

Adult Education within BeLL partner countries

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United Kingdom

The adult education sector of the United Kingdom is characterised through different policy developments in the four belonging nations of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The central Governments of these four states hold the responsibility for the educational systems but in most cases the provision of the education is decentralised to local authorities, voluntary providers, governing bodies of educational institutions etc. From 1997 until 2000 the UK experienced a long period of economic growth, which enabled the government to make major increases in public expenditure, mainly in the education, health and social sector. A major focus has been on community cohesion, education for citizenship and reducing discrimination (CONFITEA VI, UK National Report, p. 10-28). Current economic prospects, however, induce drastic declines in support (ginconet.eu). Major feature of adult education in the UK is a strong public funded non-vocational adult education service. The Government's main strategy for adult education is to strengthen economic competitiveness and addressing social exclusion. This is supposed to be reached through skills and qualifications, and therefore, to provide employability. In the meantime, there is no distinct adult education sector in the UK. Adult education takes place in sectors like higher education, school, work based learning programmes or local authority adult education services. Only the last one is exclusively for adults. It is the one being less public funded and at the same time counts most participants. Concerning the funding of adult education, the UK Government went from annual budgeting to a three-yearly review which reallocated resources. Funding then is decentralised to the nations and takes place as follows: Adult education in England is financed through the 'Higher Education Funding Council' (for Higher Education) as well as through the learning 'Skills Council' (for Further Education). In Scotland the 'Scottish Funding Council' is responsible for higher as well as further education. In Wales the funding is managed directly by the 'Welsh Assembly Government' while in Northern Ireland further and higher Education is funded through the Department for Employment and Learning (CONFITEA VI, UK National Report, p. 10-28).

Focusing on adult education in England¹, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills is responsible for most policies concerning the adult education sector. Since 2010, the funding and regulation lies under the responsibility of the 'Skills Funding Agency'² which was established under the 'Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act' of 2009. This act also introduced the right for employees to request time for training. Most important bodies, which work on a UK-wide basis to give leadership to business on skills development, are, for example, the 'UK Commission for Employment and Skills', the 'Sector Skills Council' and the 'National Skills Council' (eacea.ec.europa.eu).

In England 'The Adult Entitlement to Learning' gives adults the chance to study for certain qualifications, like reading and math, vocational qualification or a general qualification (level 2A) for free. Most of the free studies go up to level 2A. For higher levels students have to pay. This boundary varies from the public funding available. In 2013/14 so called further education loans will be introduced for people over the age of 24 who wish to complete full level 3 or 4 in order to qualify for a job (eacec.europa.eu).

Finland

According to the Ministry of Education more than 1.7 million citizens of Finland (out of 5.2 million) participate in adult education each year. Half of it is covered through the working age population. The 'Ministry of Education' is in charge of the whole education system while the 'Ministry of Employment and Economy' underlies the labour market training. Every four years the government compiles a development plan for the whole education sector. The development plan 2007-2011 for example, included the implementation of a development program for liberal adult education, the improving of apprenticeship training or the enhancement of competences of teaching staff. Since 2007, a voucher scheme within adult education exists in Finland. Within this scheme, institutions who offer liberal adult education receive study voucher subsidies in order to enable special target groups, like immigrants, unemployed, and pensioners etc. to lower or totally compensate the tuition fees for them. The main emphasis of Finnish adult education as well as further training, are to update and upgrade competencies of adults and to promote enjoyment. Since the economic downturn during the 1990s, the adult education sector changed from mainly liberal adult education to a very certificate-oriented education in order to handle a drastic rise in unemployment. Future trends for adult education in Finland are independent and internet based learning environments as well as the inclusion of minority groups. Further, the recognition of skills which have been acquired during the lifetime and the emphasis to make guidance and counselling services more effective are current as well as future key issues. Main providers

¹ Since questionnaires of the BeLL project will be collected there

² <http://skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/>

of liberal adult education in Finland are Folk High Schools, Adult Education Centres, Summer Universities, Study Centres and Physical Education Centres (Country Report on Adult Education in Finland, 2011, p. 3-7)

