A Toolkit for Developing, Implementing and Monitoring Adult Education Strategies

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Implementing and Monitoring
Adult Education Strategies

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Intellectual output 2: NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND GAP ANALYSIS AT NATIONAL AND EU LEVEL

Comparative report

1. Summary

The following document tries to present *needs assessment and gap analysis,* based on results of three different instruments used for data collection: web based survey, individual interviews and focus group discussions.

Results of the survey were collected by the IO2 coordinator, from Slovenian team. Other partners were obliged to elaborate summaries of individual interviews and focus group discussions and send them to IO2 coordinator.

Document is devided in several chapters and sub-chapters, logicaly following presentations of outcomes of all three instruments. The first instrument, web based survey, is presented in charts and tables which make this part of the whole document quite extensive in comparison to other to presented instruments.

Conclusions are outlined at the end, as the final chapter.

2. Introduction: Objecties and methods

If the Intellectual output 1 (State of the Art) was focused on presenting each of the partner countries, their socio-economic and demographic characteristics and especially their legislative and political frameworks of adult education system, the main objectives of the Intellectual output 2 are to:

identify and assess needs for adult education in these countries: in what manner are these needs being addressed, what kind of programmes are provided, who are main providers, who participants;

identify gaps and problems, common for all and specific for each participating country;

identify approaches and measures taken in addressing these problems;

assess development and prospective of adult education in the future.

In other words, quoted from the DIMA project proposal: *The gap analysis and comparative report will provide required information about target group members' needs, and provide specific suggestions, comments and feedback on the development of DIMA toolkit and training material.*

In the project proposal these objectives are defined more in details:

2.1. Objectives of the IO2 defined in the project proposal:

- Collect reliable research data and evidences from target group members;
- Bring together stakeholders for the adult education sector (e.g. national agencies, universities, human resource development, authorities) for brainstorming ideas;
- Identify key challenges and problems that policy makers and adult education providers face;
- Develop a strategy map of the current scene in relation to local and national strategies, on Adult Education and their effectiveness;
- Conduct a gap analysis and comparative analysis report;
- Mapping of the current scene in relation to local and national strategies, on Adult Education and their effectiveness.

For collecting all necessary data and information, three basic methods and/or instruments have been used, which were also determined in the project proposal:

2.2. Instruments and methods for collecting and analysing data, defined in the project proposal :

Data collection:

(i) 50 completed questionnaires from policy makers, adult education providers, and target group members from each partner country;

(ii) Implementation a focus group in each partners' country with key stakeholder members, experts, etc.;

(iii) Conducting interviews - meetings with at least 5 key stakeholders and target group members in each partners' country;

(iv) Implementation of a strategic visioning workshop in each partners' country in order to elicit ideas on the project topic.

Data analysis:

All collected data were analysed in order to provide the required information about target group members' needs.

2.3. Some of the questions guiding the gap analysis and comparative analysis are:

- What are the needs of target group as is relates to adult education?
- What tools/processes should be provided in order to enable local and national authorities to contribute towards the achievement of adults' participation in education and training from the lifelong learning perspectives?
- What challenges local and national authorities face for achieving adults' participation in training activities?

- What kind of resources should be developed in order to be equally relevant to the learning needs of all adults?
- What models should be provided in order to increase the efficiency of public expenditure in adults' education?

3. Data collection

3.1. Questionnaire:

The first and the most extensive instrument used for collecting data was a web based survey (on the platform SurveyMonkey).

The survey was designed for addressing the supply side of adult education provision. The addressees and potential respondents were mostly adult education providers and professionals that are directly involved in adult education processes. Each partner has chosen its own range of target addressees.

The questionnaire has 33 questions: 6 of them were open, asking respondents to write their answers.

According to project requirements each partner country team was obligated to collect at least 50 fulfilled questionnaires, which correspond to at least 250 fulfilled questionnaires in total (*Table 1*):

Table 1: Number of responses

Cyprus	Ireland	Slovakia	Slovenia	Total
Number of responses				
50	172	48	72	342
100	100	100	100	100
Calculation bases				

As seen in *Table 1* the targeted number of responses in total has been achieved (342), which enables us to summarize results for all participating countries. Three participating countries (Ireland, Slovenia and Cyprus) have reached the required sum of replies, Slovakia was almost there. Since the EAEA partner does not represent any particular country we have agreed to encompass their participation share within the scope of other partners' responses.

It is obvious from the *Table 1* that differences in numbers of achieved replies were calibrated so that responses could be compared among each other.

We have elaborated all questions presenting all of them in tables and graphs, exept open questions. Each table has a separate row which shows the number of respondents that have skipped that particular question (answered/skipped).

Questions about respondents' organization, position and type of work:

Table 2: Respondents by type of institution they work for

	Cyprus	Ireland	Slovakia	Slovenia
Governamental body	36,5	7,7	11,4	15,1
Public institution	13,5	67,3	54,5	63,0
NGO	38,5	13,7	6,8	11,0
Private entities	11,5	11,3	27,3	11,0
(answered/skipped)	(46/4)	(166/6)	(44/4)	(67/5)

**Graph 1: Respondents by type of institution they work for**
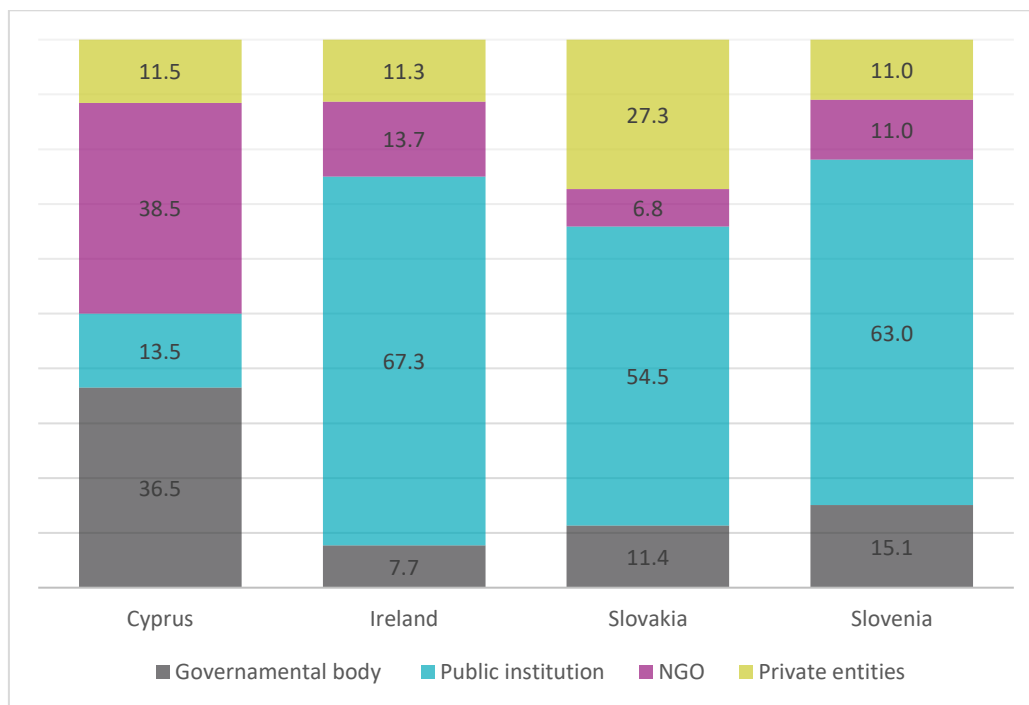
We can see, on *Table 2* and *Graph 1* some differences between types of institutions respondents are coming from: majority OF respondents in Ireland, Slovakia and Slovenia are employed in public institutions, whilst Cypriots are coming from governamental bodies. The share of private entities is obviously bigger in Slovakia in comparison to others.

Table 3: Respondents by position in the organisation

|	Cyprus	Ireland	Slovakia	Slovenia
Management staff	25,0	30,4	36,4	45,2
Professionals	50,0	62,5	50,0	46,6
Technical assistance	5,8	1,2	0,0	4,1
Administration	19,2	6,0	13,6	4,1
(answered/skipped)	(46/4)	(166/6)	(44/4)	(67/5)

Graph 2: Respondents by position in the organisation
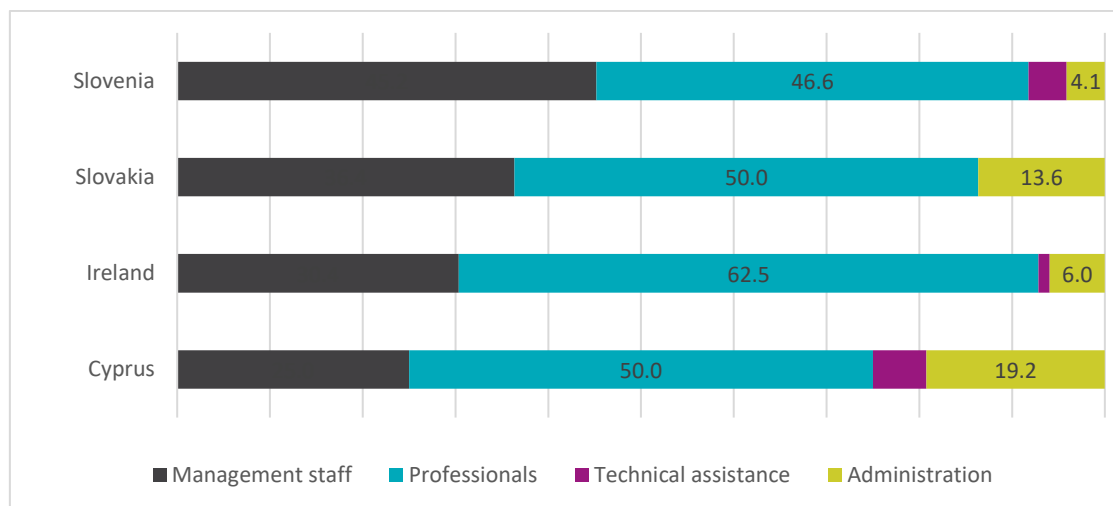
The share of professionals among respondents is the biggest in all countries (*Table 3, Graph 2*). There is quite big difference between Slovenia and Cyprus regarding shares of management and administrative staff. Almost a half of Slovenians who fulfilled our questionnaires were managers.

Table 4: Respondents by type of their work

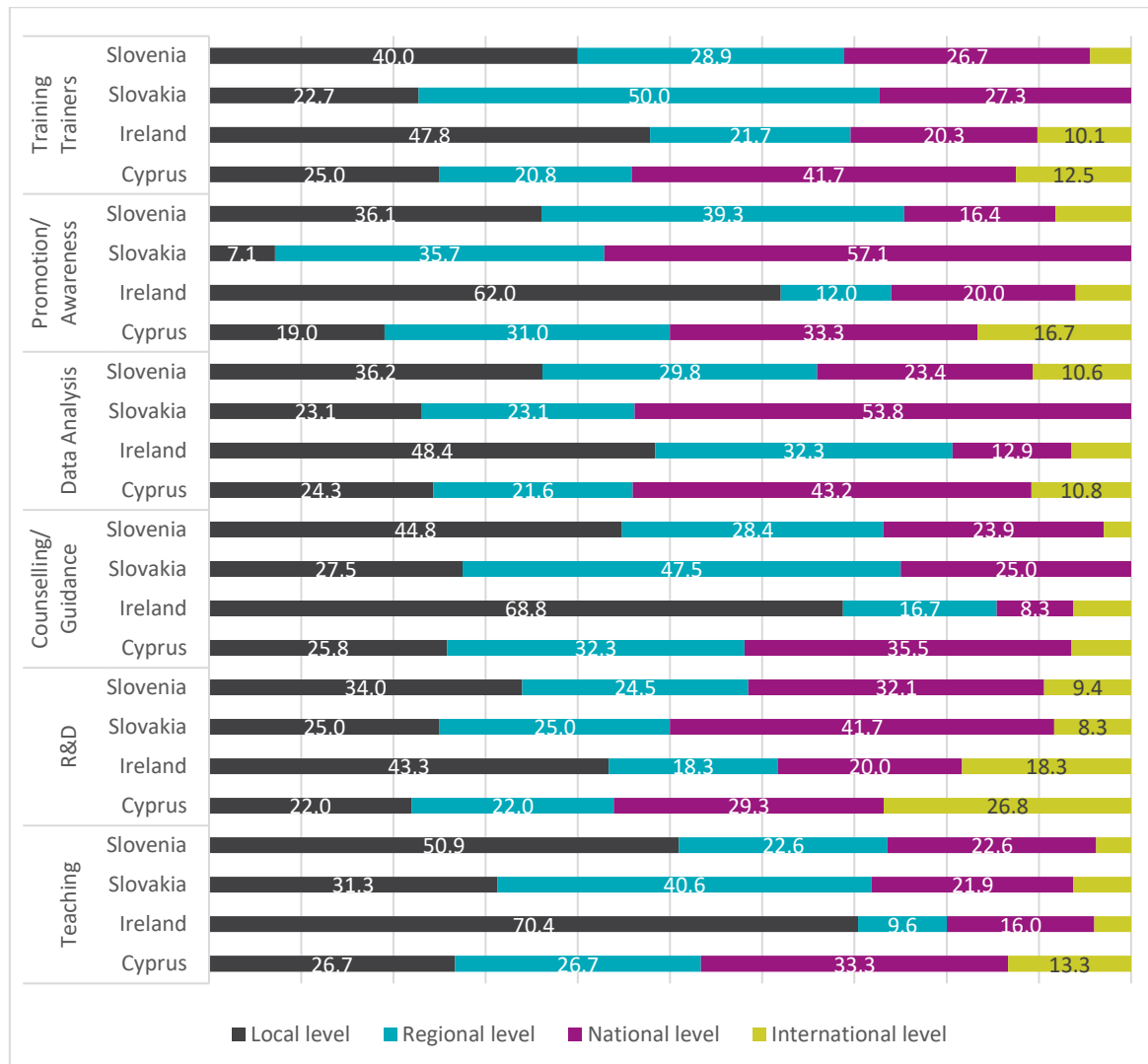|	Cyprus	Ireland	Slovakia	Slovenia
Teaching	14,6	32,6	24,1	16,3
R&D	20,0	15,7	9,0	16,3
Counselling	15,1	12,5	30,1	20,6
Data Analysis	18,0	8,1	9,8	14,4
Promotion	20,5	13,1	10,5	18,7
Training of Trainers	11,7	18,0	16,5	13,8
(answered/skipped)	(45/5)	(152/20)	(42/6)	(65/7)

