

## Experience of Individual EU Member States in Education of Adults

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### Abstract:

**Purpose and Originality:** The aim of this paper is to clarify key components of adult education in some of the European Union member states, to share their experience and the problems they are faced with regarding adult education policies and implementation in their country.

**Method:** This paper is based on literature review of policies and strategies, as well as relevant laws, regulations and guidelines of some of the European Union member states.

**Results:** In the countries that are members of European union, notably Slovenia and Croatia, adult education is an important component of education system, which has been verified through several important strategic documents on developing and implementing life-long learning concept and adult education, making it compatible with European goals and practices.

**Society:** The results obtained can be used as indicators to the European Committee and members of European Union in further development of laws and strategies concerning adult education to include larger number of their inhabitants in some form of adult education.

**Limitations / further research:** Adult education is multi-level process of acquiring knowledge, either formal or informal, that is based on furthering personal knowledge, skills and abilities. Lifelong education presupposes constant investment in people and knowledge, promotes learning new skills, which include digital literacy as well as increasing possibilities for innovative and more flexible ways of learning. The aim is to give all age groups equal and open access to high quality learning opportunities through various learning experience. Further research should be conducted on the ways to achieve the goal set by EU members: 15% of adults between the ages of 25 to 64 included in adult education in 2020.

**Keywords:** lifelong learning, adult education, European Union, European Committee, adult education strategy.

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## 1 Introduction

Education is the key to success, which is in most of the European countries, and throughout the world, a priority that should be equal for all citizens, which in most cases is not. The principle of formal education in most countries is the same, and it consists of elementary school education, high school and higher education. However, in Croatia there is the so-called elementary school education for adults. There are many reasons that influence decision-making on further education, but despite the fact that it is available for everyone, many people after formal education still do not see a great professional benefit in it.

Each country has its own education policy, but in Europe there is a European Programme for Adult education that works for all levels of education. It helps states to take the lead in organizing various educational groups, both alien and local citizens. It also promotes awareness of the importance of investing in yourself both personally and professionally.

The purpose of this article is to explore the likelihood of adult education in European countries and compare them.

## 2 EU Policy in the Field of Adult Learning

Adult education can be defined as lifelong learning, aimed at improvement in knowledge, skills and competence, as a framework for personal, civil, social or professional action of an individual. It implies learning in all periods of life and it can be formal, non-formal and informal. Educational system in European Union stresses the importance of lifelong learning, which was mentioned for the first time in year 2000 in Lisbon Strategy. The concept was also mentioned in Prague Communiqué in 2001 (Ala-Mutka, Malanowski, Punie, & Cabrera, 2008). It covers all phases of educational activities and its importance lies in raising overall quality of life. All countries, according to Kiss (2011), started this policy as a response to economic crisis and high unemployment rates.

Lifelong education can be defined as »acquiring and improving all abilities, interests, knowledge and qualifications from preschool till the period after retirement, as well as promotion of the development of knowledge and abilities that will enable citizens to adjust to the knowledge society, and to actively participate in all levels of civil and professional life thus, influencing their future (Kitić, Miljak, & Lozić, 2012, p. 54). As further stated by Kitić, Miljak & Lozić (2012), in the context of lifelong education, all forms of education are considered: formal (course at the university), non-formal (e.g. perfecting the skills needed for work place), informal, cross generations learning (sharing knowledge among friends and family members). All forms of lifelong education are described below.

Formal education is organised learning that encompasses learning within the school system (from elementary school to university), at the end of which person gets public document

(certificate or diploma) that shows the form and the level of education finished (Pastuović, 2008, p. 254). Non-formal education also implies organised learning, but it is learning that is not within regular school system (Kitić, Miljak, & Lozić, 2012, p. 54). Informal education occurs naturally, it is neither formal or non-formal, and it refers to learning based on everyday experience and other influence or source in person's surroundings. This is self-learning that is usually done by using the Internet or other forms of communication technology. Lifelong learning plays an important role in modern society, for its personal and professional development. All the things mentioned lead to conclusion that education helps economic growth and employability therefore reducing unemployment.