Germany

In order to describe the adult education system in Germany, several factors have to be included. Germany is composed of 16 federal states the so called 'Länder'. Since each state defines its own priorities and goals concerning education, there is no centralised system. The "Länder" are able to enact legislation in the areas of education, science and culture. Even though there are some overarching policies like the focus on work and occupational progression or the certification and recognition of lifelong learning³, "the individual decisions and systems are entirely dependent on the situation in the specific "Länder" and particularly to the respective legislation on further education". In the area of adult education the power of the "Länder" specifically relates to school leaving certificates, continuing vocational education or education at trade or technical schools as well as continuing academic education. The laws of the "Länder" outline basic conditions concerning the public-sector support and also define continuing education as an area of education on its own right. These laws contain rules on the curriculum or define required teacher qualifications. Meanwhile, the federal state is responsible "for continuing vocational education outside of the school sector, for research into continuing education, and for issues relating to continuing education statistics; In other words, for areas which affect issues across the "Länder" (Country Report on Adult Education in Germany, 2011, p. 4-5). Collaboration between the Federation and the state is necessary in order to agree on aims and roles within education which takes place in various different bodies. Therefore, the 'Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the "Länder" and the 'Joint Science Conference' was build. It functions as a crucial element so as to reach a comparable development of education within the "Länder". On federal level the 'Federal Ministry of Education and Research' (BMBF) is the main organisational body. It is divided into eight directorates-generals. One of them is being responsible for vocational training and lifelong learning and is subdivided into two directorates. The first one concerning vocational training, the other one concerns lifelong learning, educational research and continuing education. One important federal key legislation is the so called 'Concept for Lifelong Learning' (2008) which is based on the insight that there is a relatively low participation rate (especially for low qualified adults) in continuing education compared to other countries. 'The Concept of Lifelong Learning'

³ For example within the 'Vocational Education Act' or the 'Employees Representation Act' (Nuissl,E./Pehl, K. (2004): Portrait continuing education Germany, Bielefeld.)

includes measures to improve vocational training, the facilitating of transition from school to higher education, the attention to technology and natural sciences as well as improving the opportunities for women. Further, its aim is to strengthen the motivation in participation, to increase the flexibility between individual educational sectors, to improve the integration through education and to intensify the knowledge about processes and effects of lifelong learning (Country Report on Adult Education in Germany, 2011, p. 4-7).

In Germany a general trend towards breaking down boundaries between vocational and general education can be found. This is a very interesting discussion, since the employment and vocational law still lies under the federal responsibility while the cultural and general education law underlies the "Länder". Continuing education is provided by a wide range of providers in Germany. The offers depend on the local situations and needs of the different regions. Key adult education providers in Germany are trade unions, company-based and commercial providers, institutes on distance education, chambers of industry and commerce as well as chambers of craft trades and agriculture, higher education institutions, stated financed education organisations, religious organisations and community initiatives. Besides, many umbrella and organisational bodies can be found. Main providers here are, for example, the Volk High Schools, church led organisations (like the 'Catholic Federal Association for Adult Education'⁴ and the 'German Association for Ecumenical Adult Education'⁵), 'The German Institute for Adult Education'⁶, the 'Agency of Adult and Further Education'⁷, the 'German Industry Board for Vocational Training'⁸ and the 'Confederation of German Trade Unions'⁹ (Country Report on Adult Education in Germany, 2011, p.8-12). As most important principles for the organisation of adult education (generally contained in all adult education acts) are: a secure institutional structure of AE which is supposed to be created through institutional support and recognition; organisational autonomy (for example separation from societal organisations, employers' associations, churches as well as autonomy in syllabus planning and the appointment of staff) qualified staff; cooperation with other educational institutions and other communes and through open access for everybody (Nuissl, Pehl, 2004, p. 21).

