



LEAP

Local Adult Education Policy

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Intellectual Output 2

Trends & Dynamics in AE Local Policy Making

Country Snapshot – SLOVAKIA

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Table of contents:

Introduction.....	2
How are AE policies are defined at local level in Your Country?.....	7
How are AE policies are implemented at local level?	8
Conclusions and Takeaways	9
Bibliography	11
Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of SR, “Návrh legislatívnych pravidiel pre fondy na roky 2021 – 2027 (Draft legislative rules for the funds for the years 2021 – 2027), 2018.....	12

Introduction

The basic legislative and governance framework for the adult learning is set by the Act on Lifelong Learning from 2009 Nr 568/2009¹ and the Strategy of Lifelong Learning from 2011². There have been ongoing efforts to revise both documents or prepare new versions. The key challenge therefore remains setting up a strategy covering all current issues and clear governance system for the area of adult education. The new Strategy on LLL is expected this year (2021), and the new law next year (2022).

The sector of education faces a number of pressing challenges – early school leavers, inclusiveness, teaching profession, brain drain, skills mismatch, educational results, funding, low level of basic skills, threat of automatisisation, digitalisation, low participation of adults in learning and all of them need to be tackled quickly. Therefore education is presented as a priority area in the National Reform Programme 2019 and 2020, as well as for the next programming period.

The National Reform Programme 2020 states that the lifelong learning strategy is being revised and the new version is supposed to respond to the current challenges in adult education. It also says that a proposal for a pilot testing of individual adult learning accounts will be prepared, and that as a measure to support lifelong learning, employers' expenditure on employee education is tax-exempt with effect from 2020. It confirms that a testing system to verify skills acquired outside the formal education system will be rolled out.

One of the newest documents related to the adult education, learning and skills is the OECD Skills Strategy for Slovakia³ that was presented by OECD in January 2020. On Priority 3 Fostering Greater Participation in Adult Learning it says that „Nonetheless, Slovak production and exports are concentrated in a small number of manufacturing industries and the risk of job automation is particularly high. In this context, adult learning is, and will continue being, essential for boosting the skills of adults, and can generate a range of personal, economic and social benefits....”.

According to the Skills Strategy, Slovakia has opportunities to foster greater participation in adult learning by:

- Improving the governance of adult learning
- Increasing participation among adults out of work.
- Supporting the capacity of employees and firms to engage in adult learning.

After parliamentary elections in February 2020, a new government started to work in March 2020, just when the pandemic started. The Government Manifesto 2020-2024, inter alia, stresses the need to re-define the system of further education as the current system is not functioning. The new system shall

¹ <https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2009/568/20150901>

² <http://www.minedu.sk/data/files/1899.pdf>

³ <https://www.oecd.org/skills/centre-for-skills/OECDSkillsStrategySlovakRepublicReportSummaryEnglish.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.mpsr.sk/download.php?fID=18769>

- reduce the risk of losing job for the employed persons, make it easier for them to change the job and even qualification to reflect the needs of employers
- ease the access to the labour market also for the vulnerable groups
- open the ways for current providers of formal and non-formal education, especially VET schools, universities and NGOs, to get involved in creating a bigger offer of lifelong learning opportunities
- be based on quality, applicability of and accessibility to learning.

New Topics

Basic skills in adult education is rather a new topic in Slovakia. The number of early leavers from the school system has grown over the past 10 years and was as high as 8,3% in 2019 (13,2 % in Eastern Slovakia). Also the PIAAC results from 2012 showed that basic skills need attention as 11,2% of adults had only the basic reading literacy, 13,8% had basic mathematical literacy and 21,7% lacked computer literacy. The help to low qualified people is often offered through the second chance education programmes. But the structure and approach of these programmes are often not adjusted to the needs of adults who often find themselves in various and complex life situations. The programmes rarely include skills assessment upon entering the programme that may lead to having a group of learners with very mixed levels and needs. The support in basic skills acquisition requires multisectoral approach - not only education, but also employability, health, living standards, financial issues, democracy and social participation play role. This topic is covered in the newest planning documents (new programming period).

Another new topic, that has however not been reflected in the general programmes of adult education yet is digital skills (maybe with the exception of senior citizens), and we expect that something like green skills will also appear in the strategic documents and action plans. During the interviews also a topic of cyber security was mentioned, eventhough it was linked more to the local governments than the general public. A number of activities that were mentioned during the interviews, concerned senior citizens.

Digital Skills

There is no specific mention of adult digital skills development in any strategic documents/plans. Since various surveys indicate that Slovakia is lagging behind in the area of digital skills, education in ICT is supported at all levels of the educational system, ie in the formal school education (but not in adult education).

