

A Toolkit for Developing, Implementing and Monitoring Adult Education Strategies



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DIMA project (2016). NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND GAP ANALYSIS AT NATIONAL AND EU LEVEL. Date accessed online [e.g. 26/10/2016] from www.dima-project.eu.

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

Comparative report

1. Executive Summary

The report presents a needs assessment and gap analysis for adult learning providers in the four partner countries of the DIMA project. The results presented in this report arise from three different data collection instruments: web based survey, individual interviews and focus group discussions. Results from the data collection instruments were collected by the IO2 coordinator, the Slovenian partner team. The other partners elaborated summaries of individual interviews and focus group discussions.

The report is divided into several chapters and sub-chapters, logically following outcomes of all three instruments. The first instrument, web based survey, is presented in charts and tables which is quite extensive in comparison to other two presented instruments.

The intention of the report is to outline topics, needs, and problems in the field of adult education in each country. The findings will underpin approaches to solve these problems, and decision making and planning methods common or similar in all partner countries. However, the report also outlines solutions undertaken in just one or two partner countries, which serve as examples of good practice for others.

1.1. Questionnaire

As regards characteristics of the respondents, mainly providers, there are no substantial differences among partner countries. The majority of respondents were professionals or officials in public educational institutions. Results slightly differ when type of work is taken into account. In Ireland and Slovakia a vast majority of respondents' work is "participants' oriented" (teaching, counselling, and training). In Cyprus it is "subject oriented" (R&D, data analysis and promotion); while in Slovenia this ratio is neutral.

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

1. On the systemic level the need for a comprehensive national strategic adult education document was much emphasized. In this respect each of partners expressed different approach: Respondents in Cyprus precisely noted the lack of a document of this kind on the national level. In Slovakia the lack of adequate legislation in the field of adult education, which is already prepared and will be processed shortly, was noted. Questionnaire respondents from Slovakia note that the legislative framework would assure proper decision making and planning. In Ireland respondents acknowledged the presence of some strategic documents for skills and qualifications acquirement and further education. Arising from the questionnaire respondents Slovenia is an example of good practice having adopted a comprehensive strategic document titled The Adult

Education Master Plan 2013-2020. This document defines all relevant issues and responsibilities of planning and development of adult education in Slovenia.

2. One observation common to all providers' responses is noted. The vast majority of respondents set performance targets; but mainly short or mid-term targets only (such as number of issued certificates, number of participants, participants' outcomes). Very few set long-term targets with the exception of providers in Cyprus who set more long-term targets.

3. Providers respondents expressed an interesting opinion to 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 were agreed (ranging 40% in Slovakia to 70% in Ireland, that target groups are not properly defined and addressed. When asked; "Which groups should be defined as more in need for additional attention and treatment?" answers were almost equally distributed among all offered target groups with particular attention to the unemployed.

1.2. Individual interviews

There are two major common points arising from 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 not able to access or afford learning opportunities. What characterises a group as vulnerable is commonly agreed by interviewees in all countries: low qualification, unemployment, marginal position in society, and failure in initial schooling.

2. The second point is how interviewees define types of programmes and the most important outcomes of learning. In all participating countries interviewees were oriented in two directions. One, placing emphasis on labour market needs and employment as the most desirable outcome of learning activities. Second, attention to basic skills such are learn to learn, social/societal skills, and empowerment for active citizenship to enhance possibilities to recognize one's own learning opportunities.

1.3. Focus group discussion

Focus groups following predetermined discussion questions in two countries (Slovenia and Cyprus) and one (EAEA) partially following discussion questions gave rise to three important issues:

1. The feasibility of any strategic document depends on a detailed action plan being attached to the document. The action plan should include the tasks and responsibilities of involved stakeholders, measurable outcomes, monitoring instruments, and financial sources allocated.

2. Learning for employability is the most prioritised outcome from focus group discussions. Those who argue this point note that employment is measurable while there is no evidence that so called soft skills contribute any substantial progress. However, those in focus groups who do not agree with this statement point out countless areas where increased basic and social skills enhance society prosperity e.g. decreasing health hazardous behaviour, diminishing intergenerational social determination, environment protection consciousness, and social cohesion.

3. It was also noted in focus group discussion that is not an obligation of public finances to train the labour force in skills needed for particular jobs which are momentarily in demand by the labour market. Focus group discussants noted that employees seek to persuade decision makers that this is the only way to effectively decrease unemployment. Focus group discussants noted that publicly financed learning programmes should focus on increasing basic skills and competences, while particular skills needed on the labour market should be provided and financed, or at least co-financed, by the employer.

2. Objectives and methods

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

It is noted that the DIMA Project outcome of Intellectual output 1 (State of the Art Report) was focused on presenting the socio-economic and demographic characteristics, and the legislative and political frameworks of the adult education system in each of the partner countries. The outcomes of 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 are the 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 and as 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 in detail as:

- 📌 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.

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

Three basic methods and/or instruments, determined in the project proposal, were used to collect necessary data and information.

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) Conduct 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.

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

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

- ❗ What are the needs of target group as 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 a lifelong learning perspective?
- ❗ What challenges do local and national authorities face in 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 SurveyMonkey platform).

The survey addressed the supply side of adult education provision. The invited potential respondents were mostly adult education providers and professionals directly involved in adult education provision. Each partner chose its own list of target addressees. The questionnaire has 33 questions, six being open, asking for written responses.

According to project requirements each partner country team was obligated to collect at least 50 completed questionnaires, corresponding to 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				

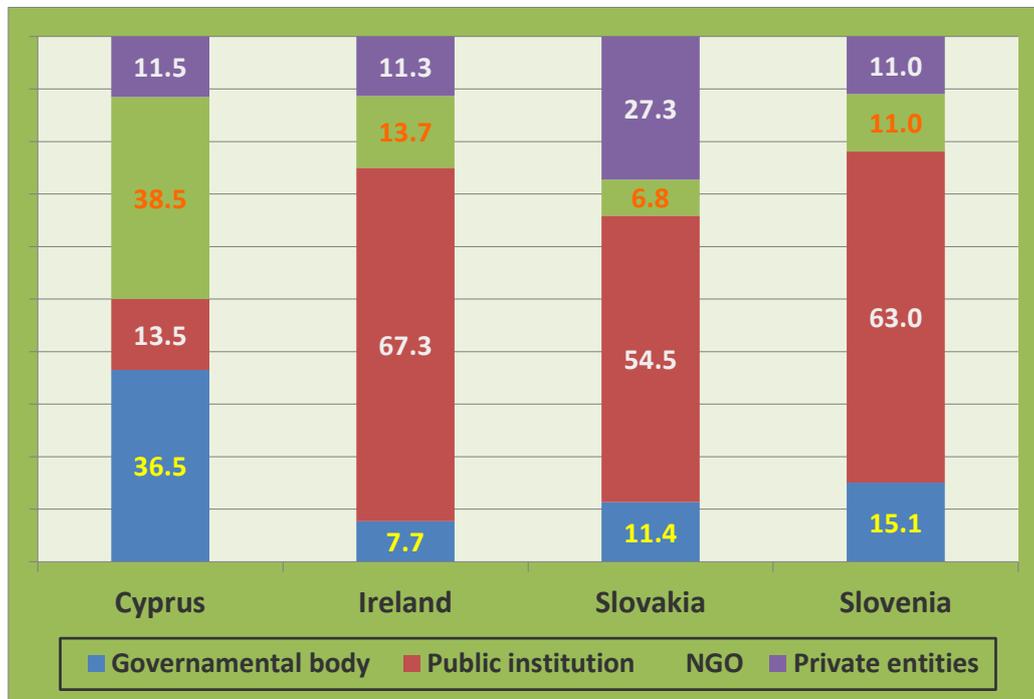
As *Table 1* shows the targeted number of responses was achieved (342). This enabled the designated partner (the Slovenian IO2 coordinator partner team) to summarize results for all participating countries. Three participating partners (Ireland, Slovenia and Cyprus) reached the required reply target and Slovakia almost achieved the target. Since one partner (EAEA) does not represent a particular country, the consortium agreed to encompass their share of responses within the share of other partners' responses. Response rates listed in *Table 1* were adequate so that response could be compared among each other.

Following the responses to all questions are presented in tables and graphs, except for open questions. Each table has a separate row showing the number of respondents who skipped that particular question (answered/skipped).

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

Table 2: Respondents by type of institution they work for

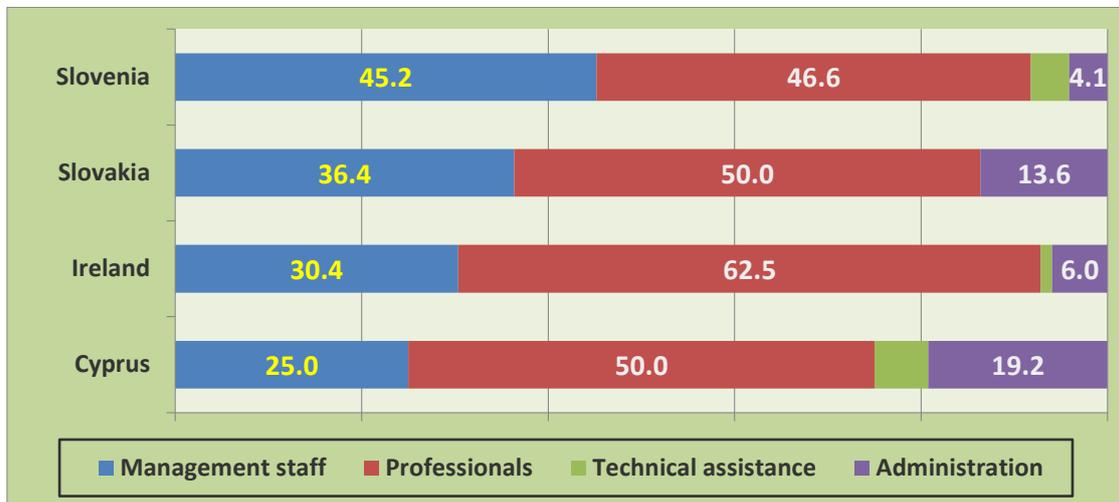
	Cyprus	Ireland	Slovakia	Slovenia
Governmental body	36,5	7,7	11,4	15,1
Public institution	13,5	67,3	54,5	63,0
NGO	38,5	13,7	6,8	11,0
Private entities	11,5	11,3	27,3	11,0
(Answered/Skipped)	(46/4)	(166/6)	(44/4)	(67/5)

Graph 1: Respondents by type of institution they work for


We can see, in *Table 2* and *Graph 1* some differences between types of institutions respondents are coming from. The majority of respondents in Ireland, Slovakia and Slovenia are employed in public institutions, whilst in Cyprus majority of respondents are coming from governmental and NGO bodies. The share of private entities is significantly bigger in Slovakia in comparison to others.