Graph 3: Respondents by type of their work
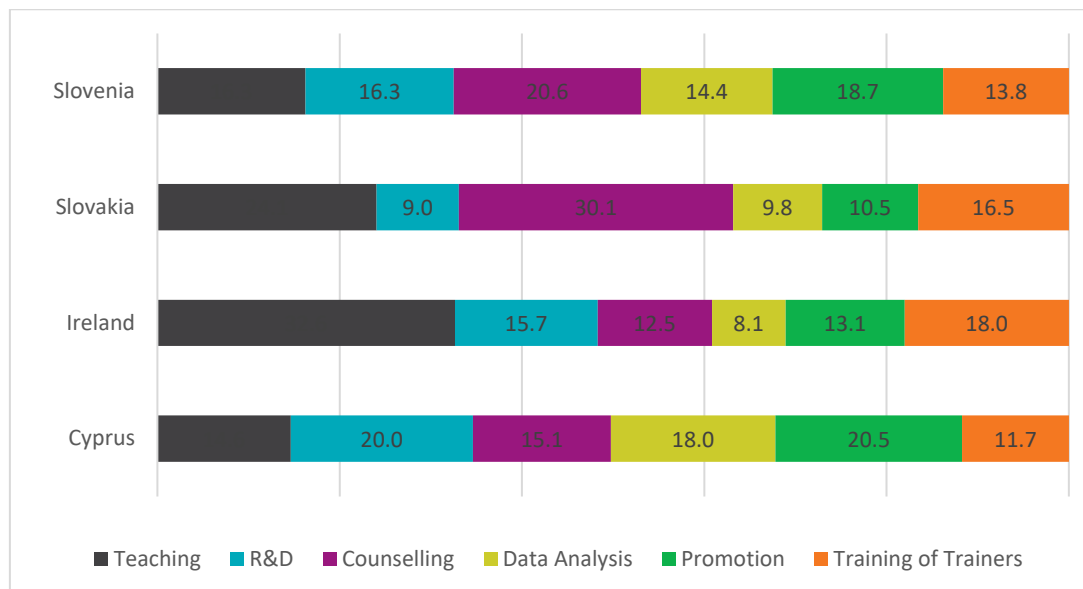
Main differences shown in Table 4 and Graph 3 are between shares of teachers in Ireland and counsellors in Slovakia, in comparison to other countries.

We can observe some differences between the four partners' countries regarding respondents' characteristics. For example, if we separate different types of work our respondents do (*Table 4, Graph 3*) into two categories: (1) "participants' oriented" (teaching, counselling and training of trainers) and (2) "subject oriented" (R&D, data analysis and promotion), we get the following ratios: Cyprus 42:58, Ireland 63:37, Slovakia: 71:29, Slovenia 51:49. But, nevertheless the presented data demonstrate that the vast majority of those who fulfilled the questionnaire are professionals or management staff. This enables us to make a conclusion that we can take their opinions reliable.

Following data, presented on *Graph 4* might look interesting and varying among countries. But, on the other hand it would not be justified to make any conclusions on this basis: partner countries are very differently structured regarding administrative boarders in terms of regions, local communities and definition of national levels. From this point of view we could only make some remarks when comparing all levels with international one:

Graph 4: Respondents by type and level of their work

|		Local level	Regional level	National level	International level
Training Trainers	Slovenia	40.0	28.9	26.7	
	Slovakia	22.7	50.0	27.3	
	Ireland	47.8	21.7	20.3	10.1
	Cyprus	25.0	20.8	41.7	12.5
Promotion/ Awareness	Slovenia	36.1	39.3	16.4	
	Slovakia	7.1	35.7	57.1	
	Ireland	62.0	12.0	20.0	
	Cyprus	19.0	31.0	33.3	16.7
Data Analysis	Slovenia	36.2	29.8	23.4	10.6
	Slovakia	23.1	23.1	53.8	
	Ireland	48.4	32.3	12.9	
	Cyprus	24.3	21.6	43.2	10.8
Counselling/ Guidance	Slovenia	44.8	28.4	23.9	
	Slovakia	27.5	47.5	25.0	
	Ireland	68.8	16.7	8.3	
	Cyprus	25.8	32.3	35.5	
R&D	Slovenia	34.0	24.5	32.1	9.4
	Slovakia	25.0	25.0	41.7	8.3
	Ireland	43.3	18.3	20.0	18.3
	Cyprus	22.0	22.0	29.3	26.8
Teaching	Slovenia	50.9	22.6	22.6	
	Slovakia	31.3	40.6	21.9	
	Ireland	70.4	9.6	16.0	
	Cyprus	26.7	26.7	33.3	13.3

Having in mind this, we can point out quite outstanding engagements of Cyprus on the international level as far as research, developmental and promotional work are concerned. On the field of R&D international involvement also Ireland is doing above the average.

3.1.1. Questions about target groups of participants

Table 5: Which is the primary TARGET GROUP of EMPLOYED adults for your adult education work?

	Cyprus	Ireland	Slovakia	Slovenia
Low qualified	19,8	46,9	19,3	24,5
Older (50+)	16,8	14,2	20,5	22,6
Immigrant workers	13,9	13,6	2,3	10,1
Persons with special needs	11,9	11,7	13,6	15,7
Professionals (engineers, highly skilled)	23,8	9,3	22,7	16,4
Management	13,9	4,3	21,6	10,7
(answered/skipped)	(44/6)	(146/26)	(42/6)	(65/7)

Graph 5: Which is the primary TARGET GROUP of EMPLOYED adults for your adult education work?
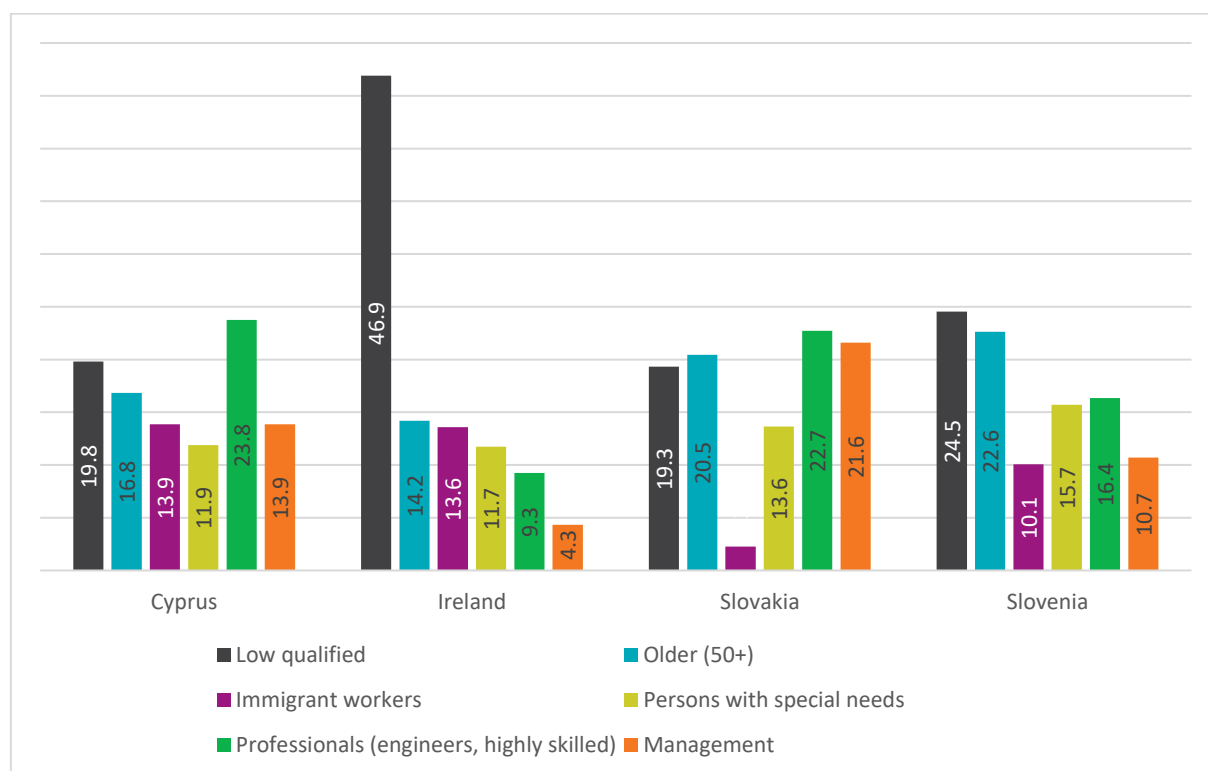

Among employed participants our respondents deal with, we can see two figures that deviate from others (*Table and Graph 6*): the share of low qualified employed included in adult education in Ireland (46,9%) and very law percentage of immigrant workers participating in education in Slovakia.

Table 6: Which is the primary TARGET GROUP of UNEMPLOYED adults for your adult education work?

|	Cyprus	Ireland	Slovakia	Slovenia
Long term unemployed (>12 m.)	21,1	29,0	15,7	20,7
Short term unemployed (<6 m.)	17,8	14,1	16,9	16,6
Youth (18-25 years)	25,6	25,5	20,5	15,9
Young adults (25-30)	20,0	18,6	25,3	24,1
Elder (50+ years)	15,6	12,8	21,7	22,8
(answered/skipped)	(43/7)	(145/27)	(41/7)	(64/8)

Graph 6: Which is the primary TARGET GROUP of UNEMPLOYED adults for your adult education work?
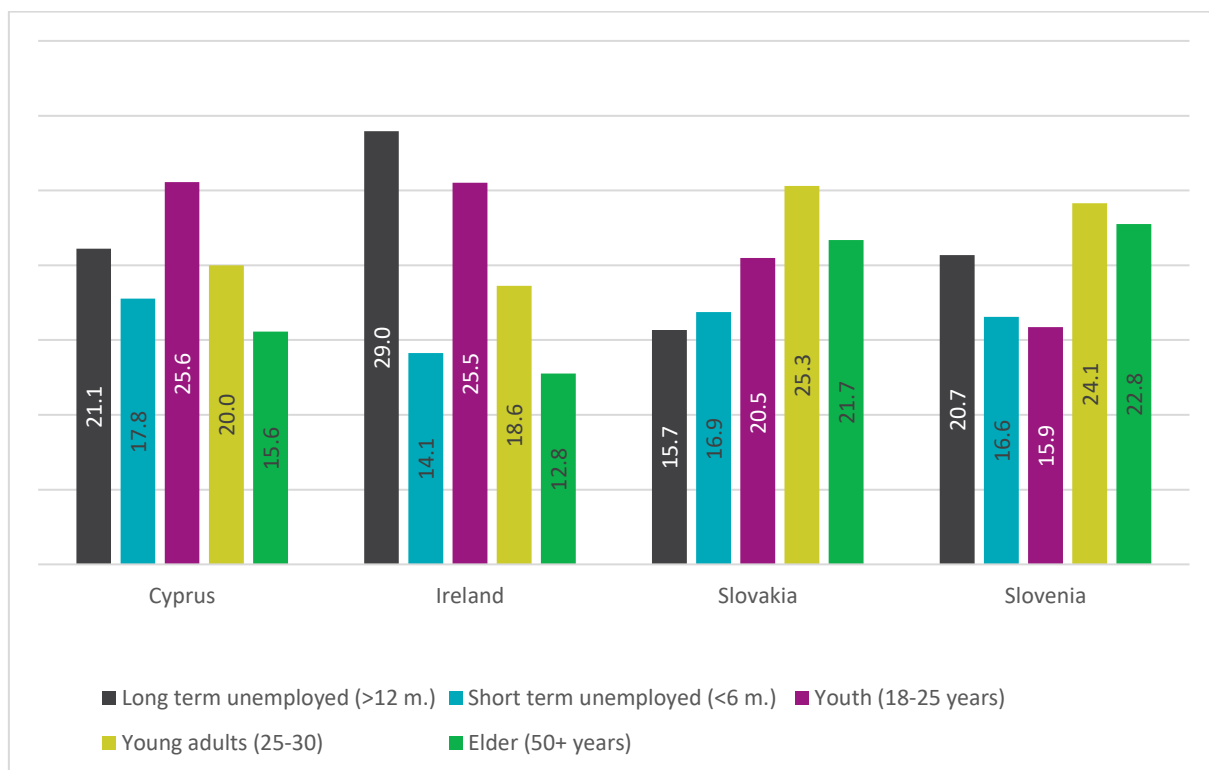
There are slight differences in specifics of unemployed included in educational or training programmes which can be seen on *Table and Graph 6.* Almost a third of participating unemployed in Ireland are long-term unemployed, while the share of elder unemployed is the lowest. In Slovenia there are not many young unemployed that are taking part in training activities.