The development of digital skills and support of lifelong improvement of digital skills is dealt with in the *Action Plan of Digital Transformation of Slovakia from 2019*⁵. It planned to make a reform of lifelong learning, draft a lifelong learning strategy and make legislative changes. In the are of education it pledges to „support the digital transformation of schools and education to raise the quality and employability as well as the acquisition of digital skills and competences necessary for the digital era“. The Action Plan develops the *2030 Digital Transformation*

⁵ Akčný plán digitálnej transformácie Slovenska na roky 2019 –2022, https://www.mirri.gov.sk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Akcny-plan-DTS_2019-2022.pdf

*Strategy of Slovakia*⁶. Both documents are from 2019 and follow upon the Strategy and Action Plan for Smart Industry presented by the Ministry of Economy earlier. The concrete results in ALE area are not yet reported.

The draft version of the Plan for Recovery and Resilience (December 2020), in chapter on Better education contained the heading on Support for lifelong learning, especially digital skills (50 mil €). The aim was to increase the participation rate of adults in learning to 50%, increase the participation of low-qualified and unemployed people and bring the rate of people with basic digital skills⁷ to the level of 70%, improve the digital skills of state servants and seniors. The form of investment should be the individual learning accounts that would open free access to courses, upgrade digital skills of employees in risk sectors, support the basic skills of people without qualification. The reform was to be drafted as a comprehensive strategy for support of lifelong learning with the participation of key stakeholders, mainly the employers. However, this chapter is not included in the final version of the document. It will hopefully become a part of the regular ESF funding.

Green Skills

The Ministry of Environment prepared in 2019 strategy “Greener Slovakia” – Strategy of the Environmental Policy of Slovak Republic until 2030. It deals with

1. Sustainable use and effective protection of natural resources.
2. Climate change and air protection.
3. Green economy (includes Chapter 13. Environmental education and training at any age)

According to this Strategy, environmental education and awareness is a long-underestimated societal need in Slovakia. Citizens’ environmental awareness in Slovakia is insufficient and does not lead to a change of behavior and values in terms of sustainable development.

The environmental education should pursue the following goals:

1. To improve environmental education in formal education.
2. To lead to responsible production, consumption, and nature protection in non-formal education.
3. To improve environmental awareness through cultural and natural heritage and tourism.

⁶ Stratégia digitálnej transformácie Slovenska 2030, <https://www.mirri.gov.sk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/SDT-English-Version-FINAL.pdf>

⁷ The development of digital skills and support of lifelong improvement of digital skills is also dealt with in the Action Plan of Digital Transformation of Slovakia from 2019. It planned to make a reform of lifelong learning, draft a strategy and make legislative changes. https://www.mirri.gov.sk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Akcny-plan-DTS_2019-2022.pdf The Action Plan develops the 2030 Digital Transformation Strategy of Slovakia (available at <https://www.mirri.gov.sk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/SDT-English-Version-FINAL.pdf>). Both documents are from 2019 and follow upon the Strategy and Action Plan for Smart Industry presented by the Ministry of Economy.

There are no specific measures related to the adults, however from the context it is clear that a number of measures are addressed to general public, ie also adults. The local authorities are seen as important players in environmental education.

More concrete activities are listed in a related document, *Sectoral strategy on environmental education, training and awareness until 2025*⁸.

Social Agenda / Seniors

A new Programme on Active Aging for 2021-2030 is being prepared in 2021. It contains the parts and measures related to (senior) adult education. Section 4.2 therein deals with Support to human resources in the lifelong learning cycle. It pursues several goals, such as

1. Legislation supporting the lifelong learning, (new law on lifelong learning with a section on support of further education of seniors)
2. Informing seniors on learning possibilities (free counselling for citizens 50+ on further education possibilities)
3. Support of development of professional and social competences of employees in individual stages of their life and family lives, (key competences, civilization literacy, setting up and implementation of Individual Learning Accounts for employees of various age categories, setting up the system of further education, especially in area of ICT, personal development, work and legal awareness and mental health)
4. Education related to key trends of Industry 4.0 (digital, financial, media literacy),
5. Qualified staff for work with seniors in the area of silver digitalisation (approving a new qualification “lecturer of senior education”, stable staff for universities of third age for topic of active aging),
6. Lifelong non-formal education of seniors as a tool for their social inclusion and intergenerational cohesion (information and education programmes for seniors on environment, non-formal education activities in cultural institutions)

Financing

The whole sector of education, at all levels, is under-funded and relies heavily on EU funds. The funds in the new programming period and the funds from the Recovery and Resilience Facility are an opportunity for much needed reforms and investments.