Table 3: Respondents by position in the organisation

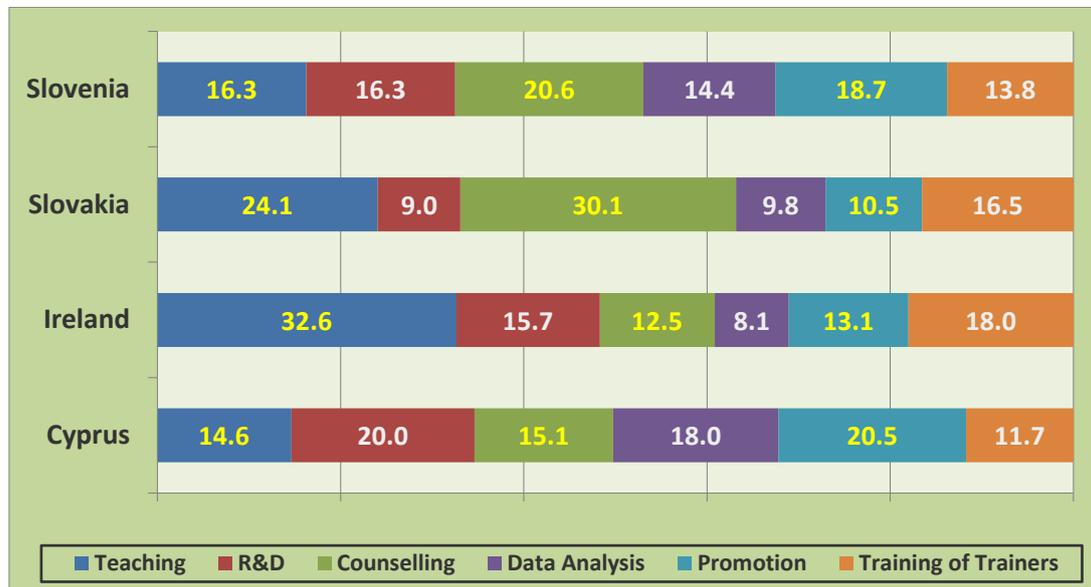
	Cyprus	Ireland	Slovakia	Slovenia
Management staff	25,0	30,4	36,4	45,2
Professionals	50,0	62,5	50,0	46,6
Technical assistance	5,8	1,2	0,0	4,1
Administration	19,2	6,0	13,6	4,1
(Answered/Skipped)	(46/4)	(166/6)	(44/4)	(67/5)

Graph 2: Respondents by position in the organisation


The share of professionals among respondents is the biggest for all countries (*Table 3, Graph 2*). There is a significant difference between Slovenia and Cyprus regarding shares of management and administrative staff. Almost a half of Slovenians who filled 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)

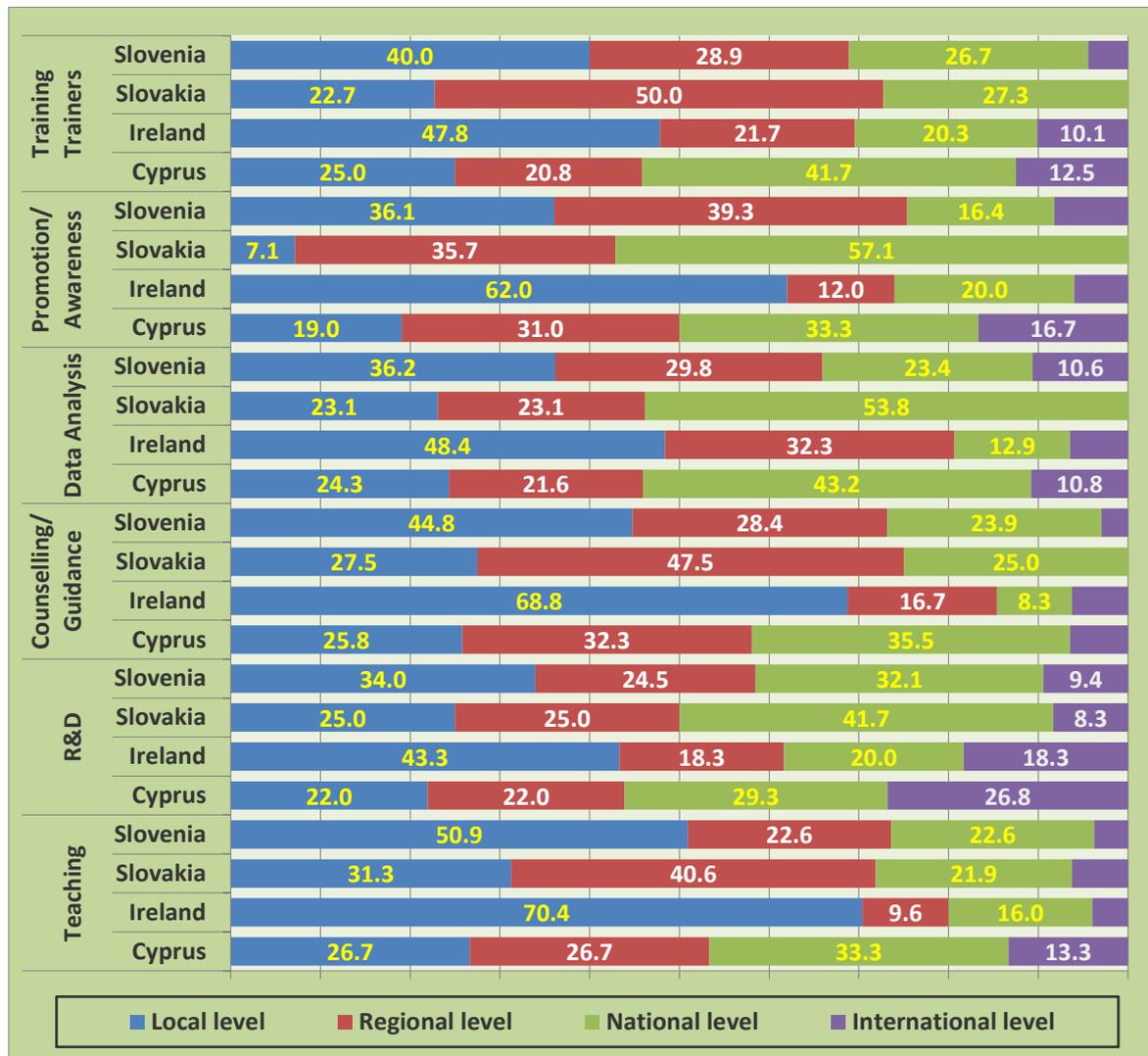
Graph 3: Respondents by type of their work


Main differences shown in Table 4 and Graph 3 are between respondents who are teachers in Ireland and counsellors in Slovakia relative to other partner countries.

We can observe some differences between the four partner countries regarding respondents' characteristics. For example, if we separate different types of respondents work (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. However the majority of questionnaire respondents are within the professional or management heading. Therefore we can conclude that for this topic survey their opinions are valid.

The data, presented following in Graph 4, might suggest significant variation in type and level of work among country respondents. However, when we account that partner countries are differently structured regarding administrative borders. i.e. in terms of regions, local communities and definition of national levels, it would not be justified to make any conclusions on this basis. From this point of view we could only make some remarks when comparing all three national levels of respondents' work (local, regional and national) with international one.