Table 7: Are among adult learners you are dealing with, also members of specific ethnic groups?

	Cyprus	Ireland	Slovakia	Slovenia
NO	55,6	39,2	55,8	65,6
YES, other (immigrants, travellers, refugees)	11,1	41,1	9,3	3,1
YES, Roma participants	33,3	19,6	34,9	31,3
(answered/skipped)	(43/7)	(145/27)	(41/7)	(64/8)

Graph 7: Are among adult learners you are dealing with, also members of specific ethnic groups?
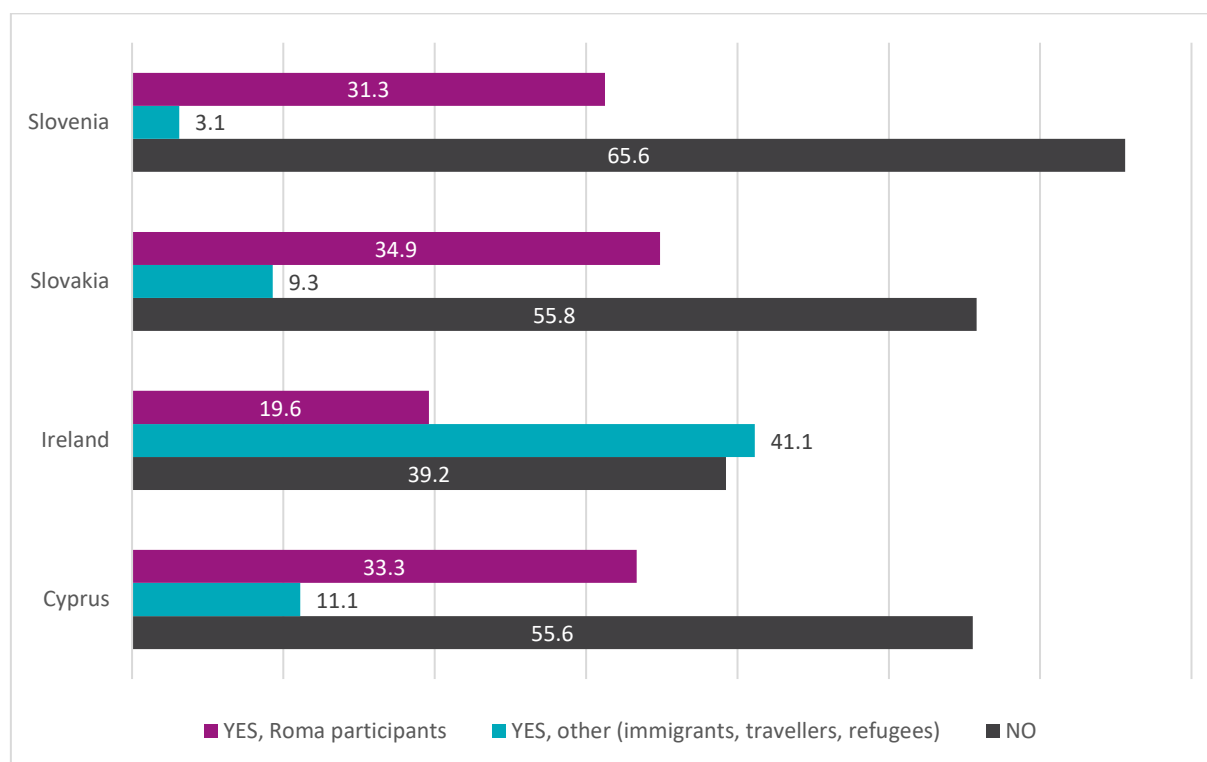
Among participants in adult education a substantial share represent members of specific ethnic groups which are very often considered to be marginalized and low qualified (*Table and Graph 7*). Apart from Roma people, such vulnerable groups are immigrants, travellers and refugees, which number will most probably increase in near future which means that the share of NO answers, which is very high in presented data for all partner countries (with the exeption of Ireland, which already faces the problem of low skilled immigrants, travellers and refugees), will decrease substantially.

3.1.2. Questions about offered and provided educational programmes

Table 8: What type/level of FORMAL educational programs are your adult learners attending?

	Cyprus	Ireland	Slovakia	Slovenia
Tertiary Education	17,8	14,0	13,5	8,7
Secondary Education	17,8	9,0	17,3	27,9
Further Continuing Education	24,8	45,5	42,3	18,3
Vocational Training	23,8	30,0	17,3	27,9
Elementary (Primary) School	15,8	1,5	9,6	17,3
(answered/skipped)	(42/8)	(139/33)	(39/9)	(58/14)

Graph 8: What type/level of FORMAL educational programs are your adult learners attending?

Elementary (Primary) School   Vocational Training   Further Continuing Education
Secondary Education   Tertiary Education

As regards formal educational programmes for adults (*Table and Graph 8*) we can note some differences among partner countries: Slovenia has the lowest share of *further continuing education* programmes and the highest share of *secondary education.* On the other hand it is obvious that Ireland is putting major emphasis on training for enhancing employability in comparison to educational attainment. Formal programmes, providend in Cyprus are equally distributed among offered choices.

Table 9: What kind of NON-FORMAL educational/learning programs are your adult learners attending?

	Cyprus	Ireland	Slovakia	Slovenia
Basic skills	18,9	26,7	16,3	16,7
Language of the country (for immigrants)	13,9	7,9	2,2	11,3
Foreign languages	13,9	2,1	14,1	17,2
ICT skills	20,5	23,7	18,5	16,1
Arts and Crafts	9,8	12,5	13,0	11,8
Social skills	13,9	21,3	29,3	17,7
Environment Protection, Sustainable Development	9,0	5,8	6,5	9,1
(answered/skipped)	(41/9)	(131/41)	(38/10)	(58/14)

Graph 9: What kind of NON-FORMAL educational/learning programs are your adult learners attending?
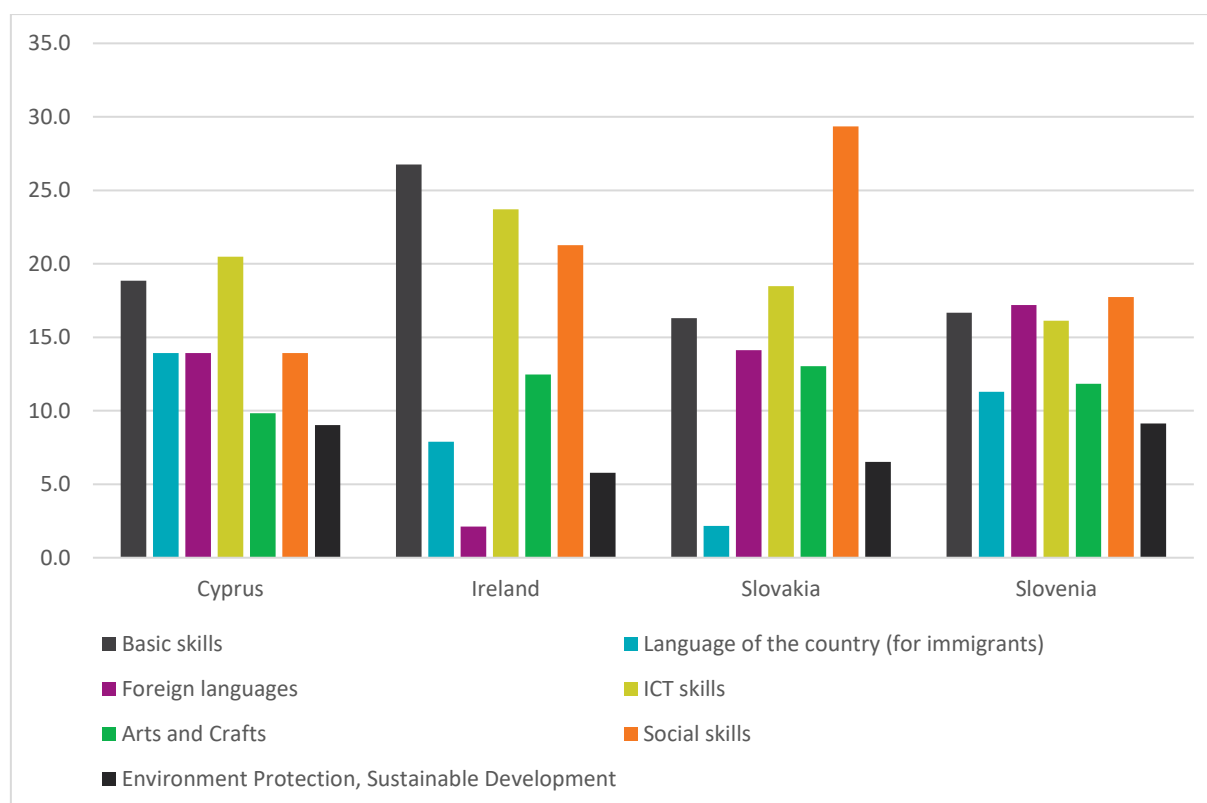
Regarding non-formal programmes we can see quite equally distributed values for all offered types in Cyprus and Slovenia, whilst in Ireland and Slovakia they encourage aquirement of social skills. In Ireland the share of basic skills is also above average. We have already mentioned above, that Slovakia does not have any experiences with immigrants and, presumably this is the reason for almost not providing any programmes for

immigrants. On the other hand it is obvious once more that English language is the first on the list of foreign language programmes which is probably the reason that there are almost none foreign language programmes provided in Ireland.

Graph 10: Are you measuring (valuating) participants' outcomes?

There is quite big difference between Cyprus and other countries regarding measurement of learning outcomes. In Cyprus almost a half of providers (*Graph 10*) are not measuring results what so ever. The share for Slovenia in this respect is also surprisingly high.

Table 10: Do you issue official certificates of any kind after successfully accomplished program?

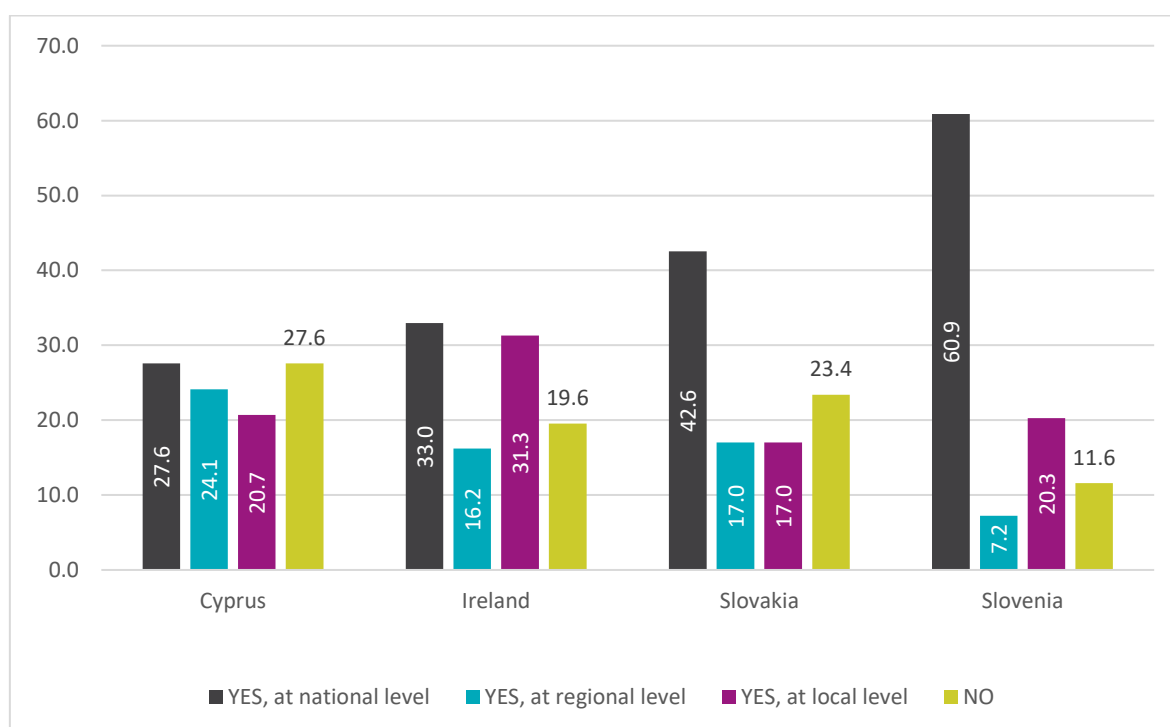|	Cyprus	Ireland	Slovakia	Slovenia
Yes, Formal Certificate of educational attainment	31,5	**62,4**	29,4	31,1
Yes, Certificate of programme participation	48,1	22,0	**54,9**	41,1
Yes, other type(s) of cerificate(s)	7,4	9,1	2,0	13,3
No, we don't issue any certificates	13,0	6,5	13,7	14,4
(answered/skipped)	(41/9)	(136/36)	(41/7)	(59/13)

Even greater differences can be observed on the *Table 10*. In Ireland almost two thirds of providers issue *formal certificates of educational attainment,* whilst in Cyprus and Slovakia about half of providers issue *certificates of programme participation.* We might assume that these big differences are based on differences in terminology

and, maybe, in some administrative regulations. For example, it looks like that in Ireland the issue certificates for educational attainment for participants in further continuing education and vocational training programmes, whilst in Slovenia such certificates are issued for primary, secondary and tertiary education programmes only.