Italy

Since the 70s the responsibility for adult education in Italy is mostly transferred to the different regions. Since the economic structure of southern and northern regions differ from

⁴ www.kbe-bonn.de

⁵ www.deae.de

⁶ www.die-bonn.de

⁷ www.aewb-nds.de

⁸ www.kwb-berufsbildung.de

⁹ www.dgb.de

each other and migration increases in the whole country, lifelong learning in Italy focuses on social inclusion. Courses for adults were first offered in 1947 in so called “social schools” which were promoting literary and numeracy skills. From the 70s up to the 90s associations and trade unions played a key role in Italian adult education. They worked closely together with political parties and the Catholic Church to promote literacy and improve professional skills. Since then, a number of legislative acts and agreements have been developed in order to have adult education at current stage. For example, the 'Circolare Ministeriali 7809/1990' was an act promoting the development of evening classes and its administrative organisation. Further acts improved the rights for education and vocational training or the integration of foreign pupils. Since 2009 the Italian adult education system is being reformed by transforming the existing 'Permanent Territorial Centres' (CTP)¹⁰ into 'Provincial Centres for Education of Adults' (CPIA) which should bring a reorganisation of their activity and management. This has been done by the influence of European institutions and policies and the recommendation of establishment of a 'European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training' (ECVET) (Country Report on Adult Education in Italy, 2011, p. 4-5).

Main public institutions promoting adult learning opportunities are the Permanent Territorial Centres and the evening schools. Additional private organisations as well as NGOs can be found. The CPTs operate in the field of formal and non-formal education. Its main purpose is to promote basic literacy skills, develop basic skills and specific knowledge, teach foreign languages, offer Italian courses to foreigners and to offer courses for high education diplomas. The courses at the CPTs are free of charge and in most cases financed through the 'Ministry of Education'. Teaching areas in CPTs are Italian, mathematics, technology and foreign languages. The CPTs evening schools also offer the possibility to reach a high education diploma. Moreover, they promote cultural as well as the professional development of adults. Most courses require a tuition fee but some have the chance to become publicly funded. NGOs like the 'Italian Association for the Education of Adults', the 'Folk High Schools' or the 'Universities of Third Age' underlie different rules (depending of the region they belong to). Though in order to operate, all of them have to be recognised as an association. They must provide at least six different courses, two thirds of the teachers have to have a university degree and they should be economically autonomous. Further, they have to be a member of the national or the international association of Università per la Terza Età¹¹ (Country Report on Adult Education in Italy, 2011, p. 5-8).

Romania

¹⁰Have been established in 1997 in order “to improve the legislation in concerning adult education” (Country Report on Adult Education in Italy, 2011)

¹¹ University of third age

In Romania major political changes within the adult education sector have been taking place since the late 1980s. These reforms are still ongoing. The most important ones nowadays are part of 'The National Development Plan 2007-2013' or the 'Sectoral Operational Programme for the Development of Human Resources'. Those Programmes are trying to attain the benchmarks set in the Lisbon Agenda. Other programmes, more specifically addressing lifelong learning, are the 'National Employment Strategy 2004-2010', 'The Short- and Medium-Term Strategy of Continuing Vocational Training' as well as 'The Ministry of Education and Research Strategic Guidelines for 2006-2008'. Most of these programmes are financed through the 'Sectoral Operational Plan Human Resources Development' which Romania belongs to since its access to the EU in 2007. Because adult education at all levels has been provided only in Romanian language there have been quite a few conflicts in the past. To lighten this conflict, new policies give the national minorities¹² the right to study in their own language (Country Report on Adult Education in Romania, 2011, p. 4).

Within the Romanian education law a special sector is dedicated to the so called permanent education. Here, access to education and continuing education for young people and adults who have no compulsory education, early school leavers, people with special educational needs, people returning from working abroad, residents in economically and socially disadvantaged communities, older persons with low qualification levels, students with a risk of school failure as well as citizens who want to benefit from adult education is attempted to be ensured by the Romanian state. 'The Ministry of Education Research and Innovation', 'The Ministry of Labour Social Solidarity and Family' and 'The Ministry of Culture and Cults' are responsible for the organisation and accreditation of adult education in Romania. It is mostly financed through public and private funds as well as from financing or co-financing of employers. According to the law, organizations within adult education must ensure compensatory education, continuing vocational training, civic education as well as personal education in order for the learners to be able to play an active role in society. Main providers of adult education are public institutions, private bodies and NGOs. A big topic in Romania are the so called 'basic education recovery programmes' which enable young people, who have not reached the basic level of school education, an apprenticeship type of training. Further, there is a programme within areas with high Roma population which is called 'positive discrimination'. It tries to encourage more Roma to become teachers in order to function as positive role models. This is done by a distance learning programme through the University of Bucharest (Country Report on Adult Education in Romania, 2011, p. 5-8).