Renewed European Programme for Education of Adults (2011) shows the vision for the development of adult learning in Europe till 2020. Specific priorities for the period of 2015 to 2020 are (EUR-Lex.europa.eu, 2011):

- 1. Management:** that ensures coherence in adult learning by improving coordination, efficiency and relevance for the needs of society, economy and environment with an emphasis on private and public investments.
- 2. Availability and participation:** this mean increasing and widening programmes in adult education with an emphasis on increasing computer and digital skills and improving computer literacy.
- 3. Flexibility and access:** this enable increased accessibility of learning at work by efficient use of information and communication technology. New procedures for establishing and evaluating skills and abilities of adults with low qualifications are used to provide other opportunities to obtain qualifications on different levels of European Qualification Framework.
- 4. Quality:** improving the quality by making the curriculum more up to date, using more dynamic teaching methods, providing constant professional development of educators, setting up institutions and programmes for lifelong learning and making the system more flexible.

The European Committee cooperates with 32 countries on implementing European Programme for Adult Learning. Programme stresses the importance of participating in all forms of adult learning (formal, non-formal and informal learning) to acquire new work skills, develop personal skills and competences. If the number of participants in adult learning increases, the needs for new skills can be met, and older workers efficiency and productivity can be kept (European Committee, 2018).

### **3 Adult Learning Experience in some European Countries**

#### **3.1 Lithuania**

Education system in Lithuania can be divided in two areas: Formal and non-formal. Formal education includes elementary school education, high-school education and higher education.

Lithuania puts special emphasis on non-formal education and raises public awareness on non-formal education. Lithuania has therefore established Department of Non-formal Education as a part of Ministry of Education and Science. 2014 was an important year for non-formal education. That year the national government acknowledged and approved Non-formal Adult Education Council. That same year a new Law on Non-Formal Adult Education and Continuing Learning was passed. The Law clearly defines key aspects of adult education and continuing learning – planning, organisation, financing and ensuring quality (Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, 2018).

Documents and acts that govern Lithuanian education system are: Law of Education, (2003), National Education Strategy, 2013-2022, Law on Vocational Training, (1997), Law on Non-formal Adult Education, (1998), Law on Special Education, (1999), Law on Higher Education, (2000), Law on Science and Studies, (2002) and other acts (Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, 2018).

As in Croatia, age limit for entering adult education system is 18. Adults have the opportunity to enrol schools and centres for adult education which provide elementary school education for adults. So called “third age universities” also play active role in community (Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, 2018).

It is also important to mention Vocational Education and Training Development Centre founded in 1996 under the patronage of Ministry of Education and Science. Its main purpose is development of qualifications and vocational education, improvements in vocational education, increasing the number of students in vocational education, development of quality culture, issuing guidelines for improving vocational teachers' qualification, external evaluation and other similar methodology (Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre, 2018).

Another important role in the field of adult education is played by non-governmental association - Lithuanian Association of Adult Education (Lithuanian Association of Adult Education, 2018). Primary scope of activities of the association is networking, creating partnerships, promoting the idea of lifelong learning and education, sharing experience and information.

### **3.2 Ireland**

Ireland has a long tradition of adult learning, several different programs, courses provided by formal institutions, local communities, civil associations and even individuals. Adult learning in Ireland is based on cooperation and partnerships between institutions and citizens emphasising personal development as well as wellbeing of the community.

Irish adult education system puts special emphasis on reintegration in formal adult education for those who left school too early, at the same time promoting learning and work place

specialisation. The main goal of this approach is ensuring and evaluating non- formal skills and experience of adults in order to allow them to enter the system of higher education or get vocational qualifications. Thus defined, adult education system includes higher education, continuous training, formal and non-formal learning that is a part of the system.

Learning for Life (2000) is a part of the *White Document* that represents a new era of adult education in Ireland. The main guidelines of the document include easier access to high education, increasing the role of education in community and promoting work place learning. Documents and Acts governing adult education in Ireland are: Law on Education (1988), Law on National Qualifications (1999), National Skills Strategy (2007), National Action Plan for Social inclusion (2007).