**Table 11: Are you obliged to fulfill statistical or other data questionnaires about educational outcomes?**

	Cyprus	Ireland	Slovakia	Slovenia
YES, at national level	27,6	33,0	42,6	60,9
YES, at regional level	24,1	16,2	17,0	7,2
YES, at local level	20,7	31,3	17,0	20,3
NO	27,6	19,6	23,4	11,6
(answered/skipped)	(41/9)	(136/36)	(39/9)	(59/13)

Graph 11: Are you obliged to fulfill statistical or other data questionnaires about educational outcomes?

The share of providers that don't need to report any data on their performances is rather high in Cyprus and Slovakia (*Table* and *Graph 11*). Also in Ireland, where the percentage of NO answers is slightly lower, only one third of data on providers' performance is gathered on the national level. We believe that adequate statistical data collected and processed on national levels is indispensable for policy makers to make their decisions, projections and strategic plans based on solid ground.

Graph 12: Does your organisation set any targets for adult education participation and achievements?
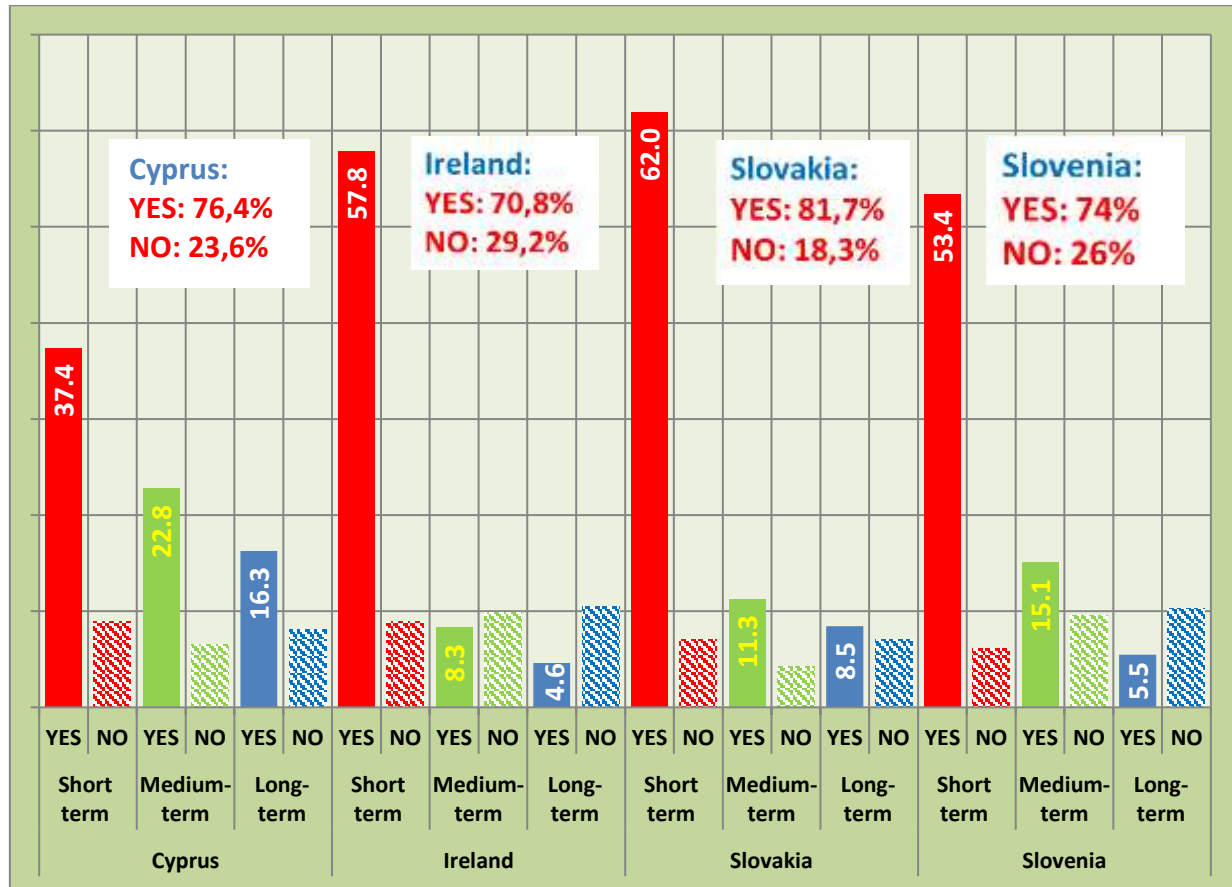
A lot of interesting information can be observed on *Graph 12*. On first sight we can see that there are not many differences among partner countries in percentage of providers that set targets for their performances on one hand and those who do not, on the other. But a closer look reveals one important feature: providers in Ireland, Slovakia and Slovenia set mainly short-term targets and very few long-term ones. The ratio between setting short-term and medium or long-term objectives is much more equally distributed in Cyprus.

Table 12: How frequently are these targets being reviewed?

	Cyprus	Ireland	Slovakia	Slovenia
	Regularly			
< 6 months	27,3	21,2	10	10,9
6 months to 1 year	21,2	18,3	23,3	28,3
> yearly	21,2	29,8	46,7	34,8
> 2 yearly	3	2,9	3,3	6,5
Not measured	27,3	27,9	16,7	19,6
	Occasionally			
< 6 months	7,7	11,4	21,4	21,4
6 months to 1 year	15,4	13,6	28,6	14,3
> yearly	34,6	13,6	0	28,6
> 2 yearly	3,8	9,1	7,1	3,6
Not measured	38,5	52,3	42,9	32,1
(answered/skipped)	(37/13)	(114/58)	(37/11)	(54/18)

Data presented on *Table 12* show that providers review their targets regularly each year, on average. About one half of providers are reviewing their targets once a year occasionally.

Table 13: How do you react if these targets are not met in larger scale?

	Cyprus	Ireland	Slovakia	Slovenia
žWe define actions to be taken	41,0	51,4	72,2	64,8
We adapt targets	30,8	16,8	22,2	14,8
We do not react	2,6	8,4	0,0	3,7
(We do not measure outcomes)	25,6	23,4	5,6	16,7
(answered/skipped)	(40/10)	(115/57)	(36/12)	(55/17)

Graph 13: How do you react if these targets are not met in larger scale?
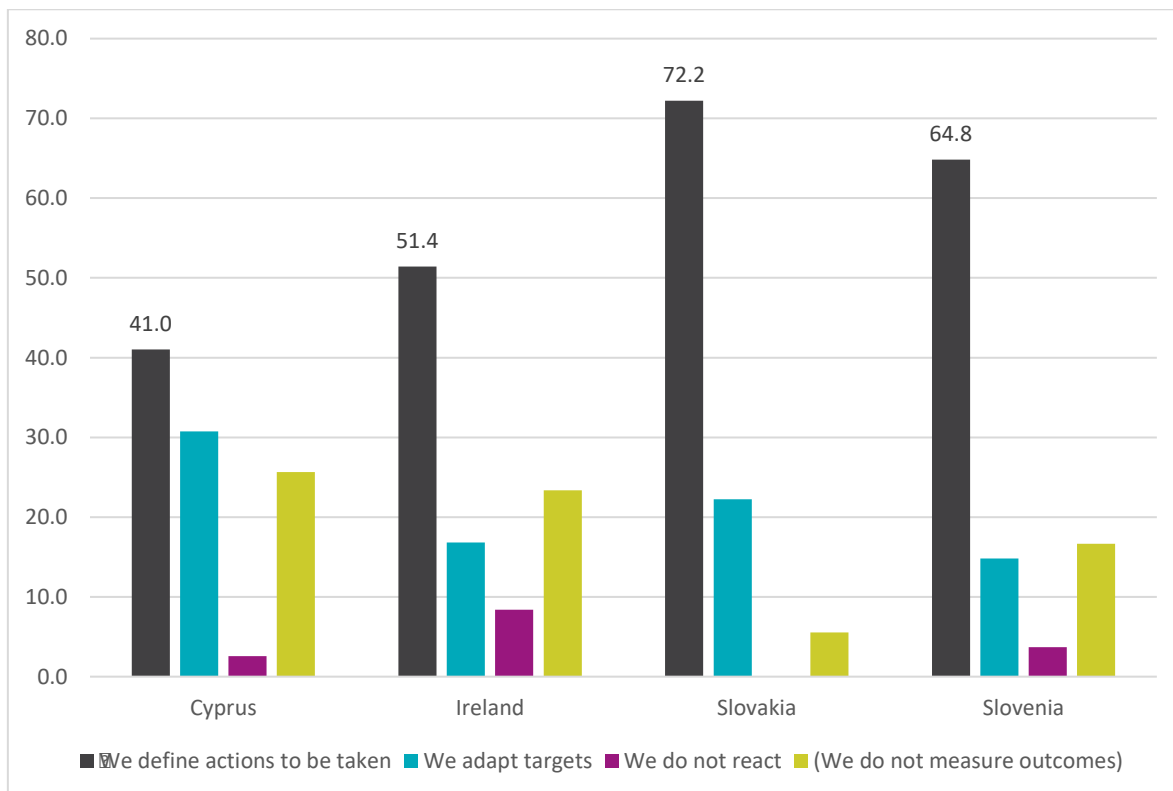
On *Table* and *Graph 13* we can see that providers in Slovakia and Slovenia mostly define actions to be taken if targets they've set are not met. In Cyprus the tendency is oriented towards adapting targets if these have not been realized.

Table 14: Are there any benchmarks set on the national level which are directly linked to your adult education activities that you are familiar with?

	Cyprus	Ireland	Slovakia	Slovenia
YES, there is a comprehensive strategic document, I am familiar with	**20,0**	**32,3**	**36,8**	**42,6**
YES, but I am not familiar with it in details	30,0	32,3	23,7	20,4
NO, we do not have any document of this kind	40,0	26,6	36,8	33,3
Other	10,0	8,9	2,6	3,7
(answered/skipped)	(40/10)	(124/48)	(38/10)	(54/18)

The highest percentage of providers that are familiar with an adult education strategic document has been reached in Slovenia, closely followed by Slovaks and Irish respondents (*Table 14*). (For me, being a Slovenian, it is quite strange that one third of providers are not aware of the existence of our Adult Education Master Plan.)

Q18: If YES, could you please write down the name of this document?

There were not very many answers to this question, and many of these few respondents have named different documents:

Cypriots have mentioned *Life-long learning Strategy 2014-2020* or *National Life-long Learning Strategy 2014-2020.*

Irish have named different documents, mainly linked to training and skills:

- *Further Education and Training Strategy 2014 to 2019*
- *Nationall Strategy for Literacy and Numeracy*
- *National Skills Strategy*
- *National Framework of Qualifications*
- *National Plan for Equity of Access*
- *Quality and Qualifications Ireland*
- *Solas Further Education and Training Strategy*

Slovene respondents have had much easier choice to make, because the national strategic document for adult education in this country really exists: *Adult Education Master Plan 2013-2020*, adopted by the Slovenian Parliament. All respondents that have answered to this question have named this document.

Slovaks mentioned *The concept of further education in the Slovak Republic and The National Programme of Education in the Slovak Republic - Millennium (2001).*

Table 15: Do you think that priorities, benchmarks and targets, set in your national strategic documents are feasible for your country?

	Cyprus	Ireland	Slovakia	Slovenia
YES, I think our targets and benchmarks are defined properly	73,7	64,4	79,2	69,0
NO, they are set to optimisticly and are not reachable	21,1	28,8	20,8	17,2
(answered/skipped)	(39/11)	(111/61)	(38/10)	(48/24)

Although there are quite big differences among respondents' perception of what a strategic document was (*see Q18*), they have mostly agreed that benchmarks and targets set in these documents, whatever their shape and range might be, are defined properly (*Table 15*). The lowest percentage of this agreement was expressed in Ireland, where almost 30% of respondents think, that benchmarks are not reachable.