Graph 4: Respondents by type and level of their work



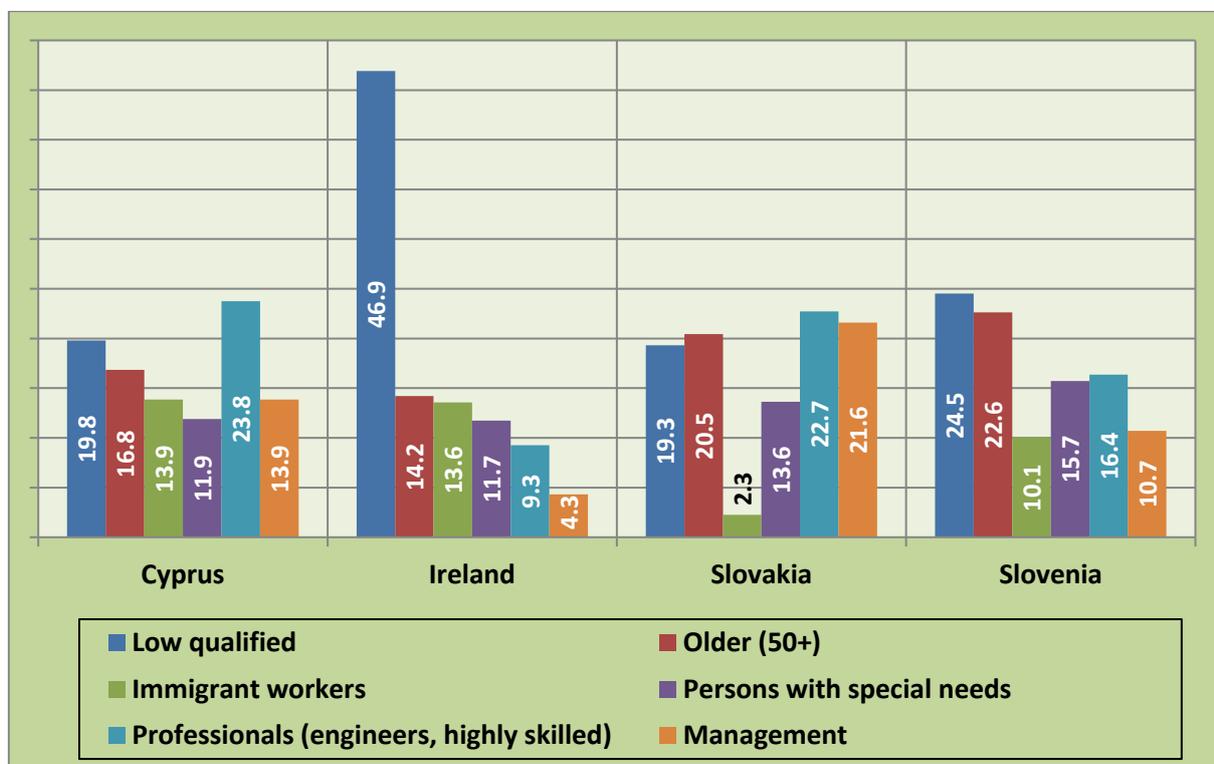
The outstanding engagements of Cyprus in research, developmental and promotional work on the international level should be noted. The international involvement of Ireland in the field of R&D is also above the average.

3.1.2. 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?



In *Table and Graph 5* we note figures deviate from others relating to employed participants our online questionnaire respondents deal with. 1) The share of low qualified employed included in adult education in Ireland (46,9%), and 2) The relatively very low 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?

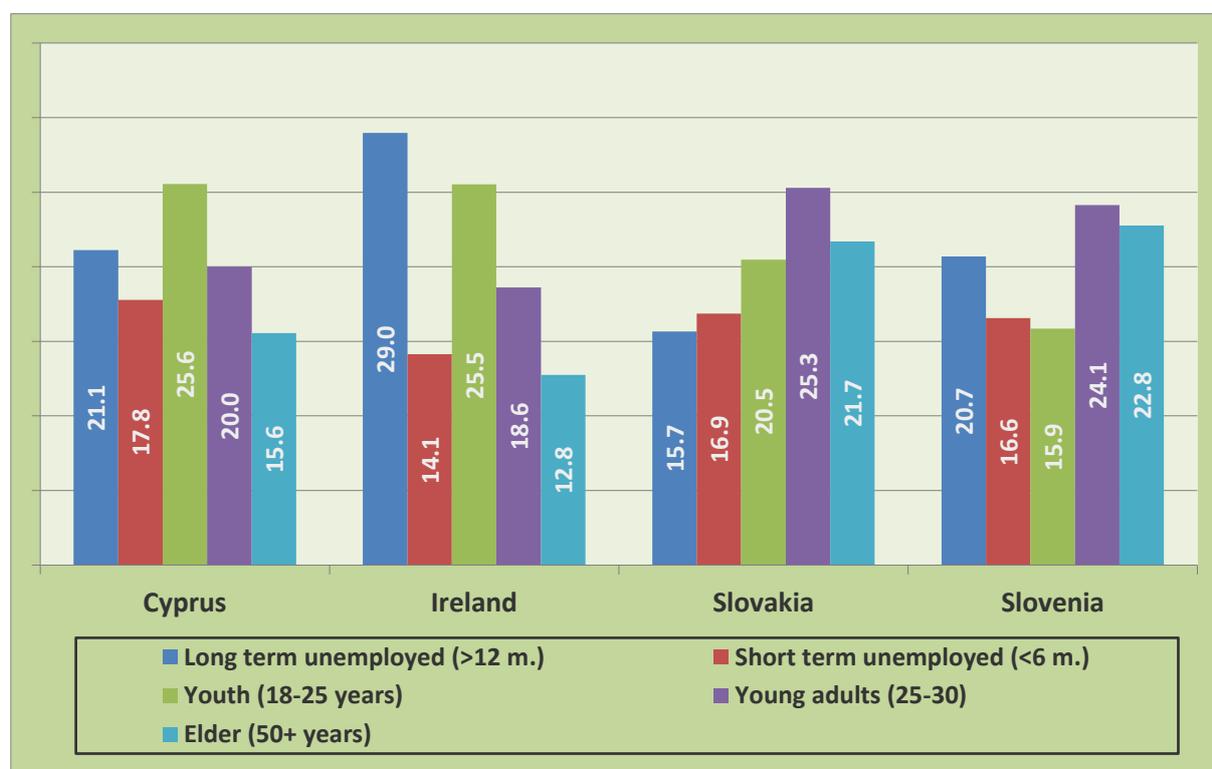


Table and Graph 6 shows slight differences in level of priority accorded the inclusion of unemployed in educational or training programmes. Almost one third of respondents target long-term unemployed in

Ireland, while the number of respondents targeting elder unemployed is the lowest. Slovenia has less priority on targeting young unemployed to take 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?

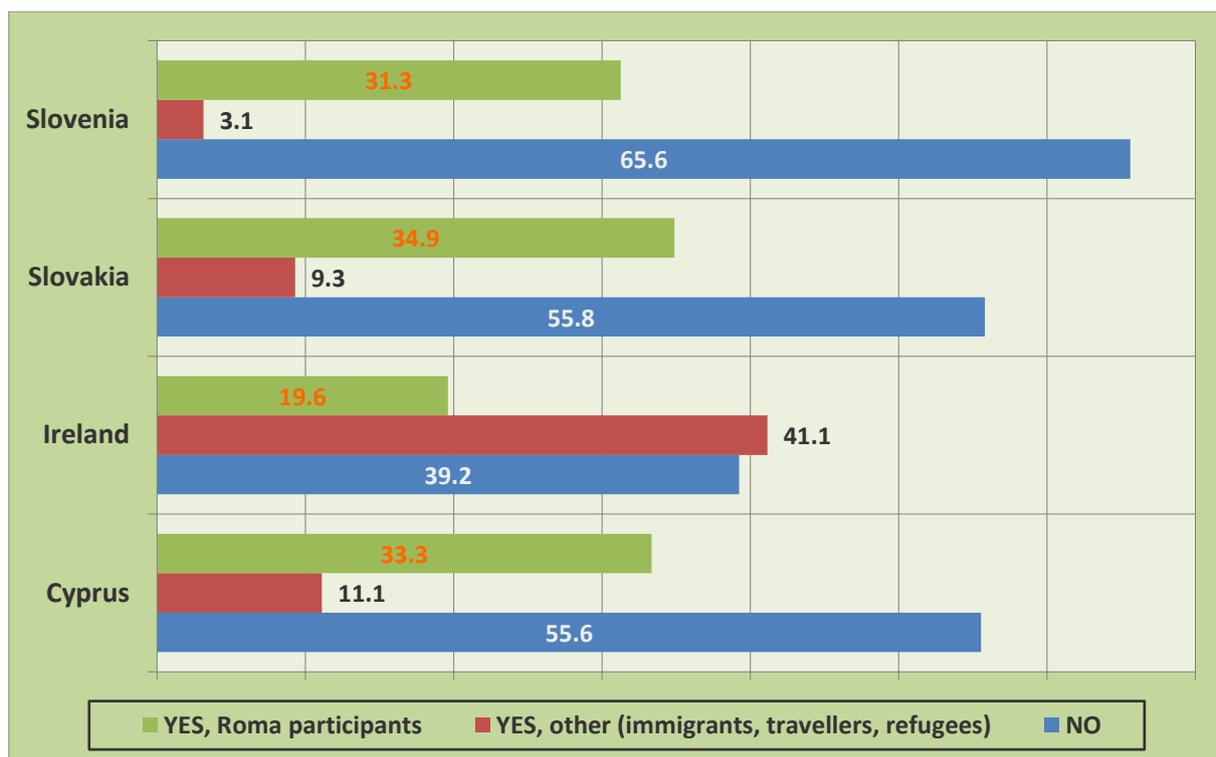


Table and Graph 7 suggest that members of specific ethnic groups deemed marginalized and with low qualifications are targeted for adult education. Apart from Roma people such vulnerable groups are immigrants, travellers and refugees. The need to increase targeting education services to such groups will probably increase with increasing numbers of immigrants. With the exception of Ireland, who indicates a significant number of respondents already targeting low skilled immigrants, travellers and refugees, the share of respondents giving a NO answer will decrease substantially.

3.1.3. 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?