Switzerland

¹² Mostly Hungarian and Roma people

In Switzerland adult education used to be highly decentralised and heterogeneous because it was regulated by several ministries on a national as well as on a cantonal¹³ level. Until January 2013 Switzerland did not have a ministry of education. While the 'Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology' (BBT), used to be in charge of vocational continuing education, the 'State Secretariat for Education and Research' (SBI) had the responsibility for university level education. In January 2013 in Switzerland a new education department was established. Therefore the 'Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology' (SBFI) and the 'State Secretariat for Education and Research' have been merged to the 'Federal Office for Economics, Education and Research'¹⁴. This hopefully helps to centralise the before often split responsibilities in that area and therefore coordinate them in a better way. Nothing changes within the 'Federal Office for Culture' which arranges policies concerning literacy and within the 'State Secretariat for Economic Affairs' which is mandating continuing education for unemployed people (Country Report on Adult Education in Switzerland, 2011, p. 5).

Generally the government and the cantons have a shared responsibility for the educational system. The cantons are responsible for the primary sector as well as for most parts of the secondary and tertiary sector. The support of the vocational education underlies the responsibility of the federal government. Further, education in Switzerland is mostly privately organised and funded. The annual turnover of continuing vocational education in Switzerland is 5.3 billion CHF¹⁵ (which is approximately 4.4 billion Euros). The employers are the most important source of financing; therefore, they fund 70% of all vocational courses either completely or to some degree. Only 20% of the vocational continuing education courses are exclusively financed by the participants (<http://www.effekte-projekt.de>). “Moreover, one of the leading features of adult education in Switzerland is the high participation rate, as it has one of the highest enrolment rates in the OECD area in both general education and vocational training” (Country Report on Adult Education in Switzerland, 2011, p. 7).

Until a couple of years ago there has been a term for continuing education in Switzerland which only differentiated between vocational and general continuing education. Continuing vocational training was, therefore calculated to vocational education. Due to the adaption of the Swiss statistic to Eurostat¹⁶, the differentiation in formal, non-formal and informal continuing education has increasingly gained ground in the last years. Exceptions are still some parts of higher vocational education. It is sometimes counted to the non-formal and

¹³Switzerland is divided into 26 cantons. They are member states of the federal state of Switzerland (Country Report on Adult Education in Switzerland, 2011, p. 4)

¹⁴ <http://www.sbf.admin.ch/>

¹⁵ 1 CHF = 0,82 Euro (<http://www.oanda.com/lang/de/currency/converter/>), stand 05.11.2012

¹⁶ Provides the EU with statistical information (concerning Europe), <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/eurostat/home/>

sometimes to the formal continuing education. These contradictions are supposed to be clarified with the implementation of a new national further education law. As of 2004, the national 'Vocational Education Law' contains a chapter for vocational continuing education. This law comprises most accepted professions. Still further education which is not for vocational reason does not have any national legal basis in Switzerland. Some areas are regulated through special laws (for example the fight against illiteracy) but others do not have any regulation (<http://www.effekte-projekt.de>). For a long time there have been approaches for a national regulation which helps to support the further education sector on a national basis. Years of efforts had paid off, when in 2006 the decision to regulate the further education sector on a national legal level was made. With this, principles of further education can be determined (<http://www.alice.ch>). "Goals of high strategic importance are the implementation of a closer connection between ALE, other sectors of the Swiss education and training system, and the economic and social system" (Country Report on Adult Education Switzerland, 2011, p. 5). Experts worked on a draft law and correspondingly, a preliminarily draft of a national further education law has been accepted from the federal council in November 2011 (<http://www.alice.ch>). Though the full implementation of the new law will probably not be realised until the year 2014 (<http://www.effekte-projekt.de>).