Graph 14: Are target groups of adults that need special educational attention and treatment in your country, in your opinion, accordingly addressed and emphasized?
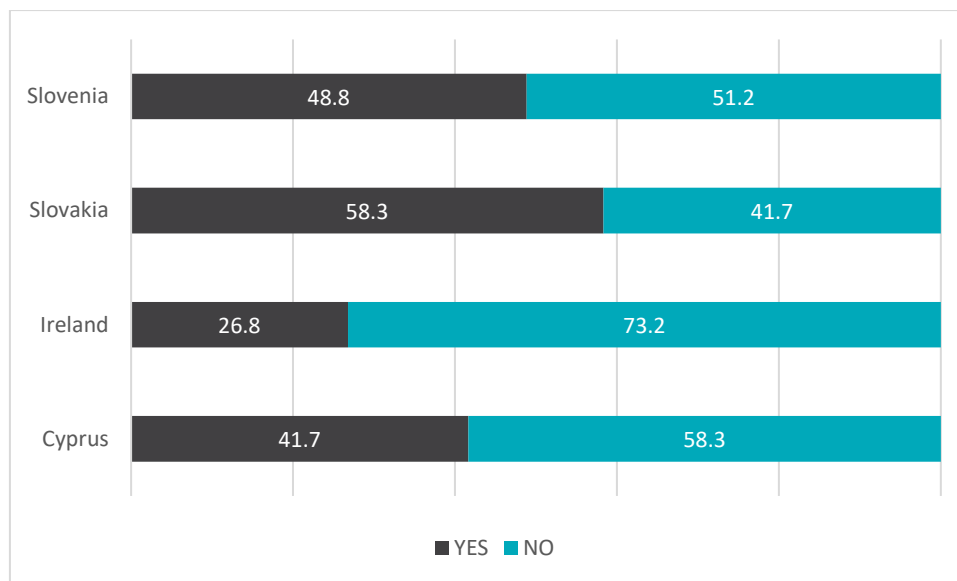

Almost three thirds o Irish respondents believe that targets groups which need special educational attention are not accordingly addressed in respective documents in their country (*Graph 14*). Also in other three observed countries, this percentage is very high – around a half.

For better understanding of these answers, we have asked which target groups have been neglected in this respect (*Table 16* and *Graph 15*):

Table 16: If NO, to which target groups should be paid more attention in your country?

|	Cyprus	Ireland	Slovakia	Slovenia
Unemployed	20,2	16,6	20,5	16,5
Elderly	14,1	9,9	21,7	19,6
NEET	15,2	17,0	16,9	15,5
Persons with special needs	15,2	16,6	13,3	13,4
Immigrants	13,1	12,4	2,4	10,3
Low skilled	13,1	16,6	16,9	18,6
Ethnic minorities	9,1	11,0	8,4	6,2
(answered/skipped)	(28/22)	(89/83)	(30/18)	(34/38)

Graph 15: If NO, to which target groups should be paid more attention in your country?
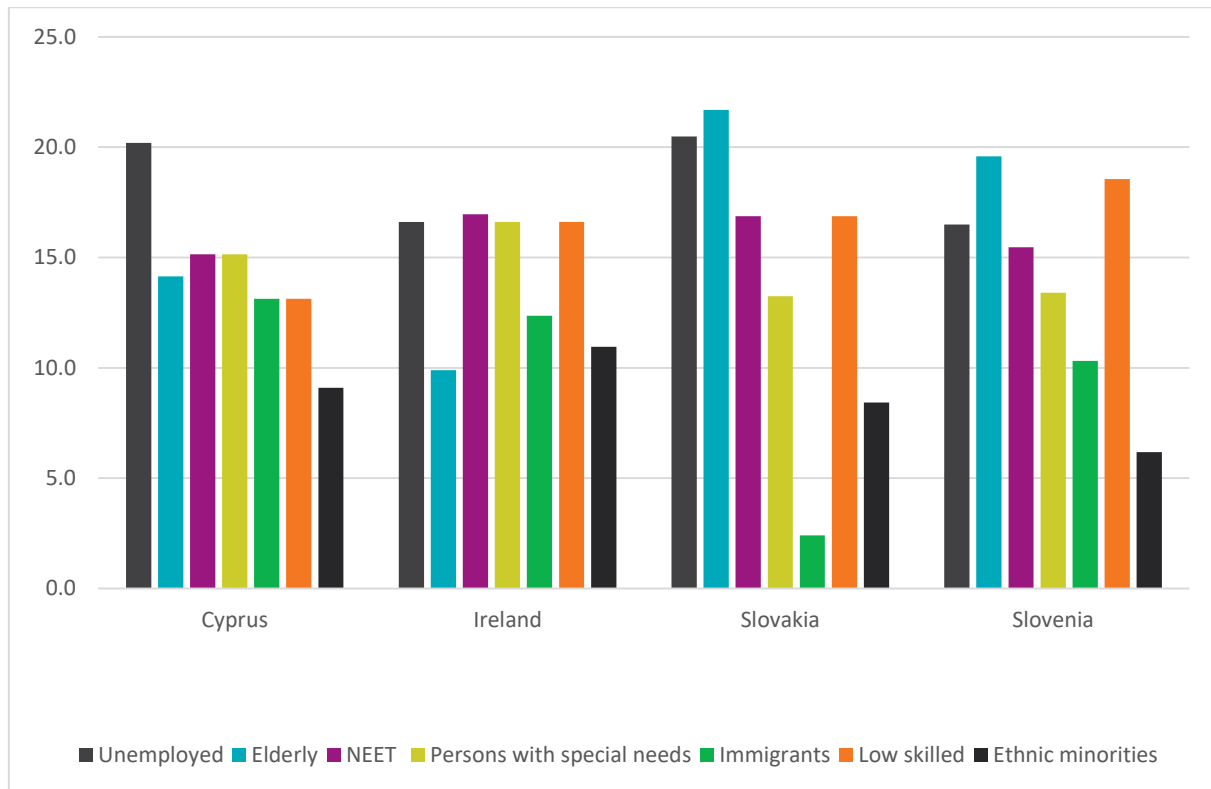
Respondents in all participating countries have put emphasis on unemployed, youngsters which are not employed but neither in education or training (NEET) and low skilled, but they have select also other choices quite frequently. We may point out slightly greater attention paid for elderly in Slovenia and Slovakia and almost no attention for immigrants paid in Slovakia.

Table 17: Do you think that statistical office and other agencies in your country collect and process data about adult education promptly and sufficiently?

	Cyprus	Ireland	Slovakia	Slovenia
ŽYES, the data are collected and processed promptly and sufficiently	15,8	19,8	22,2	31,9
Partially: data collection is satisfactory, but the data are not processed promptly	47,4	26,0	22,2	36,2
NO, the data are not collected sufficiently and satisfactory	21,1	36,5	22,2	17,0
(not familiar with data)	15,8	17,7	33,3	14,9
(answered/skipped)	(39/11)	(109/63)	(37/11)	(49/23)

Graph 16: Do you think that statistical office and other agencies in your country collect and process data about adult education promptly and sufficiently?
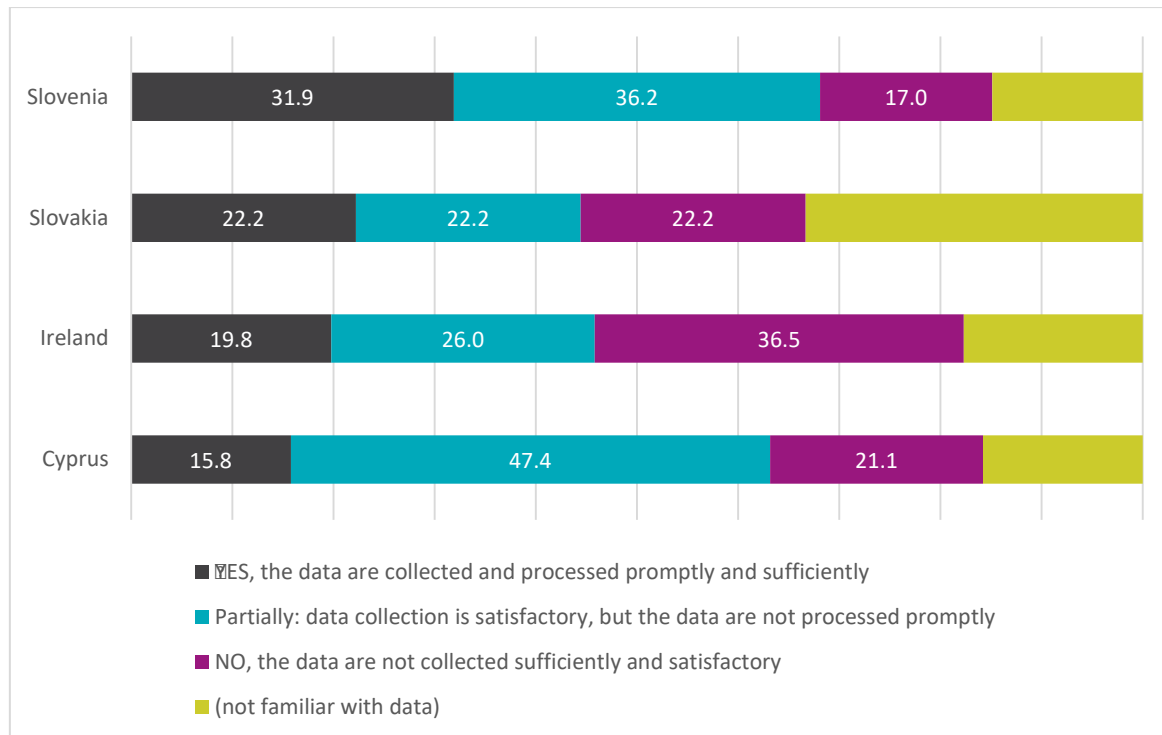
(*Table 17* and *Graph 16*): If we summing up the percentages of those respondents who think that statistical offices do their job promptly and sufficiently, and those who think thata they are working good, just not promptly enough, we see that a half Slovaks and Irish do not agree with these two statements, whilst two thirds of Slovenes and Cypriots are satisfied with performances of their statistical offices.

Table 18: What adult education needs do you identify as the most important to be satisfied with regards to AE programmes your organization is providing?

	Cyprus	Ireland	Slovakia	Slovenia
learn to learn	3,4	9,3	2,9	1,9
basic skills	**33,0**	**26,4**	**17,5**	**7,7**
personal growth	4,5	11,5	9,7	11,5
communication skills	3,4	1,8	1,9	3,8
environment protection	2,3	0,9	1,9	1,9
languages	4,5	0,9	6,8	9,6
arts	2,3	0,9	0,0	0,0
ICT	15,9	6,6	5,8	5,8
etrepreneurship	2,3	0,0	1,9	13,5
health	1,1	4,0	1,9	0,0
job related	**15,9**	**17,6**	**24,3**	**23,1**
social skills	8,0	7,5	8,7	5,8
formal education	3,4	2,6	2,9	0,0
career guidance		3,1	0,0	1,9
community education		7,0	1,9	0,0
other			11,7	13,5

In *Table 18* we present answers to open question (*Q28*). We have sorted answers into 16 categories. Two major groups of categories can be identified: (1) job related (basic skills, job related programmes etc.), and (2) litteracy or personal growth (learn to learn, ICT, personal growth, communication, social skills etc.). It is very obvious that a vast majority respondents agree, that job related skills are the most important.

Q29: What are the main challenges that your organization face with regards to the management of your organization?

Majority of respondents in all partner countries have emphasized three major problems: financing, staff and positioning the adult education sector within education in general. Additionally **Irish** and **Slovak** respondents have mentioned bureaucracy, **Slovene** the problem of quality assurance and outreaching vulnerable groups, while **Cypriots** have emphasized facility problems – lack of adequate premises.

Q30: What measures do you face for achieving adults' participation in training activities?

There were not many respondents that have answered to this open questions. Among those who have, most frequently used words and terms were: *promotion, accessibility, collaboration between stakeholders in local environment, meeting needs of potential learners, personal approach to each learner* on one hand and *lack of interest and motivation* on the other.

Q31: What tools/processes should be provided in order to increase adults' participation in education and training in a lifelong learning perspective?

Let us quote some interesting suggestions:

Cyprus:

Adults have to be convinced that future participation in education and training is of their benefit;
Better managment of funds, motives to those most in need and social groups at risk;
Certificates; Dissemination; Flexible working hours; Motivation;
Online learning tools; Sponsored fees.

Ireland:
Quality assurance tools; Career guidance; Childcare; Training support; Additional andragogical training for teachers; Soft skills; Funding for nonaccredited education; Building greater links between compulsory and lifelong learning; Focus on employability; Free access and better information given; Changes in assessment methods; Changing teaching methods.

Slovenia:
Cooperation among providers and stakeholders; Promotion of occupational qualifications and new job profiles; Guidance support in guidance centres for adults at reagional level; Outreach approaches in guidance; Involvement of target groups in the planning of activities, Intersectoral coordination; Programmes related to labor market needs; Encouraging employers to support employee training, Raising employability; Voucher.

Slovakia:
Support employers (tax relief) thus, employers could encourage their employees to enhance their education; Low-interest loans for education.

Q32: Do you have any suggestions/recommendations on how the Adult Education and Training sector in your country could be improved?

Cyprus:
Developpment of a comprehensive strategy; Distinction between VET and Adult Education; Provide more opportunities and better dissemination so that adults are aware of these programmes.

Ireland:
Better networking and more investment in Community Enterprises; Employ more adult educators and less teachers from the formal sector; Extra funds to employ support staff; Recognition of non-formal, infomal and formal learning; Keep employers engagemnet with courses - links with industry; Linking AE to employment needs; Modules to be carried out over a number of years; More focus on process of education, less on formal national outcomes;

Slovenia:

Adjustment to labour market needs; Implementing bottom-up principle: decision makers should get familiar with the situation on the ground before taking decisions.

Slovakia:

Cooperation with businesses, employment agencies; Designing and adopting a functional system of recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

Q33: Is there anything else that you would like to add regarding Adult Education and Training in your country?

Ireland:

Adult Education and Training is reasonably available if you live in an urban environment and have access to public transport or your own transport. In the rural environment this can be extremely difficult due to poor public transport. Also there is a certain focus on "employability" and the 'need' for courses to be focused on up-skilling people for the labour market. This is only one aspect of life long learning and should not be the focus, particularly in relation to special needs participants.