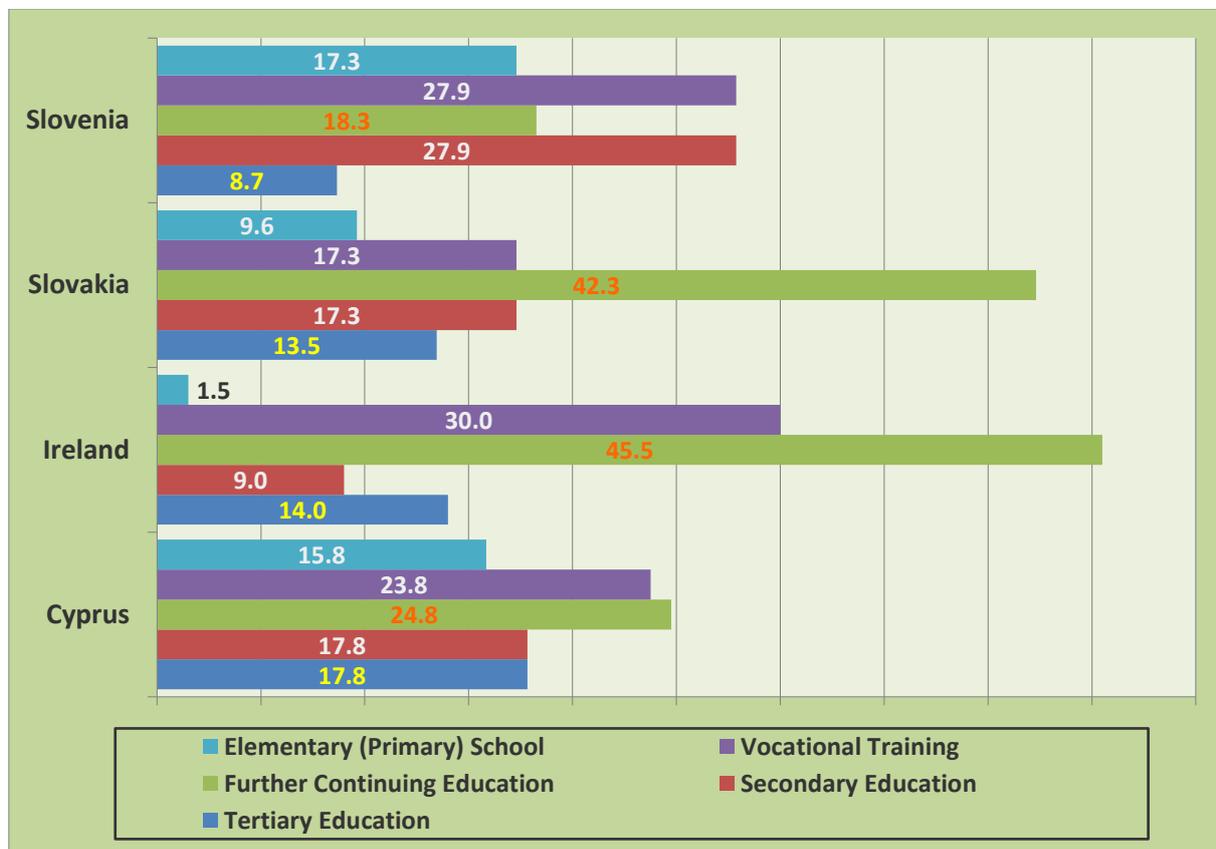
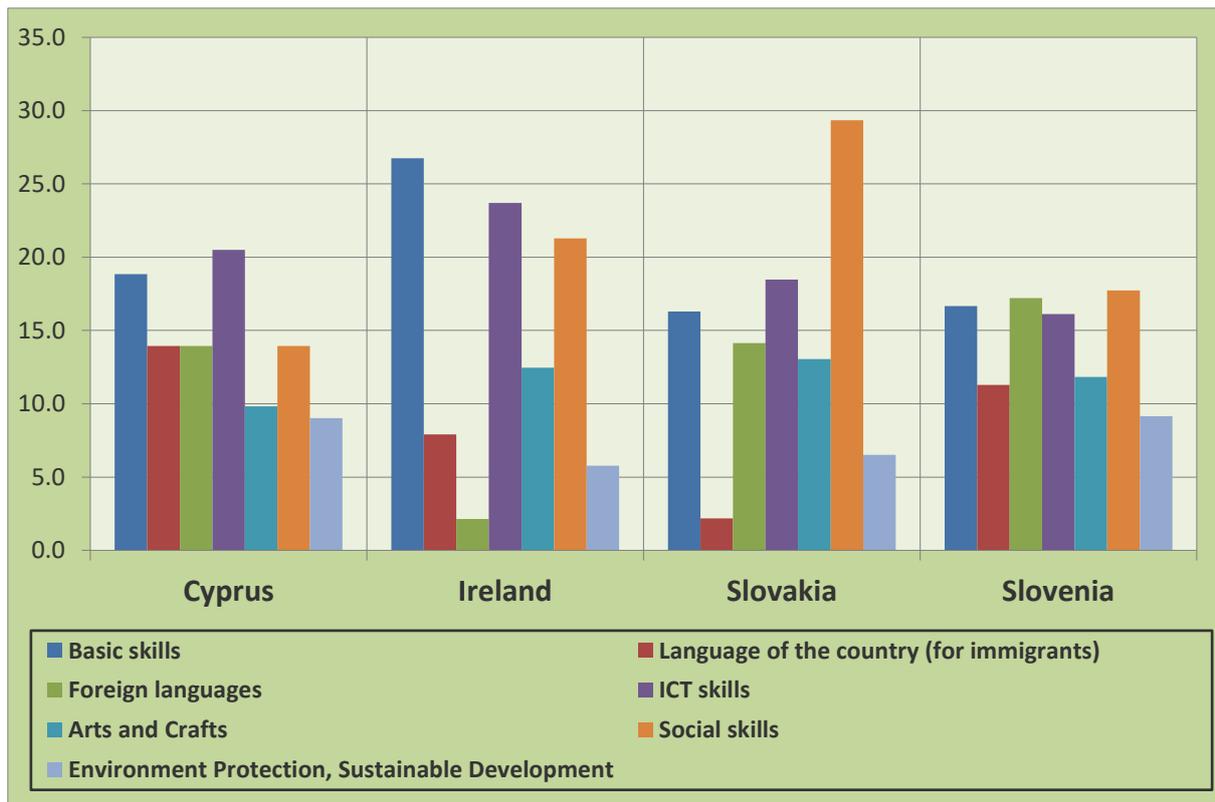


Table and Graph 8 indicate differences among partner countries regarding formal educational programmes for adults. Slovenia has the lowest share of further continuing education programmes and the highest share of secondary education. In comparison respondents from Ireland place emphasis on training for enhancing employability relative to educational attainment. Formal programmes, provided in Cyprus are equally distributed among offered choices.

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

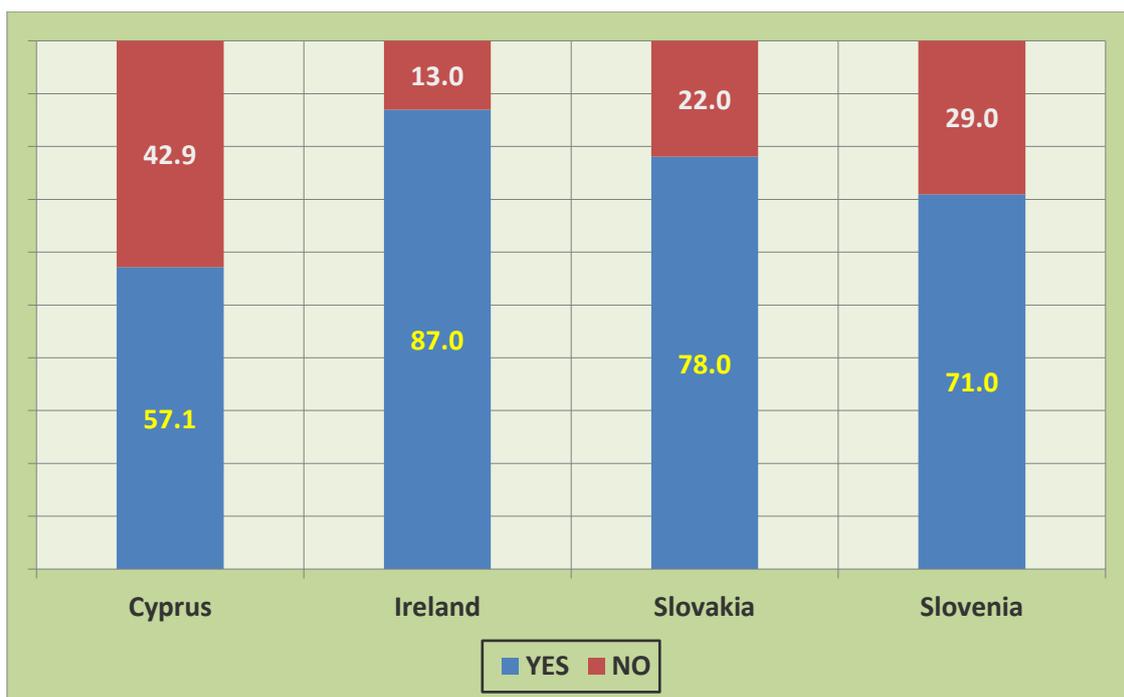
	Cyprus	Ireland	Slovakia	Slovenia
Basic skills	18,9	26,7	16,3	16,7
Language of the country (for immigrants)	13,9	7,9	2,2	11,3
Foreign languages	13,9	2,1	14,1	17,2
ICT skills	20,5	23,7	18,5	16,1
Arts and Crafts	9,8	12,5	13,0	11,8
Social skills	13,9	21,3	29,3	17,7
Environment Protection, Sustainable Development	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 respondents replies are quite equally distributed for all programs offered in Cyprus and Slovenia, whilst in Ireland and Slovakia the emphasis is on social skills. In Ireland the share of basic skills is also above average. As noted above Slovakia does not place emphasis on programmes for immigrants. It is notable the respondents do not report providing foreign language programs in Ireland.

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



There is significant difference between Cyprus and other countries regarding measurement of learning outcomes. In Cyprus almost a half of providers (*Graph 10*) do not measuring results, whereas the response for Slovenia is surprisingly high.