Since 2011 Switzerland, still not a member of the EU, is participating in European programmes as a full partner, therefore a national agency dealing with this programmes has been organised. It is called 'chStiftung'¹⁷ (Country Report on Adult Education in Switzerland, 2011, p. 6). Key providers in the Swiss adult education sector are the newly funded 'Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology' (which supports seven umbrella organisations in the field of ALE¹⁸), 'The Swiss Association of Popular Universities'¹⁹, 'The Education and Training Centre Movendo'²⁰ and the 'Swiss Federal Institute for Vocational Education'²¹ (Country Report on Adult Education Switzerland, 2011, p. 8-11). Since Switzerland is quadrilingual²², providers offer courses in three different languages. Most courses though are offered in German, French and Italian since most people having Rhaeto-Romanic as their mother-tongue are bilingual and are able to participate in a course held in one of the other languages. Even though a lot of Swiss people know at least one of the other national languages, the communication and coordination between the different language regions is in some cases still a challenge.

¹⁷ <http://www.chstiftung.ch/>

¹⁸ One of them is the Swiss Federation for Adult Learning (SVEB), which is one of the partners in the BeLL project

¹⁹ <http://www.up-vhs.ch/>

²⁰ <http://www.movendo.ch/>

²¹ <http://www.ehb-schweiz.ch/en/Pages/default.aspx>

²² German, French, Italian and Rhaeto-Romanic are the four official languages in Switzerland

Slovenia

In Slovenia the parliament passes laws concerning adult education and training and supports the national AE programme. 'The Division for Higher Professional and Adult Education' within the 'Ministry of Education, Science and Sport' is the main decision making department concerning the design and implementation of policies within the field of adult education. 'The Council of Experts of the Republic of Slovenia for Adult Education' (CEAE) has been entrusted by the government to professional matter and programme development in order to monitor and evaluate the conditions and the development on adult education. Since 1996 adult education is legally regulated through several acts like the 'Adult Education Act' or the 'Organisation and Financing of Education Act', which determine lifelong learning and the accessibility of education with equal conditions for everybody as well as the freedom of education, the professional and ethic responsibility of adult educators, as the fundamental principles of adult education in Europe. At the same time they regulate the conditions for carrying out adult educational activities (Country Report on Adult Education in Slovenia, 2011, p. 3-6).

The most important strategic documents for planning and implementation of adult education in Slovenia are the Master Plan for AE and the Lifelong Learning Strategy. The new 'Master Plan for Adult Education' (MPAE 2013-2020) which is statutorily defined by the 'Adult Education Act' is at current state almost finished. The document determines priorities, identifies target groups and sets benchmarks for each of them. Further, it sets a financial scope that is guaranteed for several years ahead. The new MPAE is based on the experience of its predecessor from the years 2004-2010. On the basis of MPAE an 'Annual Adult Education Master Plan' is prepared which “determines the national interest in adult education, defines activities required for the implementation of adult education, and provides stable funding from public sources” (webgate.ec.europa.eu). The plan is the basis for annual work plans. The Slovenian lifelong learning strategy encompasses the development of adult education. The document aims at adjusting learning to the needs of the individual learner, developing a positive attitude to learning, enhancing key competences for a good life and being a valuable member of society. Also, it is intended to increase the effectiveness as well as to create equal opportunities (Country Report on Adult Education in Slovenia, 2011, p. 4-6).

In terms of public institutions dealing with AE there are: 'The Slovenian Institute for Adult Education', 'The Slovenian Institute for Vocational Education and Training', 'The National Education Institute', 'The National School for Leadership in Education' and the 'National Examination Centre'. They are the five most important institutes being financed by the government (Country Report on Adult Education in Slovenia, 2011 p. 7-8). The Slovenian

Institute for Adult Education (SIAE) “is the national institution for development, research and guidance in the field of adult education” (siae.acs.si) with the basic mission to foster the Slovenian culture of lifelong learning and education. The main providers of adult education, meanwhile, are private AE institutions providing formal and non-formal programmes, secondary schools with mostly formal courses and folk high schools with mostly non-formal programmes. Organisations which provide programmes for the education of adults and who are funded through public sources have to comply with requirements for staffing, space and equipment. Additionally, they have to be registered in the 'Adult Education Programmes Registry' at the Ministry of Education (webgate.ec.europa.eu). Noticeable is the fact that in Slovenia the providers are concentrated in regions with higher gross domestic product (BeLL, Sampling Plan – Slovenia, 2012).