The current system is highly focussed on meeting national targets, based on the needs of specific industries; it would be preferable to recognise the autonomy of adults, and to give them opportunities to decide on, and find their own training and education/build on their own interests rather than squeezing them nto boxes they may not fit.

Yes, it should be seen as lifelong learning and education, rather than specific skills training. it shuld be congruent with human development and learning to learn, rather than short-term job skills.

Slovenia:

A lot of things are very wrong, a lot of public funding goes to the privat sector, public adult education institutions are not proparly guided by the state and are more or less on their own in the local environment, trying to respond to the local needs and the state many times doesnt have a clue what is going on.
Adult education is to heavily modeled on school system and in this respect rigid and not flexible.
in the financing of adult education there is still given too much emphasis on education only for the purposes of labor and employment, while forgetting about the importance of learning for well-being of individual and society.

In twenty years we did big progress, but now due to the good results there is not enough understanding among policy makers that there is a need for further development.

Slovakia:

It is hard, because a lot of people don't have work and they have much more oportunities to learn (free courses, trainings etc.) but most of working people do not have time to learn and they are just happy when they have a free sunday... its all about necessities and priorities.

3.2. Individual interviews

3.2.1. Target group:

The main purpose of acquiring information by conducting individual interviews was to gain a closer insight into policy makers' attitude towards adult education in each of participating countries: what priorities they consider as most important ones and what challenges they identify as crucial for the future development of life-long learning in general and adult education in particular.

For collecting information and opinions as reliable as possible it was expected that each partner choose 5(five) of the most influential policy decision makers in their countries among those that would be willing to accept the invitation for interview, of course.

Partners in **Cyprus** have managed to conduct interviews with highly positioned officers at the Foundation for the Management of European Lifelong Learning Programme, Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance and agency Innovade: Leadership in innovation

Partners in **Slovakia** have conducted interviews with representative of the Ministry of Education, national coordinator of Epale platform, responsible for national coordination of the implementation of the European Agenda for Adult Learning, National Lifelong Learning Institute, director of the Centre for continuing education, Comenius University Bratislava, and director of National Lifelong Learning Institute.

Partners in **Ireland** interviewed representatives of National State Agencies QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland) and SOLAS (Further Education and Training agency), two providers from National learning Network, one from Youthreach and one from Adult Education Services (6 in total)

Partners in **Slovenia** have conducted interviews with highly ranked officers at the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport and the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affair and Equal Opportunities, the director of the main Adult Education institute, and with head of the Council of Experts of Adult Education, appointed by the Minister for Education, Science and Sport.

Partners from **EAEA** have conducted interview with the representative of EARLALL – European Association of Regional and Local Authorities for Lifelong Learning.

3.2.2. Questions:

Question for interviews were formed in advance, following the content and aims of the project. The purpose of forming a uniform list of questions was to identify main differences in partner countries as regards issues in the field of adult education that policy is addressing for the future improvements and development on one hand and, even more important, to find similarities and bases for common approaches.

The list of questions and summarized responses of interviewees:

A. Policy priorities:

What are your policy priorities for adult education and training?

What are your main policy, programme, or other initiatives related to adult education and training?

What are your main policy, programme, or research questions related to adult education and training?

What kinds of statistical data are useful in addressing these policy priorities? (Outcomes of adult education and training)

According to answers given by interviewees the issue of **policy priorities** in the field of adult education can be devided into 5(five) parts:

A1) Legislative framework and equality: all Slovene interviewees have pointed out that the main role of legislation of anykind is to protect the vulnarable. In the case of adult education it means that legislation and corresponding documents should enable, attract and motivate low-skilled and other marginalized groups to participate in learning activities. In the case of Cyprus, the interviewees pointed out that »the greatest challenge and priority is that, Cyprus does not have a comprehensive Strategy in the field of Adult Education«, in Slovakia »the greatest challenge and priority in the field of adult education is currently a new law on further education«, while »the Master Plan for Adult Education in the Republic of Slovenia for the period 2013-2020 is the most important document which defines adult education policy in Slovenia«. According to interviewees' oppinion it is obvious that some formal strategic document is needed in every country for defining the direction in which policy would point its decisions, measures and instruments for avoiding situations where »the national policy is disconnected from the local learner's need« although the mission statement of the National Agency for Further Education and Training provision »…the provision of 21st century high quality Further Education and Training programmes which are responsive to the needs of learners and the requirements of a changed and changing economy« is still appropriate (Ireland).

An indication that a clearer and detailed strategic policy orientation would be welcome can be understood by reading this remark: »A significant divergence of perspective is evidenced in the experience of those who deliver education and training to adults, particularly to those who are already marginalised from formal education systems, and high level managers of FET provision and accreditation. This disconnect is causing a demotivation and continued demoralisation among frontline teachers working with the most disadvantaged learners. While these interviewees do not question the value of providing high level skill education and training that enables people to secure quality employment they are strong voices highlighting the danger of a split society where the disadvantaged are impoverished and trapped in increasingly hopeless situations.«(Ireland) This means that policy makers do not consider the situation on the field which can be understood that there is a lack of reliable strategic insight in the situation on the national level. On the other hand it was mentioned, that exestence of a clear and comprehensive strategic document on the national level (which is the case in Slovenia), can discourage the local decision makers to make their own mid-term and long-term plans for enhancing initiatives in the field of adult education.

Interviewees in Belgium (EAEA) pointed out that "although there currently seem to be a momentum in which policy-makers pledge for more democracy, intercultural dialogue and social cohesion, the contribution of adult education to achieve those objectives is still not fully recognized."

A2) Impact of adult education on raising human capital on one hand, and social capital on the other: interviewees have expressed major differences in defining main objectives of policy interventions in the adult

education's »market«. »Adult Education is confused with that of VET, this is a sector where there is no clear definition of Adult Education and Vocational Education.(...) Policy and the main question is in fact when one strategy falls under the Adult Education and when it falls under of Vocational Education?« So, if one of the most important priorities is to increase the participation of adults in lifelong learning (to achieve EU benchmark), this goal could be met by enhancing low skilled adults to participate in learning activities which would facilitate access to the labour market (Cyprus).

In Ireland »the particular emphasis in government and state agency policies and programmes is given to engagement with the market and the preparation of people for employment. This is the overarching, the dominant, and the driving force for education and training (FET). But »interviewees who are managing and teaching in AL/FET note that within this policy the needs of a functional social and democratic society do not have the same precedence and the soft/social skills that are acquired through the educational cultural transfer are not getting the required attention.

The outcome of less attention to democratic and citizenship skills does not become evident immediately. It often takes some time for the effects to develop. Interviewees who are at the frontline of teaching in AL/FET note the dangers of increasing marginalisation of learners who do not prosper in the formal compulsory education system and the knock-on effects for basic service provision and society cohesion.«(Ireland)

In Slovenia, the main focus of all publicly regulated and financed activities on the field of adult education is centred on empowering vulnerable groups, in terms of enabling them to play an active role in the society, by raising their basic skills and educational attainment and consequently increasing their employability. These activities include counselling, guidance, validation of prior learning and other supporting services on one hand, and provision of specially adapted basic skills programmes on the other. Interviewees representing labour market authorities have put emphasis on employment as basic positive outcome of adult education activities, which means that labour market is the main actor which forms the demand for programmes and defines theirs suitability, whilst decision makers from educational sector believe that the right way for raising employability is increasing basic skills and raising educational attainment which would enable members of vulnerable groups to adapt to labour market needs and find suitable jobs by themselves. Regardless to legitimate bases for both point views, due to financial shortages and high unemployment rate, the main share of public finances is given to job-related programmes. Shrinking opportunities for offering general non-formal basic skills programmes to vulnerable groups and reducing and adapting the supply mainly to the current situation on the labour market could have long-term impact on the social cohesion.

These dilemmas are similarly exposed also by interviewees in Ireland »… there is a great danger if learning becomes corporatized or marketized such that the agenda changes and is not learner centred. (…) the policy of adult learning needs to remain inclusive recognising the range of challenges for learners in the environment in which they live.« (Ireland) »(…) because immediate costs and shorter term planning are so influential in policy-making, providing appropriate education to marginalised learners is in danger of being marginalised itself from market focused education for the economy.«(Ireland)

»It should be clear that adult education providers and organizations are advocating for more recognition of the non-formal learning's benefits, not only for learners, but also for the society as a whole. Policy-makers should

be convinced of the necessity of a long-term perspective on education policies and a cross-sectorial approach to that.«(EAEA)

A3) Supporting activities: one of the most challenging issues in the field of adult education regulatory instruments is adopting the adequate system of recognition, valuation and certification of non-formal learning outcomes. »Lifelong learning did not find its application in practice and therefore it is necessary to modify them again so as to ensure their functioning: for example the system of recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. « (Slovakia) »Evidence on qualification made in the informal system should be issued by a single institution authorized by law so that all evidence could have equal weight. « (Slovakia)

The issue of recognition of prior non-formal learning outcomes is present in Slovenia's discussions focused on further development of adult education legislation as well. This issue is closely connected with some other supporting activities, such as counselling and guidance. » (…) a main priority in the field of adult education is (…) the need to improve the system of lifelong guidance and the need to legislatively define the lifelong guidance as a support mechanism for AE development. « (Slovakia)

But there are some threating challenges which may occur if these instruments are implemented not elaborated carefully. »The focus on the market is also driving towards a greater emphasis on standardisation and credentialisation. Interviewees who were teaching noted that there is an increasing bureaucratization, an increasing focus on having an assessed outcome at the end of learning cycles(certification), and a decreasing trust that the teacher doing " …the best that the learner". Interviewees suggest that teachers are not being trusted as professionals. Because of this lack of trust there is an increasing burden of paperwork to prove, over and over again, that they (the teachers) are meeting the standards and targets set in faraway halls of bureaucracy. In particular, some interviewees at the frontline of teaching identified that certification does not provide an adequate means of counting soft learning achievements. « (Ireland)

A4) Quality assurance: when discussing this issue, most commonly named principle is »accreditation«. »Although the current law covers an area of further education, it has a significant deficiencies especially in the lack of state control of institutions providing further education. The new Act aims to improve the quality of educational institutions by introducing a certification process for educational institutions. (…) it is necessary to improve the accreditation process in order to promote quality assurance in the field of AE.«(Slovakia) Accreditation as an instrument to establish national system for quality assurance of education is envisaged also in Slovenian new legislation proposals.

A5) Statistical data: »any data related to the profile of those participating in adult education and training programmes are very useful for identifying strengths and weaknesses of the existing policies. In addition, data on those that do not participate in education, eg. unemployed.«(Cyprus) Statistical data would be needed not only at European and national level, but also at regional and local level, such as the data on effects of adult education (with emphasis on non-formal education) on employability, justice and equality of access of vulnerable groups to education and training.(Slovenia)

B. Challenges and further needs

What are the main challenges faced at local, regional and national level with regards to adult education management?

What are your main questions related to adult education and training that you would need to be answered?

- In Cyprus, the Sectors' Stakeholders identified the following challenges:
- Lack of comprehensive National adult education strategy
- Systematization and monitoring of the field.
- Lack of effective synergies among the institutions that provide education/training to adults.
- Insufficient targeting in groups that are at risk of social exclusion based on the real needs of the participants.
- Lack of interest between adults.

But, due to the lingering effects of the crisis on the labour market, the link between training and access to the labour market has weakened - thus further is no longer considered as the means towards obtaining work or career progression (for those who have job). At the same time, enterprises and organizations have reduced or even abolished their training budgets.

The Further Education and Training Authority in Ireland (SOLAS) has set six high level goals:

- 1. Enabling delivery of skills for the economy;
- 2. Supporting active inclusion;
- 3. Empowering learners and employers;
- 4. Influencing FET policy and practice through generating intelligence and supporting innovation and entrepreneurship;
- 5. Building sector capacity and responsiveness;
- 6. Building SOLAS capability and organisational effectiveness;
- One additional goal was mentioned (not by SOLAS):
- 7. setting the functioning system of the recognition of the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning outcomes;

The importance of these goals was not questioned during any interview but the application of these goals without an informed understanding of the contextual challenges of delivering education and training is problematic. Learning itself needs to have benchmarks that are appropriate to the target learners of the programme. It was noted that there are difficulties to deliver enough programmes to reach these high level goals within an environment of austerity and staffing stagnation. This might suggest the need to strengthen the mutual co-operation of relevant stakeholders and the need to develop tools for the financing of adult education. (Ireland)

One of the Irish interviewees exposed a challenge: »Assessing needs of adult learners and designing programmes for progression cannot easily be simplified onto a one-dimensional plane; a written plan. They noted the importance of the experiential skills of the teacher who can assess learners'needs and design plans appropriate for the progression of the learner. They noted that the variety of needs suggest that increasing standardisation will further marginalise some learners and contribute to the creation of ghettos of disadvantage.«

In Belgium (EAEA) interviewees exposed the problem of cooperation: »There are different stakeholders involved in adult education supply, provision and management, each with its own role, tasks, needs and interest

(non-formal and formal educational providers, social partners, policy-makers etc.). In some cases, these stakeholders are competing in defining desirable outcomes of adult education, as well as they are competing for the same limited scope of resources. According to the EAEA Board members this hinders the effectiveness of adult education policies.« So, there is a need, wished by many, for effective formal structures or informal mechanisms for cooperation and exchange among providers.