Formal education of adults in Ireland falls under Department of Education and Skills, (<https://www.education.ie>), that is first and foremost responsible for advocating equal rights and social inclusion and the concept of lifelong learning.

As a part of non-formal education there is several evening courses as well as self-organised educational groups, most frequently linked to immigrants, seniors, or local interest groups (in most cases, creative workshops for women). There are several non-governmental associations in adult education, and most prominent ones are National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) and AONTAS. AONTAS, national organisation for adult learning is volunteer based. Its main goal is to promote high quality, all-encompassing adult education system that is accessible to all. NALA – National Adult Literacy Agency is an independent organisation that helps people with low literacy level (numerical and language) with their inclusion in the society by ensuring education tailored to their needs (Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, 2018).

National Qualification Framework was designed to integrate adult learning into public education system by making it acknowledged and transparent, therefore ensuring active social inclusion. Irish practices show that they make education a priority, and this is verified by investments in education, where 30% of funds received from European social funds were invested in education. This resulted in raising the workforce quality and economic growth. However, the Irish did not stop there. They are constantly working on improving adult education system.

### **3.3 Norway**

In Norway adult education is one of the major components, and a part of a traditional education policy. The emphasis is on acquiring basic competences for lifelong learning and developing system for evaluating previous learning, which includes non-formal and formal learning.

All forms of formal learning are approved by public schools and are regulated (and financed within the budget) by local administration offices (Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, 2018). Formal education is under the Ministry of Education and Research, and the content is

regulated by Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, 2018). Non-formal adult education in Norway is delivered through various associations and it is very popular. The starting point of adult education in Norway are »Study Circles« with hundred years long tradition. Study circles are small groups of people who learn certain topics by learning through sharing.

There are several institutions that are not a part of Ministry of Education and Research, which specialise in adult learning. It is important to mention VOX, Norwegian agency for lifelong learning, which ensures the quality in non-formal adult education programs. VOX develops basic skills (numerical, language, digital and communication skills essential for lifelong learning, develops immigrant integration curricula, provides professional career counselling and conducts research to improve the quality of lifelong learning (Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, 2018).

Norwegian Association for Adult Education is an association which includes all publicly acknowledged association in the field of adult learning. The association includes open universities (Folkuniversitet) that follow the same procedures in getting funds for their programmes, as other bidders, through public procurement, certain educational services are financed by the Ministry of Education and Research, or by some other administrative body (as for example Programme of Basic Skills for Unemployed, Programme of Basic Skills and Norwegian Language for Immigrants and so on (National Assessment of Adult Literacy, 2018).

Norwegian Association for Distance Education is the most important institution in the field of flexible, non- formal learning, from traditional correspondence learning to e-learning. This type of learning has long tradition, and it is important even today due to the size of Norway, its climate and not large population. In creating principles of e-learning NADE intensively cooperates with American institutions (Norwegian Association for Distance Education, 2018).

### **3.4 Denmark**

Denmark also emphasises non-formal learning in acquiring civil and democratic competences and developing personal skills and competences. These programs are offered by associations for adult education, open universities and universities.

The Danish Evaluation Institute is non-governmental organisation that governs preschool system, elementary school system, high-school system, higher education and adult education. It is financed by its own funds based on legal act that ensures independence in decision making and preparing different projects (The Danish Evaluation Institute EVA, 2018).

Non-formal learning is under the Education Association founded in 1941. The Association consists of 35 different institutions and to become members, institutions pay membership fee which enables them to take part in different seminars, conferences and courses (Dansk folkeoplysnings fællesråd, 2018).

### 3.5 Germany

Recent data show that 15% of adults in Germany are included in adult education (Ministarstvo znanosti i obrazovanja, 2018). The main governing body is Federal Ministry of Education and Research established in 1995 (Federal Ministry of Education and Research, 2018). The most important institution for adult education is National Agency for Monitoring Adult Education System, Vocational Education and Implementing National and International Projects. The Agency is in charge of the project Implementation of EU Adult Education Agenda in Germany, adult education platform EPALE, EU PASS project and implementation of several projects from Erasmus+ (National Agency Education for Europe at the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training, 2018).