Although the importance, value, quality and scope of publicly financed adult education and learning in Slovenia have grown considerably in the past years, there are still sectors which have not been reached or not been addressed. For example there is still considerable disparity between high and low educated adults in participation in learning activities; the share of four years of secondary attainment within upper secondary level, which enables tertiary level enrolment, is still not satisfactory. Further, the share of non-vocational learning within non-formal learning is below the desired level; an adequate system of evaluation and assessment of prior learning has not yet been implemented and the network of providers delivering publicly relevant and publicly financed programmes as well as supportive activities, designed for vulnerable groups does not have proper financial support for stable provision on the one hand and is not evenly spread throughout the country on the other (infonet-ae.eu).

Spain

The legislative power of adult education in Spain is decentralised. It is transferred to the different autonomous communities and regions. There the development and application of regulations concerning adult education takes place. Therefore, general statutes on “education are composed by framework laws, establishing general principles which each autonomous community has to develop, according to specific local needs” (Country Report on Adult Education in Spain, 2011, p.4). Generally, adult education in Spain is regulated by the education act LOE²³. It is a general act which is the current basis for adult education. Further acts like the 'Organic Law on Qualifications and Vocational Training' (which structures vocational training into youth, unemployed and working people), the 'Employment Act' (dealing with improving ongoing occupational training), or the 'Organic Act on Education' (regulating the entire non-university education system) show the efforts that have been made during the last few years in order to improve the Spanish adult education system (Country Report on Adult Education in Spain, 2011, p. 4-5).

²³Ley Orgánica de Educación, 2006

Adult education courses in Spain are provided depending on whether it is offered by education or employment public authorities. Training provided by **education authorities** mostly takes place in adult education institutions (which function on a full-time basis) or in adult education classrooms (which function part time and are mostly located in primary or secondary schools). In the non-formal learning sector the 'Spanish Federation of Popular Universities' and the 'Instituto Paulo Freire de España' are two important key providers of adult education. Within this sector many language courses for Spanish immigrants take place. Since in Spain different languages are spoken, these courses are not only offered in Spanish but also in Basque, Catalan or Galician. Most other courses focus on disadvantaged groups such as elderly, women, immigrants or disabled people. The Spanish 'Federation of Popular Universities' gets subsidised by several institutions like the 'Ministry of Education and Culture', 'The European Commission' or the 'Social Work Ministry'. Whereas education provided by **employment authorities** is mostly promoted through public authorities own institutions, business organisations, companies or private vocational training integrated institutions. The vocational training and career related sector has a high importance in Spain. Here much is done for vocational training. It is organised in different levels, beginning with basic literacy skills and ending with compulsory education certificates. Very important in this field are the 'Workshop Schools' and the 'Trade Schools' for young unemployed adults. These programmes are financed through the European cohesion fund (Country Report on Adult Education in Spain, 2011, p. 6-10). Further, Spain's adult education sector is characterised through a wide range of NGOs and other associations promoting adult education. One of the main ones is the confederation of participant's organisations in Spain (CONFAPEA²⁴). It is an umbrella organisation on national level which brings together several Spanish cultural and educational associations. The existence of these institutions goes back on the claim of adults learners to participate in decisions which concern their education. To facilitate broad access, a wide range of distance education is allocated for adults. This is coordinated and organised through the 'Centre for Innovation and Development of Distance Education' which belongs to the 'Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport'. Distance education is provided especially for people who are not able to attend courses personally because of their living situation, because they are armed forces personnel, because they live abroad but have already started Spanish official studies or because they want to attend a course which is not offered in their autonomous community (webgate.ec.europa.eu).