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

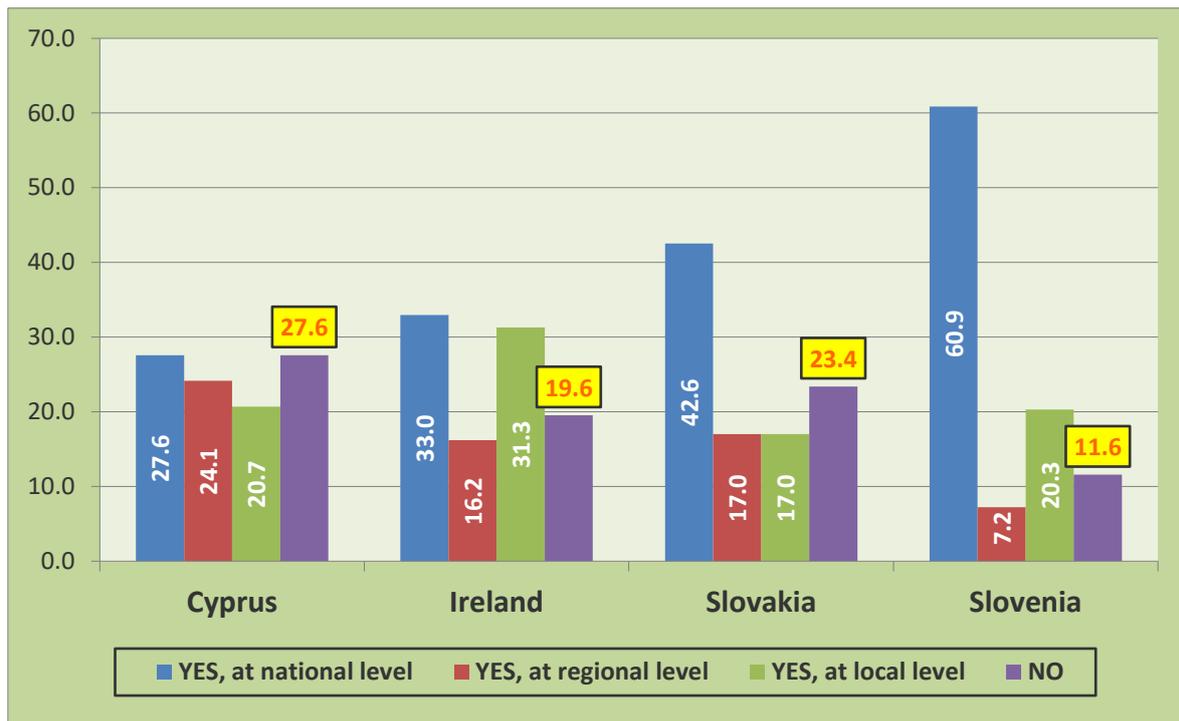
	Cyprus	Ireland	Slovakia	Slovenia
Yes, Formal Certificate of educational attainment	31,5	62,4	29,4	31,1
Yes, Certificate of programme participation	48,1	22,0	54,9	41,1
Yes, other type(s) of certificate(s)	7,4	9,1	2,0	13,3
No, we don't issue any certificates	13,0	6,5	13,7	14,4
(Answered/Skipped)	(41/9)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

Even greater differences can be observed in the *Table 10* “Do you issue official certificates of any kind after successfully accomplished program?”. In Ireland almost two thirds of providers issue formal “Certificates of educational attainment”, whilst in Cyprus and Slovakia about half of providers report issuing “Certificates of programme participation”. We might assume these differences may be differences in terminology and/or differences in administrative regulations. For example, in Ireland certificates are issued for participant educational attainment in further continuing education and vocational training programmes, whilst in Slovenia such certificates are issued for primary, secondary and tertiary education programs only.

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

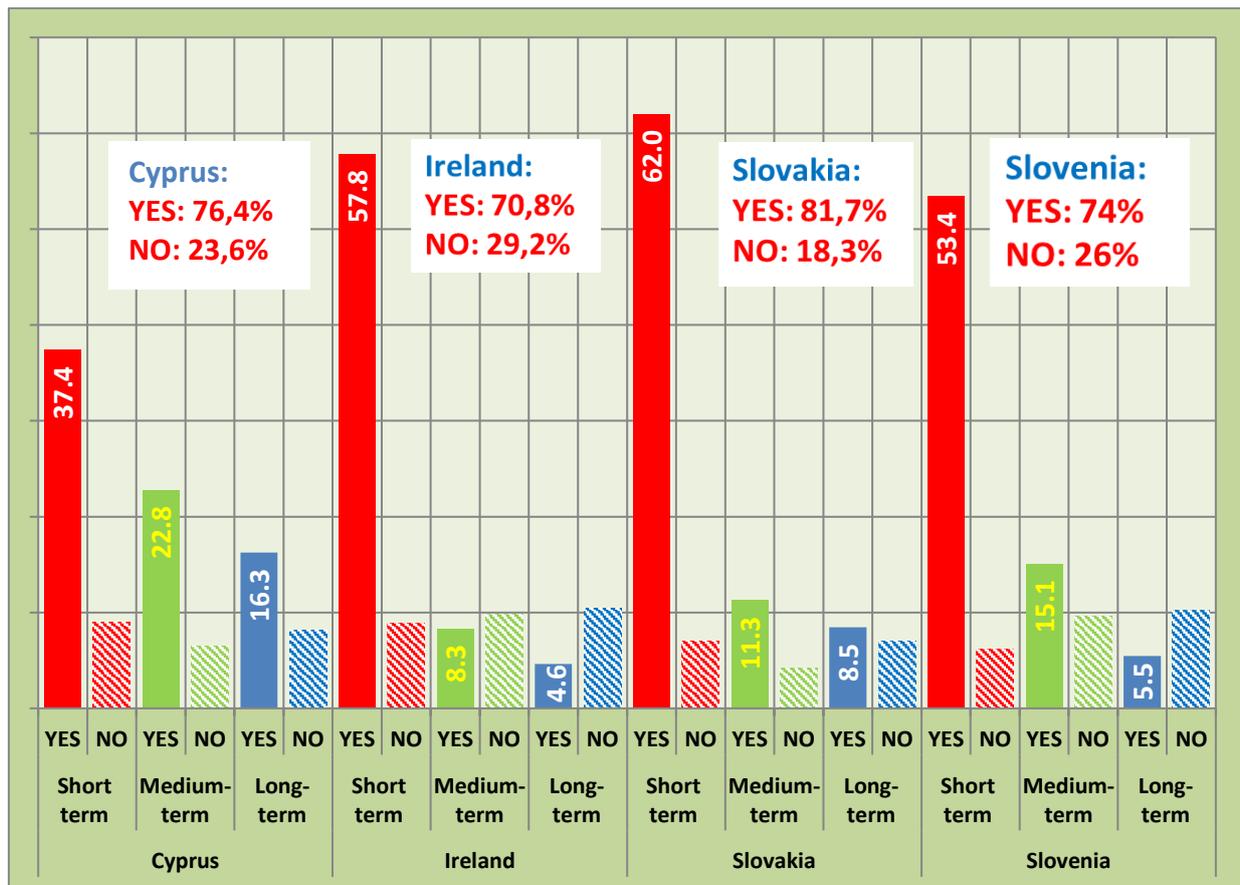
	Cyprus	Ireland	Slovakia	Slovenia
YES, at national level	27,6	33,0	42,6	60,9
YES, at regional level	24,1	16,2	17,0	7,2
YES, at local level	20,7	31,3	17,0	20,3
NO	27,6	19,6	23,4	11,6
(Answered/Skipped)	(41/9)	(136/36)	(39/9)	(59/13)

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



Data in *Table* and *Graph 11* suggest the share of provider respondents who are not required to report any performance data is rather high in Cyprus and Slovakia. While in Ireland, where the percentage of NO answers is slightly lower, and only one third report that data on providers' performance is gathered at national level. The DIMA Project note that statistical data collected and processed on national levels is indispensable for policy making, program projections and strategic planning.

Graph 12: Does your organisation set any targets for adult education participation and achievements?



Graph 12 suggests that there are not many differences among partner countries in the percentage of providers that set performance targets and those who do not. But closer analysis reveals one important feature. Providers in Ireland, Slovakia and Slovenia mainly set 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?