The **Proposal for Priorities of the Partnership Agreement 2021-2027**⁹ in objective on Social Slovakia reflects the priority Quality and Inclusive Education. The expected results

⁸ Rezortná koncepcia environmentálnej výchovy, vzdelávania a osvedy MŽP SR do roku 2025, <https://www.sazp.sk/app/cmsFile.php?disposition=i&ID=59>

include, among others, also increased participation of adults in lifelong learning, including vulnerable groups and also increased number of persons who raised their education level through second chance programmes. This should happen also with the help of lifelong counselling and individual learning accounts¹⁰.

The main elements of the modernised cohesion policy after 2020 should be, inter alia, “Cohesion policy for all regions and more individual approach to regional development”¹¹. There appears a room for manoeuvre for regional authorities to bring up the adult education policy, plan some measures and secure financing.

The drafts of new programming documents 2021-2027 related to the implementation of European Structural Funds are not yet available. In the previous funding period, the Operation programme Human Resources comprised the priority axis Education. It stated that the low level of participation of adult population in lifelong learning (2,9 % in 2016) was caused by several factors - accessibility of training (time, place or finance-wise), forms of training. It called for increasing the participation, training needs foresight, career counselling, validation of results of non-formal education and informal learning. Another priority axis that dealt among others with adult education and training, was Employment. It listed various forms of assistance to the unemployed, as well as employed people, including also education, vocational training.

The **Plan for Recovery and Resilience** aims at catching-up with the other EU countries and bases this process on the upgrade of the human capital and innovation-friendly environment. The draft submitted to the European Commission in December 2020¹² contained the following five areas for investment: Better education for everybody (850 mil €), Competitive and innovative Slovakia (700 mil €), Green Slovakia (1 900 mil €), Healthy life for everybody (1 450 mil €), Effective state and digitalisation (945 mil €). As mentioned earlier, the section on adult education does not appear in the final version of the document.

⁹ <https://digitalnakoalicia.sk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Na%CC%81vrh-priori%CC%81t-pre-PD-SR-na-roky-2021-2027- 29.9.2020.pdf>

¹⁰ The introduction of ILAs is included in the Implementation Plan for the National Programme of Development of Education from 2018. The Plan includes the piloting of financial support scheme based on individual education accounts of EUR 200 for non-formal education, and 25% tax base deductions for employers on expenses for training. The timeframe is 2020+. Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports of Slovakia (Národný program rozvoja výchovy a vzdelávania a Implementačný plan), <https://www.minedu.sk/17786-sk/narodny-program-rozvoja-vychovy-a-vzdelavania>)

¹¹ <https://www.mirri.gov.sk/sekcie/cko/politika-sudrznosti-eu/programove-obdobie-2021-2027/navrh-legislativnych-pravidiel/index.html>

¹² <https://www.mfsr.sk/sk/media/tlacove-spravy/predstavujeme-dalsie-detaily-planu-obnovy.html>

How are AE policies are defined at local level in Your Country?

The AE policies are virtually non-existent on the local or regional levels.

The main strategic development documents are regional plans of social and economic development and/or programmes of town development. They reflect the EU and national strategies in individual areas. However the extent depends largely on the competences that the authorities have in a certain area. The state can impose an obligation on a local authority only by a law. There was no law issued that would contain obligations in the area of adult education or lifelong learning. However, it appears that if a local authorities wanted to start an initiative in the ALE area, there is no barrier.

The competences of self-governments, with regard to (adult) education, are defined in the following way:

- In the Act on the Self-Government of Higher Territorial Units, as well as in the Act on the Support of Regional Development, we find support for initiatives in the field of AE. Act 302/2001 Coll. on Higher Territorial Units (HTU), Art. 4 states that "(An HTU) creates conditions for the development of education, especially in secondary schools and for the development of further education¹³."

More specifically formulated activities and goals for the improvement of further education (ie adult education) can be found in some Regional Strategies of Education, Regional Innovation Strategies, the Plan of Development and Work with Youth until 2020, the Plan of Social Policy, etc.

- According to the Act on Municipalities 369/1990, Art. 4, provision h) contains "obligation to create and protect conditions for healthy lifestyle and work of the citizens, protect environment and create conditions for health care, education, culture, awareness-raising activities, hobby art activities, physical activities and sport."

The update of the **National Strategy for Regional Development of the Slovak Republic by 2030** mentions the educational level as one of the important factors in the competitiveness of the region.¹⁴ Municipalities and cities are obliged to implement this strategy through their economic and social development plans. The adult education activities are often referred to as activities "to support the lifelong learning system and lifelong guidance", but are not always implemented. The development plan today serves primarily as a formal strategic document to back the

¹³ further education basically refers to adult education

¹⁴ Update of the National Strategy of Regional Development of the Slovak Republic, https://www.vlada.gov.sk/data/files/6951_narodna_strategia_.pdf

Human resources - recommendations for solving problems, p. 44: - support for education, lifelong learning and retraining (development of conditions for vocational education and training processes), - optimization of the network and profile of secondary and higher education institutions in connection with labor market requirements, - increasing the flexibility of the education system to meet labor market requirements.

involvement of a local government in calls financed from European Structural and Investment Funds and the state budget of the Slovak Republic and are not really a true development tool.