In the field of vocational education important role is played by Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training which is a part of Ministry and specialises in increasing basic skills and competences of adults as well as in raising public awareness. Another notable institution is Coordination office of the National Decade for Literacy and Basic Skills. It tries to reduce functional illiteracy and increase general level of key competencies of adults (Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training, 2018).

On the national level there is also German Institute for Adult Education. It was founded in 1957 and its scope includes adult education process, educational institutions, educators, the problem of illiteracy in Germany and developing on line platform for self-assessment of adult learners' skills (German Institute for Adult Education, 2018).

### 3.6 Austria

In the Republic of Austria, adult education mostly refers to continuing vocational training or obtaining new qualifications. They are defined by age or previous level of education (Ministarstvo znanosti i obrazovanja, 2018).

Main areas of adult education in Austria are (Ministarstvo znanosti i obrazovanja, 2018):

- Vocational training of employees organised by companies, partners, adult education facilities, etc.
- Continuous vocational training and workplace training (offered by educational institutions)
- Improving basic skills and competences and active employment measures organised by Arbeitsmarktservice as instruments of active employment market policy
- Education of adults (offered by Adult Education Centres) and civil politics education.
- Second chance education (education for obtaining formal education certificates after leaving education system too early).

According to Austrian constitution adult education sector is not governed by the government, it is mostly regulated by local administration offices. An important law that governs that area is Federal Law on Promoting Adult Education and Public Libraries (Erwachsenen bildungs – Forderungs gesetz) passed in 1973. It promotes the idea of voluntary, adult education on federal level, and states the obligation of local provinces to promote adult education, but it did not contain the parameters of the obligation, so it was revised two times in 1990 and 2003 (Ministarstvo znanosti i obrazovanja, 2018).

Federal Ministry of Labour Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection is responsible for education of experts within the company and promoting workforce qualifications through Employment Office. Employment office does not offer any educational programs, but it finances programs aimed at raising work force competence. Those programs are mostly conducted by public institutions for adult education, e.g. Berufs fordeungs institute (BFI) for vocational education Wirtschafts forderungs institute (WIFI), which is a part of Chamber of Economy. Programs for raising basic competences financed by Employment Office are aimed at fast reintegration of the individual on the workforce market (Ministarstvo znanosti i obrazovanja, 2018).

The main goal of this program is to balance out supply and demand on the workforce market by providing skills and expert knowledge together with personal and social competence necessary for social inclusion (Ministarstvo znanosti i obrazovanja, 2018).

#### **4 Adult Education in Slovenia**

Adult education in Slovenia has a long tradition. It has been built in education system and in the social consciousness. Throughout the history it has had its ups and downs, but it has always been present and it has formed social reality.

It is governed by the Law on Adult Education (Zakon o izobraževanju odraslih, 2006) which serves as a foundation for the development in adult education.

By providing services for development, expert bodies and organisations for adult education, organised and well-presented information to the public, promoting adult education and other development incentives Slovenia was able to keep adult education system running even in the period of economic transition.

Slovenia has been a member of EU since 2004 and it has faced the same challenges as most other member countries, its population is growing older, the information and other technologies change and develop fast, globalisation process causes constant change in both living and working conditions. There is also more prominent social stratification. These differences can be balanced through education and training which enables an individual to achieve personal growth, better employment and prosperity thus causing greater social



stability, development, progress and social cohesion (Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, 2018).

On October 24, 2013, Slovenian parliament has passed Resolution on National Programme on Adult Education in the Republic of Slovenia for the period of 2013 till 2020 (Resolucija o Nacionalnem programu izobraževanja odraslih v Republiki Sloveniji za obdobje 2013–2020 (*ReNPIO 2013–2020*)). Article 3.3. Assessing and developing the quality of adult education states (Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, 2018):

- preparing normative for systematic assessment and quality development in all organisations that provide adult education financed by public funds,
- ensuring conditions for development in organisations that conduct projects aimed at improving different factors of adult education,
- promoting further development and implementation of measures for conducting self-assessment in adult learning organisations,
- setting up network of adult education quality advisors,
- using and further development of internet platforms for assessing quality in adult education,
- promoting investing in the future.