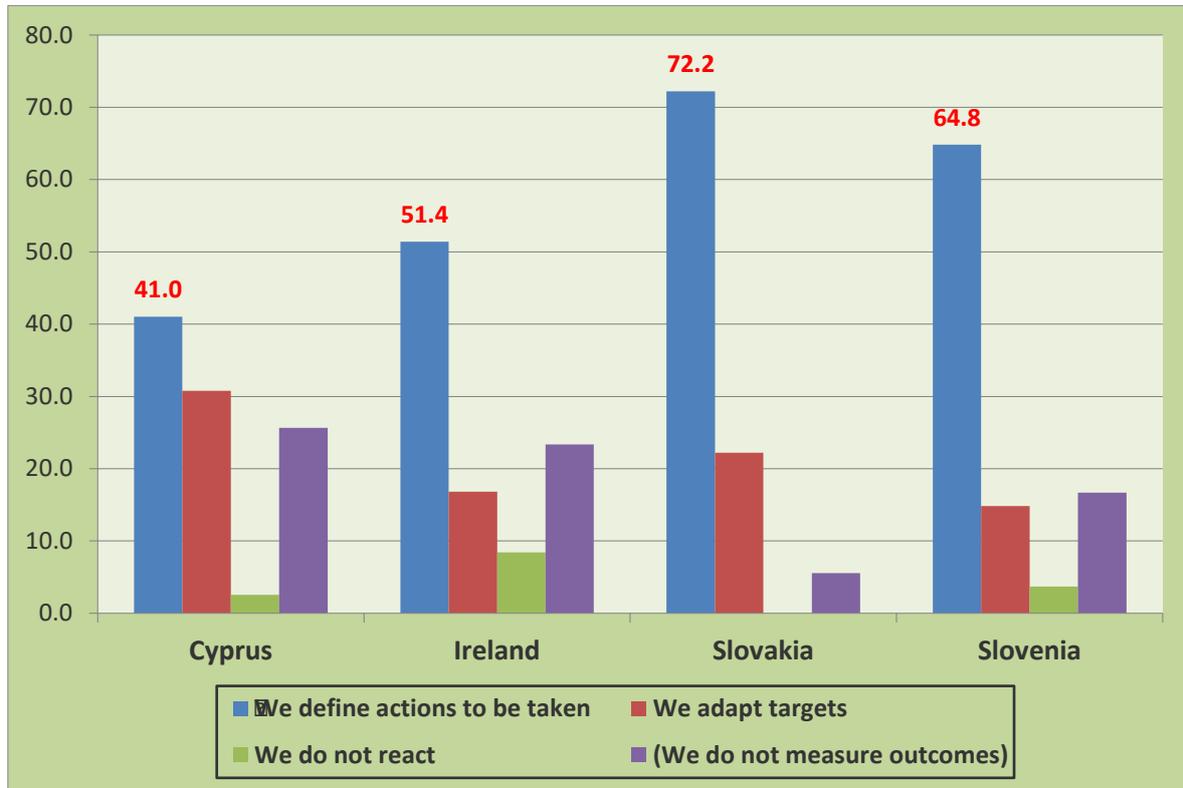
	Cyprus	Ireland	Slovakia	Slovenia
	Regularly			
< 6 months	27,3	21,2	10	10,9
6 months to 1 year	21,2	18,3	23,3	28,3
> yearly	21,2	29,8	46,7	34,8
> 2 yearly	3	2,9	3,3	6,5
Not measured	27,3	27,9	16,7	19,6
	Occasionally			
< 6 months	7,7	11,4	21,4	21,4
6 months to 1 year	15,4	13,6	28,6	14,3
> yearly	34,6	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* shows that providers review their targets on average regularly each year but approx. one half of providers review their targets occasionally.

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

	Cyprus	Ireland	Slovakia	Slovenia
☑We 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 provider respondents in Slovakia and Slovenia mostly define actions to be taken if targets are not met whereas in respondents from Cyprus adapt targets if they are not being 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 provider respondents who note familiarity with an adult education strategic document is in Slovenia, closely followed by Slovak and Irish respondents (*Table 14*).

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

There was a relatively low response to this question and many of these respondents named different documents.

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

Irish: Respondents from Ireland named different documents mainly linked to training and skills including:

-  *Further Education and Training Strategy 2014 to 2019*
-  *National 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*

Slovenia: Respondents named *The Adult Education Master Plan 2013-2020* adopted by the Slovenian Parliament. All respondents that have answered to this question named this document.

Slovakia: Respondents 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 optimistically 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) respondents mostly agreed that benchmarks and targets set in these documents, whatever their shape and range might be, are defined properly (Table 15). The lowest agreement percentage expressed was in Ireland where almost 30% of respondents think 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?



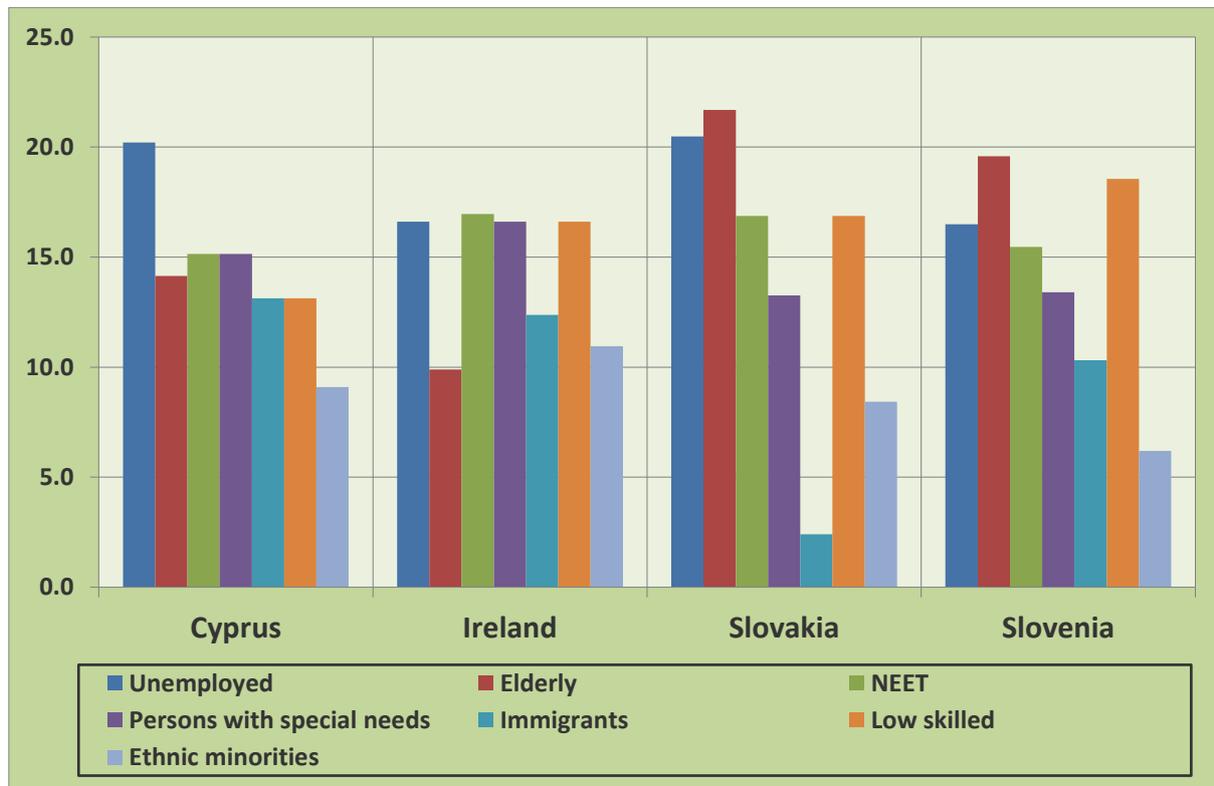
Almost three quarters of Irish respondents believe that target groups which need special educational attention are not accordingly addressed in respective documents in their country (Graph 14). Also in other three observed countries, the share is relatively high, approx. half.

For better understanding of these answers, we have asked which target groups have been neglected in this respect (Responses in 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?

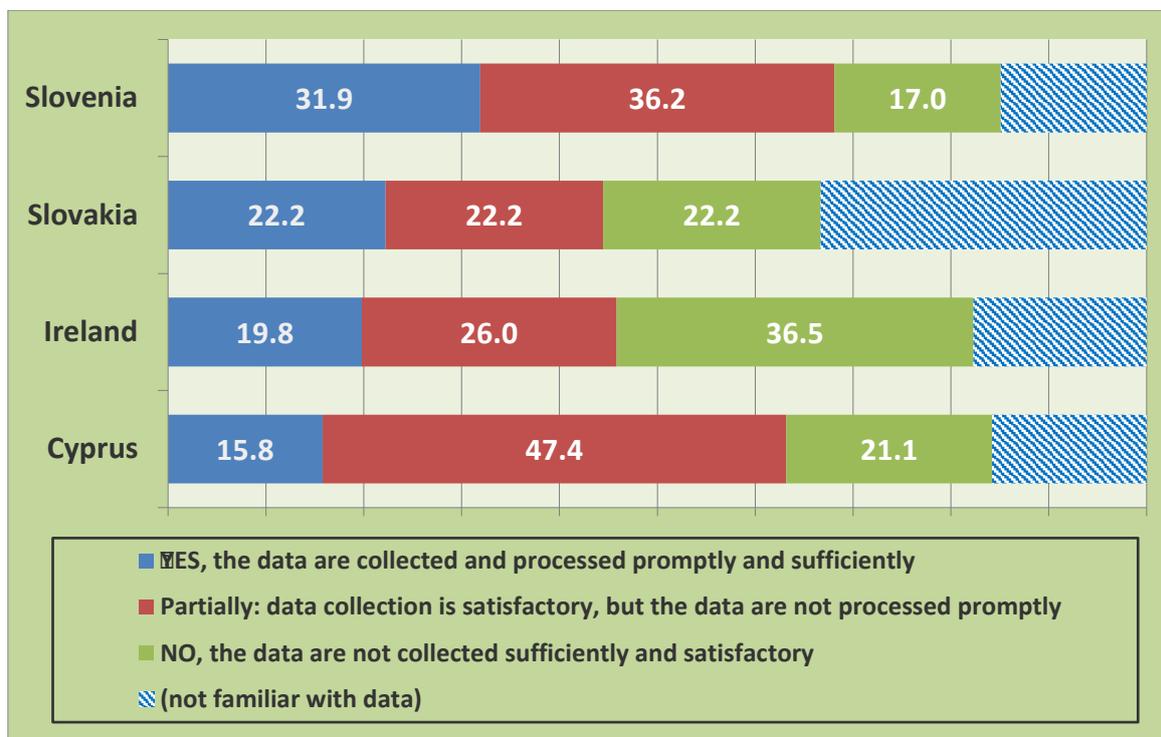


Respondents in all DIMA project participating countries placed emphasis on unemployed, young people not employed but neither in education or training (NEET), and low skilled. They also selected other choices quite frequently for example the elderly in Slovenia and Slovakia. In contrast almost no attention is focused on immigrants 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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES, 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?