- According to Act no. 189/2015 Coll. on cultural and educational activities, self-governing regions and municipalities can establish cultural centres and provide mainly hobby education and hobby art activities.

The mission of cultural centres is to provide activities that contribute to the respect of human rights and cultural diversity, creating cultural way of life, increase of cultural and educational level of citizens and development of creativity. As such, they could be a place for ALE activities.

How are AE policies are implemented at local level?

Since the local authorities do not have the obligation to deal with adult education, they do not adopt any specific policies or organise specific activities in this regard. Local government staff does not have anybody tasked with adult education.

However there are various events or activities taking place that have educational character albeit without any system or specific goal. There are no platforms for education providers or databases of organisations or courses on local or regional level.¹⁵

The stakeholders at local level include:

- Primary and secondary schools that may run various evening courses for adult
- Primary art schools
- Public employment services
- Education providers – private or NGOs
- Cultural institutions – libraries, museums, galleries, cultural centres
- NGOs active in social services, environmental protection, heritage protection that run various awareness raising activities
- Sport clubs
- Associations of seniors, Associations of women, religious associations, firemen associations

Based on interviews, there were the following activities mentioned:

Digital literacy / Financial literacy courses for seniors – they were usually organised by NGOs under the funding schemes for seniors, ie not financed by local governments themselves. They often focused on social media (Facebook), to facilitate communication for seniors.

Local policy-making - articles on local issues in local newspapers

¹⁵ Naturally, there are commercial databases of training programmes.

Local traditions and history – series of articles in local newspapers or local radio or on town Facebook, for example on well-known people linked to the area

Participatory budgeting – a process in which citizens decide on spending a part of the municipal budget. The process involves a lot of communication from the local government towards citizens as well as among citizens, and a number of facilitated meetings. A by-product of this process is educating the citizens on local policy-making and competences and limits of local governments. It is an example of (active) citizenship education.

Environmental education – seems to be the agenda which the local governments recognise as necessary and are ready to invest into awareness raising or educating activities. It is often connected with tourism in the area or with waste separation. The activities usually focus on children or families with children. The adults are therefore also impacted.

Cultural activities – many are organised by municipal or regional cultural or awareness raising centres. They also organise various hobby activities for general public (pottery making classes, photographic classes, etc.). They are financed by local or regional authorities but often they are rather independent in planning their activities.

Art education – there is a nationwide network of “primary art schools” that admit students from primary, secondary schools as well as adult students. They can follow music, painting, dancing or drama classes which are governed by state education programmes.

Conclusions and Takeaways

In general, the culture of education is not well developed in Slovakia. On the national level, there are several documents adopted by various bodies, that include sections devoted to education, training or skills development of general public or seniors (Strategy and Vision of Slovakia 2030, Active Aging, Strategy on Digital Transformation, Environmental Strategy). However the actual action or implementation plans are missing or are not regularly monitored, hence the outcomes in the adult education are not known and not felt. Also there is no body that would coordinate the ALE initiatives across sectors and across individual ministries.

At this point it is very difficult to imagine that the municipalities / towns in Slovakia would opt for a possibility to draft a separate plan or strategy for adult education since it is not required by law and it is not supported by any funds or capacities. It seems to be more feasible that measures on ALE are or will be included in other areas – general education (lifelong learning) or social services (seniors).

The municipalities are obliged to adopt a few strategic documents that guide their work, they include the Plans of Economic and Social Development (according to common methodology) and a Community Plan of Social Services. They both typically include chapters on education measures for certain groups, usually titled lifelong learning. Bigger towns adopt also planning documents in the area of transport, environment, culture or education.

Based on the interviews, the following steps could empower the local governments in taking up the ALE agenda:

- Ensuring the understanding of the concept of lifelong learning in its full scope, ie learning from the cradle to the grave
- Communicating the benefits of ALE, illustrating the benefits down to the local level
- Showcasing the ALE activities, and /or activities with ALE elements and impacts
- Strengthening the ALE elements in all municipal planning activities and documents
- When organising (education) activities for children, thinking also about their potential impact on parents / adults and actively strengthening this impact
- Appointing a person in the staff of local government to deal with ALE, ie coordinate stakeholders and activities
- Create space for various players in the area of education to cooperate (regular meetings or setting up a platform)
- Bring up examples from other towns on their ALE activities
- Promote UNESCO Learning Cities concept
- When there are specific actions for seniors or vulnerable groups like unemployed or handicapped, think about potential impacts on general public or actively reach out to other groups

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