According to the National Programme of Adult Education in Republic of Slovenia, Slovenia needs to raise the quality of education in the population, general education, improve education opportunities and increase employability of active population. The aim of the Resolution is to raise the percentage of adults in the age group 25 to 64 included in education to 8% till 2020 (in 2012, 5% of the adults in this age group were included in general education) (Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, 2018).

It is expected to reduce the number of population older than 15, who have not finished elementary school to 2,2%, in 2011, before the Resolution was passed the percentage was 4,4%. By 2020 the percentage of the population aged 25 to 64 who has finished high school should be risen to 63% as opposed to 57% in 2011. By subsidising and financing enrolment in higher education programmes, the percentage of the people, aged 30 to 34, who have finished higher education should also rise (Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, 2018).

Current funds provided by the Ministry are not large enough to put the plan into action completely. The funds should also be secured from other sources, e.g. local administration budget, employers and individuals, as well as from international projects. The funds also depend on the partnership agreement with the European Committee on using funds from European Social Fond (Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, 2018).

Partnership agreement between Slovenia and the European Committee, signed in 2014 for the period of 2014–2020 (Partnerski sporazum med Slovenijo in Evropsko komisijo za obdobje 2014–2020, 2014) in goal number 10: “Investments in education, training and professional

development for the skills and lifelong learning includes (Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, 2018):

- lifelong professional counselling and its implementation on all levels of education,
- strengthening professional quality of experts in education.

Resolution of the Committee on Adult Learning Programme revived (European Union Gazette; 2011/C 372/01) – Improving Quality and Efficiency in Education and Training states (Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, 2018):

- ensuring the quality of adult learning programmes offered through the system of accreditation regarding pre-existing frameworks and standards of ensuring,
- quality in other areas,
- improving the quality of staff employed in adult learning, through training profile, organising efficient system for basic training and professional development and promoting mobility of the educators, heads of training department and other staff employed in adult education.

Developing national system of quality in adult education in Slovenia fall under the scope of Anagogical Centre of Slovenia. Since 2001 its mission is achieved by (Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, 2018):

- conducting research and development work to support adult learning quality on systematic and executive level,
- providing consulting and training for experts employed in adult learning, helping them to implement quality module through quality assessment and quality development,
- providing support for networking, promoting exchange of knowledge and good practice examples within the network,
- developing information and communication support for these processes
- providing relevant papers and articles on the quality of adult learning,
- ensuring knowledge exchange on quality through international contacts.

## **5 Adult Learning trends in Croatia**

High –quality education is important for development of Croatia and the European Union as knowledge society and its efficient competitive participation in global economy (Sudarić, 2012, p. 72).

Lifelong learning in Croatia is viewed through several documents (Jelić, Martić Kuran, & Bosnić, 2012, p. 67):

- Declaration on Knowledge, Croatian Academy of Science and Arts (2002);
- Croatia Based on Knowledge and its Implementation document (2004);
- Strategy on Education Development passed by Croatian Government (2002);

- Competitiveness guidelines published by National Council for Competitiveness (2003);
- Adult Learning Strategy and Action Plan Proposal by Adult Learning Committee (2004);
- Concept of Changing System of Education in the Republic of Croatia, document (2002).

All the above shows that the Republic of Croatia has considered lifelong learning to be an important component of economic growth. With that in mind several documents on lifelong learning and its importance for the Republic of Croatia were passed. Since entering European Union Croatia has given even more emphasis lifelong learning, knowledge economy and overall economic growth.

Taking into consideration the fact that Croatia has become an EU member, it is important to recognise education as one of the key areas developed and invested in by the EU (Jelić, Martić Kuran, & Bosnić, 2012). By developing lifelong learning Croatia is going to become aware that using human resources and investing in their quality are primary factors in the development of Croatian economy. It is important to acknowledge necessary change in current knowledge and skills structure because of growing technology development and opening new markets.