Czech Republic

To give an overview about current key policies in adult education in the Czech Republic a number of different regulations need to be mentioned, since there does not exist one

²⁴<http://confapea.org>, 02.02.2013

integrated legal regulation. The current legislation comprises the 'Education Act' regulating "education from pre-primary to upper and tertiary professional education and its public administration" (National system overview on education systems in Europe, 2011, p. 3), the 'Higher Education Act', "which includes a provision on lifelong learning programmes" (Country Report on Adult Education in the Czech Republic, 2011, p. 4) and the 'Act on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Outcomes', making a provision for the national qualifications framework. Further, regulations which are related to work performance like the 'Labour Code', the 'Employment Law' or regulations of the 'Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports' are regulating the further education in the Czech Republic. Adult education here tries mainly to support social cohesion, active citizenship as well as employability. It is provided in the areas 'General Education' (basic education, e.g. for early school leavers), 'Further Vocational Education' and 'Civic or Special Interest Education' (concerns political, historical and cultural interest). Key providers are primary schools, secondary and professional schools, language schools, universities, companies and organisations as well as non-profit organisations. NGOs are advocating the development and coordination of adult education in the Czech Republic. The most important ones are 'The Association of Adult Education Institutions of the Czech Republic', 'The Association of Universities of the Third Age', 'The National Centre of Distance Education' and 'The National Training Fund' (Country Report on Adult Education in the Czech Republic, 2011, p. 3-6).

Serbia

In 2000 the direction of adult education in Serbia changed when democratic parties took over responsibility for the development of society. At that time one fundamental issue was the reform of the educational system. Therefore, the 'Strategy for the Reform of Education' was designed. One main key strategy emerging from this was the 'Strategy Directions for the Development of Adult Education'. In this, main problems of adult education in Serbia were identified as negative policy toward adult education, restrictive financial support, the shortage of law regulations and standards, the absence of the adult education sector in state administration, the undefined status of teachers working in adult education and the absence of systematic, statistical follow-up within the sector. On basis of this analysis, action plans and measures related to employment, the development of democracy and civil-society were designed (Country Report on Adult Education in Serbia, 2011, p. 1-8)

Due to the disintegration of the state union of Serbia and Montenegro, the following declaration of independence by Montenegro and the crisis in Kosovo, the society's attention was diverted away from education issues in the years after 2003. Not until 2006 when 'The law of the Foundations of Education and Upbringing' was passed, the emphasis was put back on the agenda. The 'Strategy for the Development of Adult Education in the Republic of Serbia' was adopted by the Serbian Government in the end of 2006 at the same time as the

'Strategy for the Development of Vocational Education and Training' (which was aligned with EU concepts for lifelong learning). The newest policy document is the 'National Action Plan on the Implementation of a Strategy for the Development of Adult Education in the Republic of Serbia' (2010). It outlines key policy criteria for the upcoming years focusing especially on literacy and improving unemployment levels. The action plan covers the priority areas efficient participation, improvement of availability of adult education and the inclusion of marginalised groups (Country Report on Adult Education in Serbia, 2011, p. 1-8).

In general it can be said that the educational structure in Serbia is quite diverse. 'The Ministry of Education' is in charge of the education sector, while the 'Educational Board of the Serbian Parliament' is in charge of legal governance within the sector. 'The National Education Council' is the authority regulating vocational education. "NGO's have become the most influential pillars of the adult education system, especially in their role as advocates and promoters of non-formal learning which has been overlooked or downgraded in previous years". There is no stable landscape of adult education providers in Serbia. The current main providers are schools for basic adult education, institutions of traditional formal education (like secondary schools, higher education institutions, universities), regional training centres, national and local employment offices, open universities, cultural centres and the chamber of commerce. There is no accurate data for the participation rate within adult education in Serbia, though a participation rate of three to four percent has been suggested. Factors that influence this rate are for example the relatively low educational level of the population, the insufficient economic situation, the unstable political situation and educational provisions which do not match the needs of the population (infonyet-ae.eu). Key issues that are going to be assessed in the future are to increase the priority of adult education provision within the government as well as the society. Further, Serbia tries to increase collaboration and exchange between other South-East European countries and tries to strengthen its vocational education sector (Country Report on Adult Education in Serbia, 2011, p. 8).

The country descriptions show that even though there are many European efforts in bringing adult education on the same level by unifying credit or certification systems, adult education still varies a lot within the countries. It depends a lot on the country's history, its financial status, its unemployment rates, types of government etc. But do these described differences lead to different views on adult education on the side of the participants? Do they consider different benefits from participation in liberal adult education? Do the experienced benefits vary because of the different situation? Does the different common value on adult education influence the learners view? Answers to these questions are supposed to be found out within the BeLL project.