if many initiatives (policy papers and strategies) are available at EU or national levels, there is not a sufficient response from lower levels. It would be beneficial to create coordination bodies at different levels of government, in order to improve the common understanding - between companies, training providers and the government - of skills needs.

The data at local level on education levels and needs are missing, as well as the data from direct beneficiaries. For the future, money should be also spent for the promotion of public policies based on prior research, rigorously substantiated. It must be an essential element in providing quality results with a positive impact on the lives of citizens.

The problem is also that often the local strategic plans haven’t been translated into a set of objectives and indicators that can be monitored and reviewed, so the assessment of progress and ensuring the accountability of the stakeholders is very slim. Practitioners need to understand better the importance of adult education and the needs. For this, a wide analysis needs to be done and then the results will support a more effective and efficient strategic planning. The missing focus on a strategic, long-term, and “intimate” vision seems to have negative impacts also on other important management functions and lead to a phenomenon of organisational anarchy.

Local policy makers and AE practitioners indicated that EU and national policies are too complex for their realities, too vague, too distant. They would prefer something that is more engrained in their territories and realities, something “simpler” to design and “faster” to implement. As a first step simple tools, primarily examples and case-study-based training would be needed.

There is a lack of synergies on national and local level, local policy making in AE is left to the initiative of the policy maker, it is not coordinated and is fragmented, outside of a more

global framework. Even if local authorities would like to be more efficient and effective in their strategic planning, the coordination is challenging. There are some efforts to link educational authorities' lifelong learning policies at either the state level or regional/national level but often due to the political tensions between the diverse levels of the administration it becomes extremely complicated. This lack of coordination can lead to the duplication of some initiatives as well as gaps in the delivery of others.

In spite of the fact that statistics indicate that, although the number of people accessing to AE and LLL increased from the beginning of the last decade, it is still below the EU average in the countries we observed. Unfortunately, often there is a lack of interest in adult education from citizens, even if training opportunities are available, 'marketing' seems to be ineffective. More awareness-raising campaign is needed on the benefits of learning for individuals as well as for communities.

In order to raise participation amongst adult learners in local and regional environments, it is necessary to improve several critical conditions so as to realise social inclusion through adult learning. Better governance and local-regional planning must include a wider spectrum of educational and training programmes so as to incorporate both VET and non-vocational adult learning for community development. Setting up a local/regional AE centre is vital in order to develop and provide adult learning services for learners who would like to develop their skills and competences both in vocational and in non-vocational aspects. The lack of coordination impedes the creation of a learning culture outside the walls of the school.

An important common focal point during the interviews was the quality of the trainings and services. Improvement should be materialized e.g., in diversification of authorized training programs, which provide participants with the skills required in the labour market, supporting the unemployed through counselling and financial incentives. A larger budget could also help training providers in developing innovative training programs. Local authorities typically support community (cultural, sport) activities and initiatives which are also a part of (informal) adult learning, but at the same time neither Covid 19 related issues, nor the topics related to environment, digital skills, health issues are not yet largely included in the education and training plans. Another problem is that the trainings and activities under EU funded projects are mainly free, and are no longer feasible when the funding ceases. There is a need to concentrate much more on sustainability, and to teach people to appreciate what they have around.

Another important and challenging issue is the improvement of recognition and validation of prior learning and learning experience so as to attract more adults into continuous and lifelong learning. Currently there is no real system of recognition of results of non-formal trainings. It is known that the better educated people pursue more education and training themselves. It is the lower educated people who need more help, support, guidance and need to be reached out.

A significant challenging aspect is professional development of AE staff and, more precisely, adult educators. Teachers are multipliers, and they should be intensively supported through



- mainly digital - trainings in order to train future adult educators. In this regard, continuous professional development of educators is an important matter to respond to through collaborative actions. There is no system of recognition neither of trainers' knowledge/skills obtained through practice, non-formal or informal training.

It would be fortunate if all collections of EU and national legislation and good practice were available in one place, constantly updated. Maintaining and operating an interactive professional network can be a huge step forward. The importance of the activities of the 3rd sector / NGOs needs to be stressed.

Financing plays a key role in the implementation of AE and LLL policies. Better financing would be very much needed to raise the participation in AE and LLL actions. More funds to apply for would require more transparency to spend such funds according to the needs of people. National adult education programmes often heavily rely on EU funding which also means that the projects funded need to reflect the national priorities. The national priorities do not always correspond to local needs and so it happens that the projects funded are not well targeted. This ought to be improved by responding to relevant good practices from other EU-member countries.

However is the funding from public and European funds and European programs essential, the sector should make an effort to raise funding from national public and private sources, based on public-private partnership. It would be important to move our habits of depending dominantly on European and central state-funds.