To make learning system in Croatia more efficient, it is important to put additional effort by the Government, Agency for Vocational Training of the Adults, Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes, Croatian Unemployment Office, different associations of professionals and the Union, as well as employed and unemployed individuals in education system (Jelić, Martić Kuran, & Bosnić, 2012, p. 67). Areas that need the largest number of key activities are (Jelić, Martić Kuran, & Bosnić, 2012, p. 68):

- new regulation of work market;
- investments in education and lifelong learning programmes;
- social policy adjustments;
- adjustment of educational programmes to workforce market requirements;
- development of entrepreneurial climate
- raising awareness of the need to take part in lifelong formal and non-formal education.

It is necessary to draw attention to raising the quality of higher and high-school education by creating better basis for lifelong learning. It is therefore necessary to make the content more up to date, by using more dynamic teaching methods and provide professional training, establishing centres and programmes for lifelong learning and making system of education more transparent.

## 6 Conclusion

Reform of higher education in the European Union started with Bologna Declaration. In Europe education is given high importance and after introducing Bologna Process, lifelong learning concept was introduced in Lisbon Strategy. Lifelong learning encompasses learning at all age to improve and perfect knowledge, skills and competence within personal, civil, social, professional prospects. As a part of lifelong learning, the term lifelong education is being used. In English speaking world it is synonymous to lifelong learning even though learning presupposes more than education. Formal and non-formal education as well as informal learning are parts of lifelong education.

New programme that replaces current programmes in the field of education and training is Erasmus+ which covers the period from 2014-2020. It aims at providing greater results than previous programmes, and emphasis is put on incentives in different areas of education, removing borders between different activities and projects, developing new ideas, attracting people from business world and starting new forms of cooperation.

To develop efficient lifelong learning system, it is necessary to include all major interest groups and to integrate other activities connected education and learning as well as economic and social growth.

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**Povzetek:**

**Izkušnje posameznih držav članic EU v izobraževanju odraslih**

**Namen in izvirnost:** Namen tega članka je pojasniti ključne elemente izobraževanja odraslih v nekaterih članicah Evropske unije, primerjati njihove izkušnje in izzive na dotičnem področju.

**Metoda:** Članek temelji na pregledu literature s področja dotične politike, strateških dokumentov, ustreznega pravnega reda v izbranih članicah Evropske unije.

**Rezultati:** V državah članicah Evropske unije, v tem primeru na Hrvaškem in v Sloveniji je izobraževanje odraslih pomemben del izobraževalnega sistema, kar je razvidno skozi različne strateške dokumente s področja razvoja in implementacije vseživljenjskega učenja ter izobraževanja odraslih, kar je v sozvočju tudi z evropskimi cilji in praksami.

**Družba:** Rezultate je mogoče uporabiti kot indikatorje za potrebe Evropske komisije in držav članic Evropske unije na področju nadaljnega razvoja pravnega reda in strateških dokumentov s področja izobraževanja odraslih, predvsem v smislu iskanja načinov za intenzivnejše vključevanje populacije v tovrstne oblike izobraževanja.

**Omejitve/nadaljnje raziskovanje:** Izobraževanje odraslih je več nivojski proces pridobivanja znanja na formalnem ali neformalnem nivoju z namenom razvoja posameznikovega znanja, spretnosti in sposobnosti. Vseživljenjsko učenje predpostavlja nenehno investicijo v posameznika in znanje, spodbuja učenje novih veščin, vključujoč informacijsko pismenost, sposobnost inoviranja in fleksibilnejšega učenja. Cilj je zagotavljanje enakopravnega dostopa vseh starostnih skupin do znanja skozi različne oblike izobraževanja. Nadaljnje raziskovanje bi bilo potrebno usmeriti v preverjanje doseganja evropskega cilja, da bo 15% odraslih med 25. in 64. letom vključenih v oblike izobraževanja odraslih do leta 2020.

**Ključne besede:** vseživljenjsko učenje, izobraževanje odraslih, Evropska unija, Evropska komisija, strategija izobraževanja odraslih.

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