In Table 17 and Graph 16 the percentages of respondents who ‘think that statistical offices do their job promptly and sufficiently’, and those who think that ‘they are working good, just not promptly enough’ is listed. The table and graph show that approx. 50% of Slovak and Irish respondents do not agree with these two statements. In contrast 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
entrepreneurship	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* the report presents answers to an open question "What adult education needs do you identify as the most important to be satisfied with regards to AE programmes your organization is providing?" (Q28). The answers fall into 16 categories, as presented in the table. Two major category groups can be identified: (1) job related programmes, and (2) basic skills or personal growth (learn to learn, ICT, personal growth, communication, social skills etc.) programmes. It is notable that a majority of respondents suggest that job related skills are most important.

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

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

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

Relatively few respondents answered this open question. In responses the 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?

Some interesting suggestions were made:

Cyprus: Adults have to be convinced that future participation in education and training is of their benefit; Better management 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 regional 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 systems.

Slovakia: Support employers (tax relief) so that 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: Development 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, informal and formal learning; Keep employers engagement 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 lifelong 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 into boxes they may not fit.

Yes, it should be seen as lifelong learning and education, rather than specific skills training. It should 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 private sector, public adult education institutions are not properly 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 doesn't have a clue what is going on.

Adult education is too 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 labour 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 opportunities 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. The project required each partner choose five of the most influential policy makers in their countries among those that would be willing to accept the invitation for interview.

Partners in Cyprus conducted interviews with highly positioned officers at the Foundation for the Management of European Lifelong Learning Programme, the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, and the agency Innovade: Leadership in Innovation.

Partners in Slovakia conducted interviews with representative of the Ministry of Education, the national coordinator of the Epale platform (responsible for national coordination of the implementation of the European Agenda for Adult Learning), the National Lifelong Learning Institute, the Director of the Centre for Continuing Education, Comenius University Bratislava, and the Director of National Lifelong Learning Institute.

Partners in Ireland interviewed representatives of National State Agency (QQI; Quality and Qualifications Ireland) and SOLAS (Further Education and Training Agency), two providers from the National Learning Network, one from Youthreach and one from the 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 Affairs and Equal Opportunities. Also the director of the main Adult Education Institute, and with the 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:

Questions 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/similarities, common approaches, and future improvements and development in adult education policy issues in partner countries.

The list of questions and summarized responses of interviewees follow:

A. Policy priorities:

The interview questions for this section are:

1. *What are your policy priorities for adult education and training?*
2. *What are your main policy, programme, or other initiatives related to adult education and training?*
3. *What are your main policy, programme, or research questions related to adult education and training?*

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

According to answers given by interviewees policy priorities in the field of adult education can be divided into five parts:

A1) Legislative framework and equality: All Slovene interviewees noted that the main role of legislation is to protect the vulnerable. 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' opinion it is obvious that some formal strategic document is needed in every country for defining the direction for decisions, measures and instruments to avoid 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 comes from the following 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 in the field can be understood if there is a lack of reliable strategic situational insight on the national level. On the other hand, it was mentioned that the existence of a clear and comprehensive strategic document on the national level, as is the case in Slovenia, can discourage the local decision makers making 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 seems 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 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 the EU

benchmark, this goal could be met by enhancing low skilled adults participating in learning activities to 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 the “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 put emphasis on employment as basic outcome of adult education activities. This means that the labour market is the main actor forming the demand for programmes and defining their suitability. Decision makers from the adult 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. In recognition that due to of personal financial shortages and high unemployment rate the main share of public finances In Slovenia is given to job-related programmes. Shrinking opportunities for offering general non-formal basic skills programmes to vulnerable groups and reducing general adult learning provision supply, mainly due to the current labour market situation, could have a 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 on further development of adult education legislation. Recognition of prior non-formal learning is closely connected with other supports 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 challenges which may arise if these instruments are not implemented with the learner as a priority. “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 for 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: This issue is most commonly discussed as “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 for a antion wide quality assurance of education system is envisaged also in new Slovenian legislation proposals.

A5) Statistical data: “[A]ny 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, e.g. unemployed”(Cyprus). Statistical data is needed not only at European and national level, but also at regional and local level, such as the data on effects of adult learning, including non-formal learning, on employability, and equality of access of vulnerable groups to education and training (Slovenia).

B. Challenges and further needs

The interview questions for this section are “*What are the main challenges faced at local, regional and national level with regards to adult education management?*” and “*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 from adults.

But, due to the lingering effects of the labour market crisis, the link between training and access to the labour market has weakened. Thus further education is decreasingly considered 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) lists six high level goals:

- ❗ enabling delivery of skills for the economy;
- ❗ supporting active inclusion;
- ❗ empowering learners and employers;
- ❗ influencing FET policy and practice through supporting innovation and entrepreneurship;
- ❗ building sector capacity and responsiveness;
- ❗ building SOLAS capability and organisational effectiveness;

One interviewee suggested an additional goal:

- ❗ establish a system for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

The importance of these goals was not questioned in 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 delivering a range of 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 expressed a further challenge: “Assessing needs of adult learners and designing programmes for progression cannot easily be simplified onto a one-dimensional plane; a written plan” (Ireland). 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 increasing standardisation will further marginalise some learners and contribute to the creation of ghettos of disadvantage (Ireland).

In Belgium (EAEA) interviewees identified 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” (EAEA). So, there is a general need for effective formal structures or informal mechanisms for cooperation and exchange among providers.

Some Slovene interviewees were critical of the current situation 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” (Slovenia).

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

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

C. Participation of adults

The interview questions for this section are 1) *“What are the main challenges that you face regarding adult participation?”*, 2) *“How adults’ participation in adult education and training can be further enhanced at local, regional and national level?”*, 3) *“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?”*, and 4) *“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 gave a variety of different answers to questions listed above. But all answers have one common bond: In none of these countries, the participation rate in adult learning is satisfactory.

Following, different explanations will be presented as well as different approaches in addressing this issue.

In Cyprus the “sectors’ stakeholders” identified the following challenges:

- I “lack of coherence policies to address adults at risk of social exclusion;
- I lack of incentives, e.g. financial motives, for those who must participate in education and training but do not have the necessary means to do so;
- I 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;
- I lack of funding;
- I lack of interest;
- I the large numbers on practical issues;
- I the mentality and the culture of adults who often have unreasonable requirements.”

In Ireland interviewees identified pointed out possible initiatives that could enhance the participation of adult learners:

- I a wider range of provision of quality courses delivered by quality assured educational providers;
- I 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 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 this interviewee identified “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” as in danger of being further excluded (Ireland). Considering 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?” (Ireland).

In Slovakia respondents are convinced 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” (Slovakia).
- “Lack of 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” (Slovakia).

Slovak respondents also pointed out that “promotion of adult education could also increase the participation rate” (Slovakia).

In Slovenia, the main challenge regarding adult participation is how to attract the most vulnerable groups to participate in adult education and training. The participation rate in Slovenia decreased significantly in last years. According to interviewees the 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” (Slovenia).

The Slovenian interviewees suggest adults participation in adult education and training can be further enhanced: by stable financing of public network of adult education providers and : by additional promotion and motivation.

D. Other issues

The interview question was *“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 led 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 relating to the further steps to improve the quality of the educational opportunities for adults:

- ! "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 challenges 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 (employers, society, state) on the other; how to measure effectiveness of adult education which is not directly linked to employment; how to make strategic documents feasible, etc.

To gain insight into stakeholders' perspective on these issues partners invited representatives of different stakeholders directly or indirectly involved in adult education (trade-unions, employment agencies, different providers' organizations etc.) to a focus group discussion.

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: The participants in the 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: Seven participants took part in the discussion: 1 from a trade-union, 1 from employment 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: 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 the 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 had agreed four questions to guide the facilitator focus the discussion on particular issues. While the list of questions were to be sent to focus group participants in advance only two partners (Cyprus and Slovenia) had done this and one partially (EAEA). For this reason this chapter of the report will be divided into two parts. The first will present answers given by participants in Ireland, Cyprus, Slovenia, and

partially EAEA to the agreed questions. The second part will present other issues discussed in EAEA board focus group.

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

1. Question:

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

Do you think that these documents sufficiently guarantee the fulfilment 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?

Slovenian focus group noted satisfaction with the strategic and other documents, the Master Plan for Adult Education and the Strategy on Lifelong Learning Annual Plan, in the field of adult education. Focus group members agreed that the problem is the realisation of what is written in them. The participation rate of adults in education in Slovenia is high relative to the EU rate but there is concern as it has been decreasing quickly in the last few years. There is a challenge in reaching final beneficiaries especially vulnerable target groups of adults. The focus group names the target groups as those without basic education or low qualified; elders; those financially unable to educate themselves, demotivated adults, etc. The low realisation of ambitious objectives in the documents were identified as the following:

- 📌 Finances: Shortage of financial resources for adult education; impact of the economic crises; funding only made available to AE providers after delivery of educational programs or to participants after they already paid the fees and complete the program of education themselves; some programs were stopped during the gap-time between the two ESF perspectives because finances not guaranteed;
- 📌 the adult education system is not settled due to lack of guaranteed funding. One focus group participant said “The adult education system we have is built on the sand”;
- 📌 the state does not sufficiently support education/training of the vulnerable groups.

In Cyprus the MOEC outlined the four priority axes and strategic objectives of the Lifelong Learning Strategy (CyLLS):

- 📌 1st: Promoting access and participation in lifelong learning for all and recognition of learning outcomes;
- 📌 2nd: Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training;
- 📌 3rd: Promoting research and development for the support of lifelong learning;
- 📌 4th: Promoting employability through 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 as Cyprus does not have an Adult Education Strategy;
- 📌 the CyLLS covers formal, informal and non-formal education;
- 📌 the priorities are significant to strengthen access and participation of all in LLL and recognizing all learning outcomes.