»However, there is an issue of competitiveness among providers. The more and more diverse they are the less a dialogue is likely to take place. In particular, this is true for providers working in different sectors (i.e. formal, non-formal, VET). When a positive attitude is there, a political or logistical support is often missing.

There should be structures that allow providers to better cooperate and assure the permeability of the sector, especially to allow disadvantaged learners to make the one step up through adult learning.« (EAEA)

Some Slovene interviewees were critical towards the current situation and prospective of this sector in the country. »Adult education is affected by marketization and privatization as well as reduction of public resources. Many times European policies in the field of adult education have influence on Slovenian without any serious reflection and reconsideration.«

According to interviewees, basic challenges for the future of adult education in Slovenia are:

- to set-up national system for validation of non-formal adult education;
- to establish national system for quality assurance of education;
- to up-to-date the legislation in the field of adult education;
- linking of different sectors (coordination of several ministries);
- preparation of national strategy – Skills strategy initiative;
- development of national system in the field of adult education (establishment of public network);
- competencies (project PIAAC);
- on-line testing of individual competencies (on the basis of PIAAC);
- data on employers' experience in the field of adult education.

C. Participation of adults

What are the main challenges that you face regarding adult participation?

How adults' participation in adult education and training can be further enhanced at local, regional and national level?

Do you think that the learning needs of all adults are met? If yes, how you ensure this? If not, what kind of resources do you think should be developed?

How do you ensure equal access and participation of adults in adult education and training (e.g. migrants, elderly people, low skilled adults etc.)?

Interviewees in partner countries have given a variety of different answers to questions listed above. But, regardless this variety, all answers have one common bond: in none of these countries, the participation rate in adult learning is satisfactory.

Now, different explanations will be presented as well as different approaches for addressing this issue.

In Cyprus »the Sectors' Stakeholders identified the following challenges:

- Lack of coherence policies to address adults at risk of social exclusion;
- Lack of incentives (e.g. financial motives) for those that must participate in education and training but do not have the necessary means to do so;
- Professional development of adult teaching staff should be further enhanced so as to develop a well-trained and effective group of practitioners who will address the needs of their learners in the most effective way and they will achieve qualitative learning outcomes;
- Lack of funding;
- Lack of interest;
- The large numbers on practical issues;
- The mentality and the culture of adults who often have unreasonable requirements.«

In Ireland interviewees have pointed out some possible solutions or initiatives that could enhance the participation of adult learners:

- A wider range of provision of quality courses delivered by quality assured educational providers.
- Robust data sets to ensure the needs of learners are linked to the needs of employers and to
- wider society.
- Greater levels of support for learners to progress into education and progress into employment or higher education.

One of the Irish interviewees has presented an interesting point: »(…) new and innovative courses that encourage participants to progress to employment or higher education, providing support for entrepreneurship, and enhancing the benefits of adult learning provision (FET) for the employer will exclude those not ready for progression into the market, and for those for whom the market is not a viable final outcome. In particular, (…) older learners, learners who had significant family commitments (such as carers), learners who lived in disadvantaged and remote areas where access to employment was very difficult, and particularly learners whose culture is antagonistic to mainstream education engagements being excluded.« Valuating this observation positively, it practically exposes the main cornerstone for enhancing participation in learning activities: programmes should be tailor made, because the needs of different vulnerable groups differ substantially.

So, what are the main questions related to adult education and training that need to be answered? One of Irish respondents replied:

- How can we provide better labour market data to help participants understand their employment options?
- How we can better support adult learner transitions from one educational sector to another, particularly further education into higher education?
- How can we widen access so that the maximum number of learners can access the learning opportunities they need at certain point in their lives?

In Slovakia respondents are convinsed that participation will be enhanced by adopting new legislation:

- it is necessary to create legislative conditions to ensure that adults can acquire new qualifications as a result of AE and that employers will recognize the qualifications.
- lack motivation, which is a big problem should be solved by a new law on further education which is being prepared under the auspices of the Ministry of Education.

Slovak respondents have also pointed out that »promotion of adult education could also increase the participation rate.«

In Slovenia, the main challenge regarding adult participation is how to attain the most vulnerable groups to participate in adult education and training. The participation rate in Slovenia decreased heavily in last years. According to interviewees, main obstacles for participation of adults in learning activities are:

- finances (decrease of purchasing power and limited scope of financial resources)
- contribution of employers (to assure financing and conditions for education of their employees e.g. adapting their working time, enabling them to take part in education and training)
- the offer of programmes is dispersed, not suitable and not adapted to the educational needs. The adults need tailor made programmes connected to their working place and local environment and also the programmes which link general and vocational skills.

Adults' participation in adult education and training can be further enhanced:

- by stable financing of public network of adult education providers
- by additional promotion and motivation

D. Other issues

Do you think that the level of cooperation among the several stakeholders of the field is satisfactory?

As mentioned by respondents in Cyprus, »the cooperation among the several stakeholders is necessary and should be further enhanced in order to create a shared vision of the field of adult education and achieve the successful management and monitoring of the sector. It would be welcome if enterprises could be more actively involved in providing work based learning opportunities.«

Ireland: »Increased collaboration among further education and training teachers may bring a greater coherence to the wider benefits of adult learning through learning from others experiences.«

»The education providers of adult education in Slovenia are not well connected, the result is an imbalance and a lack of coordination among providers (same type of programmes are provided by public and private providers of adult education at local level).«

How quality assurance of the field can be ensured?

The quality assurance issue was emphasized only by Slovenian respondents.

»National system for quality assurance of the whole education – and inside it adult education should be developed. Self-evaluation of public organisations in the field of adult education is already ensured within the project OQEA (Offering Quality Education to Adults) in which all public organisations in the field of adult education in Slovenia are included. The quality is assessed with the combination of self-evaluation of

programmes and external evaluation of educational programmes and organisations leaded by independent national body. The role of the external evaluator is to facilitate, coach and mediate communication and discussion among different stakeholders. It is important that evaluation is based on intensive participation, discussion and negotiation among all involved parties. This makes this kind of evaluation reliable.«

Is the financing of the sector (either public or private) effectively managed or further actions should be taken to increase its efficiency?

Ireland: »In a country that is emerging from a significant recession there is competition for resources. Therefore non-mainstream AL & FET has a significant challenge to retain adequate resources to provide its services. If the focus is on the market and unemployment a greater percentage of the resources assigned to AL & FET learning will be diverted in that direction for immediate return. However, the strategic challenges are much wider. The main challenges faced at local, regional and national level with regards to adult education management are: 1.Funding, 2.Cohesion, 3.Capacity, 4.Integration, 5.Progression and 6.Best practice.«

Slovenia »There is no transparency in the financing of the sector. The financing of the sector is not effectively managed.

The educational offer for adults is unevenly distributed across the country; there are noticeable differences between regions and municipalities, between urban and rural areas concerning the quantity and quality of the education on offer.«

One of the Slovenian interviewee has made an overall answer for most of these questions: »

The further steps to improve the quality of the educational opportunities for adults would be the following:
- educational programmes free of charge and accessible;
- responsive content and organization of education based on adults' needs;
- more networking in the community among different providers of adult education and other stakeholders;
- competent and trained staff in educational institutions;
- local bodies – administration (or at least regional coordination bodies) should be set-up to coordinate the activities (and offer) in the field of adult education in the local/regional level;
- preparation of appropriate local and national educational policies.

3.3. Focus group discussion

3.3.1. Target group:

The main task given to participants in focus group discussions was to consider some wider aspects of adult education, such as the relationship between benefits that acquired knowledge brings to individual-learner on one hand and to other stakeholders on the other (employers, society, state), or, how to measure effectiveness of adult education which is not directly linked to employment, or, how to make strategic documents feasible, etc.

For assuring widely spread perspective on these issues, partners have invited representatives of different stakeholders, directly or indirectly involved in adult education, such as trade-unions, employment agencies, different providers' organizations etc.

Cyprus: there were 10 participants in focus group discussion: 1 from Cyprus Pedagogical Institute, 1 from Advisory and Vocational Education Service, 1 private provider, 2 members of state institutes of further education, 3 from European and International Affairs Office, and 2 from adult education centres.

Ireland: the focus group consisted of policy makers and AL/FET agency managers.

EAEA: participants in focus group discussion were members of the EAEA board: 1 from Finland, 1 from Denmark, 1 from Portugal, 1 from Belarus and 1 from Serbia.

Slovenia: 7 participants have taken part in the discussion: 1 from trade-unions, 1 from emloyment agency, 1 from adult education centres association, 1 from private adult education providers' association, 1 from the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport and 2 from national institute for adult education.

Slovakia: apparently the focus group discussion was organised with the same people that had been individually interviewed: 1 from the Ministry of Education, 1 national coordinator of Epale platform, 1 responsible for national coordination of the implementation of the European Agenda for Adult Learning, 2 from National Lifelong Learning Institute, 1 from the Centre for continuing education, and 1 from Comenius University Bratislava.

Partners in DIMA project have agreed on and confirmed the list of four questions that should help the facilitator to focus the discussion on particular issues. This list of questions was supposed to be sent to focus group participants in advance. From the reports of partners that were submitted to the IO2 coordinator, only two partners had fully follow these instructions (Cyprus and Slovenia), and one partially (EAEA). For this reason, this chapter of the report will be devided into two parts: the first will present answers given by participants in Cyprus, Slovenia, and partially EAEA, to agreed questions, the second part will present some other issues, discussed in EAEA board focus group.

3.3.2. Presenting discussion on preliminarly defined questions (Slovenia, Cyprus, EAEA):

1.   Question:

Each EU member state has to elaborate its own Lifelong Learning Strategy which determine priorities and set specific targets for particular country. Also at the EU level there is a strategic document named »Education and Training 2020« which sets several benchmarks regarding educational outcomes.

Do you think that these documents sufficiently guarantee the fulfillment of these targets, especially as far as financial scopes are concerned, without elaborated and attached particular action plans encompassing obligations and responsibilities of involved stakeholders?

In **Slovenia** we can be satisfied with the strategic and other documents we have in the field of adult education (as The Master Plan for Adult Education, Strategy on Lifelong Learning, Annual Plan). Most of the participants of the focus group agreed that the problem is that beside all these documents we cannot be satisfied with the realisation of what is being written in them. The participation rate of adults in education in Slovenia is still rather high in the comparison with EU rate but we can be worried because it has been decreasing very quickly in the last few years. We have a problem how to reach the final beneficiaries - especially vulnerable target groups of adults (those without basic education or low qualified; elders; those, who wish to educate themselves but have

no money or are not motivated for it etc.). As reasons for the low level of realisation of ambitious objectives written in the documents were identified the following:

- finances (shortage of financial resources for adult education; influence of economic crises; financial resources are given to adult education providers after the delivery of educational programs or to participants after they already paid the scholarship fee by themselves and complete the education; some programs, initiatives were stopped during the time between the two ESF perspectives, because the finances for its implementation were not guaranteed);
- the adult education system is not settled (for example public network of adult education providers with stable finances guaranteed; as one participant of the focus group said: the adult education system we have, is built on the sand);
- the state is not taking sufficient care for the education/training of the vulnerable groups (which are final beneficiaries).

In **Cyprus** MOEC presented the Lifelong Learning Strategy (CyLLS) priorities: The CyLLS is structured around the following four priority axes and strategic objectives:

- 1st Priority Axis /Strategic Objective: Promoting Access and Participation in Lifelong Learning for All and recognition of learning outcomes;
- 2nd Priority Axis /Strategic Objective: Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training;
- 3rd Priority Axis /Strategic Objective: Promoting Research and Development for the Support of Lifelong Learning;
- 4th Priority Axis /Strategic Objective: Promoting employability (promoting integration/reintegration into the labour market).

The focus group identified the following for the Lifelong Learning Strategy 2014-2020 (CyLLS):

A. *Positive impacts:*

- The CyLLS is very helpful for the reason that Cyprus does not have an Adult Education Strategy;
- The CyLLS covers all types of formal, informal and non-formal education;
- The priorities are very significant in order to strength access and participation of all in LLL and recognizing all learning outcomes;

B. *Limitations and obstacles:*

- The CyLLS is mostly a political document of the Republic of Cyprus, therefore there are no guidelines or a specific timetable for the implementation of the actions mentioned in the Strategy;
- Member States need to monitor their systems to detect obstacles for the implementation of LLL;
- We need more cooperation between stakeholders;
- Sufficient Funding is crucial.

The second important document discussed was EU document "Education and Training 2020". Focus group identified the following:

A.   *Positive impacts:*

- Education and Training Strategy is a very useful document because mostly maps the existing situation in Cyprus (e.g. Increase of the participation of adults in LLL (age 25-64);
- Providing information benchmarks and Indicators that are very useful for the policy makers.

B. Limitations:

- Improvement targets are not defined;
- The emphasis should be put on ensuring basic skills for all;
- Lack of Quality Assurance and Monitoring of the field.

2. Question:

There are several indicators for measuring the successfulness of e.g. training programmes for unemployed, most often connected to their employability. On the other hand there is a common agreement among policymakers and many others, that non-formal learning brings several positive results, not only for the learner, but also for the society as a whole.

The problem is that it is rather difficult to measure this positive outcome.