B. Limitations and obstacles:

- ❗ the CyLLS is predominantly a political document of the Republic of Cyprus. Therefore there are no guidelines or a specific implementation timetable for the strategy actions;
- ❗ agencies need to monitor their systems to detect obstacles for the implementation ;
- ❗ more cooperation between stakeholders;
- ❗ sufficient funding to implement the strategy.

The second important document discussed was EU document “Education and Training 2020”. The focus group identified the following:

A. Positive impacts:

- ❗ The Education and Training 2020 Strategy is a very useful as it maps the existing situation in Cyprus such as increasing participation of adults age 25-64 in LLL;
- ❗ providing information benchmarks and Indicators useful for the policy makers.

B. Limitations:

- ❗ improvement targets not defined;
- ❗ Insufficient emphasis on ensuring basic skills for all;
- ❗ Insufficient emphasis on quality assurance and monitoring of the field.

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 identify relevant indicators for measuring the effects of non-formal education, or to prove the effective spending of public money. While it is generally accepted that non-formal education strengthens social and cultural capital it is difficult to measure the effects of such education. Therefore qualitative data is used for example comparative and before/after measurement. Soft indicators that could be used include level of satisfaction with delivered education/training including new knowledge gained, greater trust in the institutions, etc.

One focus group participant noted there are already many concrete indicators which show the effects of learning such as improved health, lower number of accidents, etc. Several indicators mentioned during the discussion included non-economic indicators (better flow of information among employees, better relations among employees, etc.) and economic indicators (improved productivity). The problem is the categorisation border of some effects and indicators are blurred. For example some indicators categorised as non-economic can give rise to better productivity. As an example better employee communication skills can result in better communications with customers and better outcome for the enterprise. While it is possible to measure participation in education and changes in productivity levels indicators must measure the effects of over time impact may not be evident until after a certain period of time; months or years.

Focus group participants noted that indicators can be divided in three categories: on individual level, on organisational level and on national level. Participants also discussed the range of indicators including BDP GINI and HDI which vary in suitability and reliability.

The focus group discussion in Cyprus noted that indicators measuring benefits of learning already exist:

- 📌 Cyprus Lifelong Learning (CyLLL) Strategy 2014-2020 has set the national target of the proportion of the adult population participating in education and training as 12% for 2020;
- 📌 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, refugees, early school leavers, etc;
- 📌 Quality Assurance Indicators.

2. Question:

Some experts and researchers believe, that as far as public financed adult education is concerned there is an overwhelming emphasis 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?

In Slovenia focus group participants noted that employers should be responsible for the labour force qualification needs of their enterprises. The challenge is to determine the threshold of financing between state funding and employer funding. The focus group suggested that education/training for vulnerable groups and general non-formal education should be financed from the public resources. The state, the focus group suggested, should oversee the identification of these needs and the achievement of formal or vocation education levels.

The Slovenian focus group noted that employers enterprises firstly finance on education/training of the key staff, mostly managers. Most enterprises do not invest in education/training for lowly qualified employees especially vulnerable groups. Public resources is invested in education/training of unemployed to raise employability. However, often programmes organised by employment agencies are directly linked to particular job skills demanded on the labour market. Some Public resources are used for education/training of managers or for soft skills like communication.

The Slovenian focus group recommended:

- 📌 employers should be bound by law to increase key competency levels for all employees in their enterprise;
- 📌 employers, who invest in education/training for their employees from specific vulnerable target groups should be entitled to receive tax reliefs;
- 📌 it should be prescribed that employers prepare a career plan for each employee;

- ❗ employers should be required to deliver at least part of employee education/training during working hours;
- ❗ employers should be required to deliver education/training for employee vulnerable target groups in the premises of the enterprise.

The Cyprus Sectors' Stakeholders focus group discussion noted out that the Life Long Strategy (CyLLS) covers all types of learning and training (formal, non-formal and informal). While it is not all encompassing it is a step further towards the right direction. The focus group noted that public financing would raise employability in comparison to non-formal learning. Finally, they noted that it is difficult to measure the relationship between public and private interest in adult education.

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

3. 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 was already achieved with involvement of several ministries in The Master Plan for Adult Education. This linkage could be further developed through mutual trust and further dialogue, which should be outcome oriented. The ministries should adopt a greater collaborative rather than competitive approach to public resource distribution.

Focus group participants suggested more linkage in the field of adult education at three levels: local, regional and national. This linkage should be systematically built for example among 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 especially for the vulnerable target groups.

In Cyprus the sectors' stakeholders' focus group identified the following challenges and recommendations:

- ❗ encouraging the private sector and citizens involvement in education and training development;
- ❗ cooperation between relevant stakeholders, including policy makers, teachers' unions, trade unions, political parties, and parents' associations;
- ❗ formulation of national documents and strategies with the involvement of the relevant stakeholders;
- ❗ development of a comprehensive strategy.

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 competitiveness among providers. The more diverse providers 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, etc. While a positive attitude is there political or collaborative support is often missing. There should be structures that enable providers to cooperate better and assure the permeability of the sector especially to encourage disadvantaged learners to step into adult learning.

The focus group participants also suggest empowering smaller non-formal providers working on a local level to gain more recognition and validation as well as working on issues of common interest such as quality assurance.

3.3.3. Focus group with the EAEA board – other issues

The Objectives of the EAEA 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 currently there seems to be a momentum among policy-makers for more democracy, intercultural dialogue and social cohesion, the contribution of adult education to achieve these 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 to lobby for them by showing evidence of their work. Publications, videos can play a very important role in this.

Adult education providers and organisations are advocating for more recognition of the benefits of non-formal learning's, not only for learners but for the society as a whole. Policy-makers should be convinced of the necessity of a long-term perspective and a cross-sectorial approach on education policies. For an example, the planning and decision making about learning opportunities for refugees in Finland, is divided among three different political ministries; Education and Culture; Employment and the Economy; Interior. This 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 depended on political will and support. Even when funding is available countries do not have a long term investment plans but assign funding through calls for project initiatives. This often leads to a decrease of quality, and less support to disadvantaged learners who might be asked to pay for their classes. Further providers may sometimes rely on other types of project-based funding that is difficult to obtain. Another issue raised is that the ministries in charge of adult education often lack of resources as their portfolio is considered less strategic than others relative to the priorities set by the national political agenda.

The EAEA focus group also discussed the issue of funding advanced teacher education in liberal adult education. There are many part-time teachers in adult education centres all over Europe working on short-term contracts. Such an arrangement curtails their professional development.

Finally, mostly due to the financial situation in some countries there have been structural changes among the providers in liberal adult education including mergers and some centre's closures. This leads to accessibility problems 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 data collection instruments: questionnaire, individual interviews and focus group discussion. Our intention was to outline topics, needs, problems and approaches to address problems, decision making and planning methods, in adult education common or similar in all DIMA project partner countries. The report allows sought to outline solutions, proposed or undertaken in partner countries as examples of good practice for others.

4.1. Questionnaire

It was noted that the questionnaire respondents were mainly providers and that there was no substantial differences among partner countries. The majority of respondents were professionals or officials in public educational institutions. Results slightly differ when type of work was considered. In Ireland and Slovakia the 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 was neutral.

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

1. On the systemic level the need for a comprehensive national strategic document to cover adult education was very much emphasized. In this respect each of partners expressed a different approach. Respondents in Cyprus pointed to the lack of this kind of document on the national level. In Slovakia they lack the adequate legislation in the field of adult education although this is already prepared and will be processed shortly. Respondents 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. Input form respondents suggest Slovenia is a positive example of good practice having adopted a comprehensive strategic document titled 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 common to all partners can be noted. The majority of respondents set targets for their performance, but mainly short or mid-term targets only. Very few set long-term targets such as number of issued certificates, number of participants, participants' outcomes, etc. Providers in Cyprus are slightly better in this respect.
3. Respondent providers 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 responding countries agreed to high level, from 40% in Slovakia to 70% in Ireland, that target groups are not properly defined and addressed. When asked

which groups should be defined as more in need for additional attention and treatment answers were almost equally distributed across all offered target groups with some more attention payed to teh unemployed.

4.2. Individual interviews

There are two major common points from the majority of interviewees in partner countries:

1. The role of the state and public institutions in adult education is to allocate financial sources and teaching capacities for enhancing learning opportunities for vulnerable groups not able to find or afford learning opportunities. Interviewees agreed that low qualification, unemployment, marginal position in society, and failure in initial schooling were characteristics that most commonly define a group as vulnerable. .
2. The second point is how interviewees define programme types and most important learning outcomes. In all participating countries interviewees were divided and oriented in two directions. One part is putting emphasis on labour market needs and employment as the most desirable outcome of learning activities. The other part puts more attention on basic skills such are learning to learn, social and societal skills, and empowerment for active citizenship which could enhance possibilities to realise one's own learning opportunities.

4.3. Focus group discussion

Focus group speakers in two countries that followed predetermined discussion questions (Slovenia and Cyprus) and the one that have done that partially (EAEA) identified three defined issues:

1. The feasibility of any strategic document depends on detailed action plan attached to the document, with mandatorily s tasks and responsibilities of involved stakeholders, measurable outcomes, monitoring instruments and financial provision.
2. Although advocates of employability argue that employment is the most measurable learning outcome and that there is inadequate evidence that so called soft skills bring any substantial progress, those who do not agree point out countless areas where increased basic and social skills enhance prosperity of the society such as decreasing health hazardous behaviour, deminishing intergenerational social determination, environment protection consciousness, and social cohesion.
3. It is not an obligation of public finances to train a labour force in skills needed for particular jobs on demand by the labour market although employees make this argument to decision makers as a means to decrease unemployment. Many discussion group speakers argued that publicly financed learning programmes should focus on increasing basic skills and competences. They suggest particular skills needed on the labour market should be provided and financed or co-financed by the employer.

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