What indicators are used in your country for measuring these outcomes? What additional kind of measurements would you suggest in this respect?

In **Slovenia** most of the participants of the focus group agreed that is not easy to set-up the relevant indicators for measuring the effects of non-formal education, to prove that public money was spent rationally (based on thesis that non-formal education strengthen the social and cultural capital of the participants in education). In certain areas it is difficult to measure the effects of education therefore qualitative data are used (for example – the change in perception of adult education which is positive experience in comparison to their previous negative school experience and what motivate them for permanent education and learning). As examples of the indicators on individual level in use could be those, which express the level of satisfaction with delivered education/training by the participants (for example gaining new knowledge, more trust in the institutions etc.). One participant of the focus group said that in certain fields we already have many concrete indicators which show the effects of learning as for example improved health, lower number of accidents etc. There were several indicators mentioned during the discussion - as for example those with non-economic effects (better flow of information among employees, better relations among employees, etc.) and those with economic effects (improved productivity). The problem is how to categorise some effects and indicators, while the borders among them are blurred. Some indicators which are categorised as non-economic can cause better productivity (for example – better communication skills of employee can results in better communications with customers and in better outcome of the enterprise). We can measure how many people were included in the education in one enterprise and if the level of productivity have increased. The problem is also when to measure the effects of education/training because the effects can be showed not immediately after the delivery of education but after certain period of time (two or three years).

The indicators can be divided in three categories: on individual level, on organisational level and on national level.

To measure and to compare the effectiveness of states among themselves BDP is used as an indicator. For measuring impact of educational and learning activities, other indicators are more suitable and reliable, such as GINI and HDI.

In **Cyprus** focus group discussion pointed out that some indicators measuring benefits of learning already exist:

- Cyprus Lifelong Learning (CyLLL) Strategy 2014-2020 has set the national target in terms of the proportion of the adult population participating in education and training for 2020 to 12%;
- Indicators from the Cyprus Statistical Service;
- EUROPE 2020 TARGETS COMPARED TO CYPRUS PERFORMANCE (EU2020 & ET2020);
- Labour Force Survey.

Additionally the Sectors' stakeholders suggested Additional Indicators:

- Indicators for different groups of Adults e.g. (Immigrants, low skilled adults, refuges, early school leavers);
- Quality Assurance Indicators.

3. Question:

Some experts and researchers believe, that as far as public financed adult education is concerned, there is an overwhelming emphasis put on training for raising employability in comparison to non-formal learning. As an argument for this kind of statement they expose the responsibility and interest of employers for acquiring adequate skilled workers.

What is the prevailing opinion in your country in this respect ? Do you think that this ratio between public and private interest in adult education could be measured with some indicators?

Slovenia: Employers should be responsible for qualification of the labour force for the needs of their enterprises. The problem is to define the border (the threshold) what should be financed by the state and what by the employer. We can define this border in connection with the needs of the target groups. The education/training of vulnerable groups and general non-formal education should be financed from the public resources. The state should take care that individuals achieve formal education or vocation and also for identification of these needs.

In Slovenia enterprises take care and spend their money first of all for education/training of the fey staff, mostly managers. Most enterprises don't invest in education/training of the low qualified employers, elders etc. – vulnerable groups. Public resources as well are oftenly used for education/training of managers or for some not very clearly defined soft skills like communication. On the other hand a lot of public money is being invested in education/training of unemployed. In this case sometimes initiatives are focused on raising employability by acquiering basic skills but very often programmes, organised by employment agencies, are directly linked to particular job skills demanded on the labour market.

Some recommendations:

- employers should be bound by law (it should be settled in the system) that each year they have to assure certain amount of hours for increasing the level of key competences for all employees in their enterprise;
- employers, who invest in education/training of their employees – vulnerable target groups (low qualified, those who are in danger to lose their jobs etc.) should be entitled to receive tax reliefs;
- it should be prescribed that employers have to prepare career plan for each employee;
- employers should assure that at least a part of education/training is being delivered during working hours;
- employers should assure that education/training for vulnerable target groups of their employees is being delivered in the premises of the enterprise.

Cyprus: The Sectors' Stakeholders in the focus group discussion pointed out that Life Long Strategy (CyLLS) covers all types of learning and training (formal, non-formal and informal), on the other hand CyLLS and other policies could not solve all problems of the Adult Education. It is, however, a step further towards the right direction. Also, they illustrated the fact that public financing might help raising employability in comparison to non-formal learning. Finally, it is very difficult to measure the relationship between public and private interest in adult education.

EAEA: According to the focus group's participants, the VET sector is currently more valued and funded for the reasons stated in the proposed guiding question and already elaborated in the DIMA state of the art reports. They all agree that adult education should be considered as a public good and thus financed by the State, possibly within a long-term, cross-sectorial and sustainable strategy.

4. Question:

There are different stakeholders involved in adult education supply, provision and management, each with its own role, tasks, needs and interest (non-formal and formal educational providers, social partners, policy-makers etc.). In some cases, these stakeholders are competing in defining desirable outcomes of adult education, as well as they are competing for the same limited scope of resources. How could regulatory and legal mechanisms in your country foster permeability between different sector's position? Could one of the possible solution for overcoming this competition be starting from the individual and its needs?

In **Slovenia** the first step in collaboration and mutual connection in the field of adult education was already achieved with involvement of several ministries in The Master Plan for Adult Education. This linkage should be further developed on the basis of mutual trust and further dialogue, which should be outcome oriented. The ministries should be aware that they are not established to compete for public resources among each other.

More linkage should exist in the field of adult education at three levels: local, regional and national. This linkage should be systematically built in the system (for example regional agencies responsible for cooperation in the field of adult education provision). Bottom-up approach should be used – starting from the educational needs of individuals. For realization of this approach these needs should be identified especially for the vulnerable target groups.

Cyprus: The Sectors' Stakeholders identified the following challenges and recommendations:

- Encouraging the private sector and citizens to get involved in education and training and development;
- Cooperation between relevant stakeholders, including policy makers, teachers' unions, trade unions, political parties, parents' associations;

- Formulating National Documents and Strategies with the involvement of the relevant stakeholders;
- Develop of a comprehensive strategy.

EAEA: According to the EAEA Board members this question hinders the effectiveness of adult education policies in each country.

Effective formal structures or informal mechanisms for cooperation and exchange among providers are wished by many.

However, there is an issue of competitiveness among providers. The more and more diverse they are the less a dialogue is likely to take place. In particular, this is true for providers working in different sectors (i.e. formal, non-formal, VET). When a positive attitude is there, a political or logistical support is often missing.

There should be structures that allow providers to better cooperate and assure the permeability of the sector, especially to allow disadvantaged learners to make the one step up through adult learning.

The focus group participants also suggest empowering the non-formal small providers working on a local level in order for them to be able to get more recognised and valued as well as starting to work on issues that might be of a common interest such as quality assurance.

3.3.3. Focus group with the EAEA board – other issues

Objectives of the focus group discussion were:

- Bringing together stakeholders for the adult education sector for brainstorming ideas;
- Validate the content of the state of the art report;
- Identifying key challenges and needs that adult education providers face;
- Getting insights on the current local and national strategies on Adult Education and their effectiveness.

Main topics discussed:

1.   Sector's recognition:

Although there currently seem to be a momentum in which policy-makers pledge for more democracy, intercultural dialogue and social cohesion, the contribution of adult education to achieve those objectives is still not fully recognized.

The focus groups participants state that there is little understanding of the benefits of the adult education sector in general. They suggest continuing lobby for them by showing up evidences of their work: publications, videos can play a very important role in that.

It should be clear that adult education providers and organisations are advocating for more recognition of the non-formal learning's benefits, not only for learners, but also for the society as a whole. Policy-makers should be convinced of the necessity of a long-term perspective on education policies and a cross-sectorial approach to that.

For an example, when it comes to refugees and learning opportunities in Finland, the planning and decision making is divided to three different political ministries (Education and Culture; Employment and the Economy;

Interior) which makes things complicated both for the providers and especially for the potential refugees' learners.

2.   Financing:

Adult education providers all over Europe are facing budget cuts, especially those working in the field of liberal/popular/non-vocational education. The focus group participants highlight how the adult education sector has been always depending on the political will and support. Even when funding is available, countries don't have a long term investment plan but assign funding through call for projects or punctual initiatives. This often leads to a decrease of quality and less support to disadvantaged learners who might be asked to pay a not affordable price for their classes. In relation to this last point, providers might sometimes rely on other types of funding, but they are normally project-based and difficult to obtain.

Another issue to consider is that the ministries in charge of education often lack of resources as their portfolio is considered less strategic than others. This issue is of course linked to the priorities set by the national political agenda.

Another issue linked to the funding is about the teachers (advanced) education in liberal adult education. There are lots of part-time teachers which have a short-term contract working in adult education centers all over Europe and this makes it difficult to their professional development.

Finally, mostly due to the financial situation in some countries there have been and will be structural changes among the providers in liberal adult education where institutions based in different cities merged and some therefore disappear. This might lead to an accessibility problem for people from the rural areas, especially the more disadvantaged.

4.   Conclusions

In our analysis we have tried to present all relevant data and information gathered by the three used instruments: questionnaire, individual interviews and focus group discussion. Our intention was to outline topics, needs, problems and approaches to solve these problems, decision making and methods of planning, in the field of adult education that are common or similar in all partner countries. On the other hand we've tried to outline solutions that might have been undertaken in just one or two partner countries, which could be treated as examples of good practice for others.

4.1. Questionnaire

As regards characteristics of the respondents, mainly providers, (see Tables 2,3,4) there are no substantial differences between partner countries: majority of respondents are professionals or officials in public educational institutions. Results slightly differ when type of work is considered: in Ireland and Slovakia a vast majority of respondents' work is »participants' oriented« (teaching, counselling, training), in Cyprus »subject oriented« (R&D, data analysis and promotion), in Slovenia this ratio is neutral.

Although there are some differences among partners we can outline some key findings which are common.

1. On the systemic level **the need for a comprehensive national strategic document** that would cover adult education was very much emphasized. In this respect each of partners has expressed different approach: respondents in **Cyprus** have pointed out precisely the lack of this kind of document on the national level. In **Slovakia** they lack the adequate legislation in the field of adult education, which is already prepared and will be processed shortly. They believe that the legislative framework could assure proper decision making and planning. In **Ireland** they have some strategic documents for skills and qualifications acquirement and further education. **Slovenia** is in this respect a positive example of good practice having adopted a comprehensive strategic document called *Adult Education Master Plan 2013-2020*, which defines all relevant issues and responsibilities of planning and development in adult education.

2. On the providers' level one observation can be exposed, common to all partners: vast majority of respondents do set targets for their performance, but mainly short- or mid-term only. Very few are **setting long-term targets** (such as number of issued certificates, number of participants, participants' outcomes). Slightly better in this respect are providers in **Cyprus**.

3. Respondets (providers) have expressed an interesting opinion in connection with the question: *Are target groups of adults that need special educational attention and treatment in your country, in your opinion, accordingly addressed and emphasized?* Respondents in all participating countries have agreed to high level, from 40 (Slovakia) up to 70% (Ireland), that target groups are not properly defined and addressed. When they have been asked, which groups should be defined as more in need for additional attention and tretament, answers were almost equally distributed among all offered target groups, whith some more attention payed on unemployed.

4.2. Individual interviews

There are two major points we can present as common understanding of the majority of interviewees in partner countries:

1. The role of the state and public institutions in the field of adult education is to allocate financial sources and teaching capacities for enhancing learning opportunities for vulnerable groups that are not able to find chances for learning or can not afford them. What characteristics define a group as vulnerable is almost commonly agreed by interviewees in all countries: low qualification, unemployment, marginal position in society, failure in initial schooling.

2. The second point is how interviewees define types of programmes and most important outcomes of learning. In all participating countries interviewees are devided and oriented in two directions: one part is puting emphasis on labour market needs and emloyment as the most desirable outcome of learning activities, whilst the other part puts more attention on basic skills, such are *learn to learn*, *social* and *societal skills* and empowerment for *active citizenship* which could enhance possibilities to recognize ones own learning opportunities.

4.3. Focus group discussion

Focus group speakers in two countries that have followed predetermined questions for the discussion (**Slovenia** and **Cyprus**) and the one that have done that partially (**EAEA**), have pointed out three beliefs about defined issues:

1. The feasibility of any strategic document depends detailed action plan attached to the document, which mandatorily includes tasks and responsibilities of involved stakeholders, measurable outcomes, monitoring instruments and financial sources.

2. Although advocates of employability as the most wanted outcome of learning activities are arguing that employment is measurable while there is no evidence that so called soft skills bring any substantial progress, those who do not agree with this statement point out countless areas where increased basic and social skills do enhance prosperity of the society: e.g. decreasing health hazardous behaviour, deminishing intergenerational social determination, environment protection consciousness, social cohesion.

3. It is not an obligation of public finances to train labour force for skills needed for particular jobs which are momentarily on demand on the labour market, although employees are in great extend trying to persuade decision makers that this is the only way which could decrease unemploymen. A lot of speakers that have taken part in discussions argued that publicly financed learning programmes should focus on increasing basic skills and competences, while particular skills needed on the labour market should be provided an financed by employer, or co-financed, at least.

Prepared by Peter Beltram, SIAE, coordinator OF IO2

Tables and graphs index: