

***Could you briefly describe the present structure of adult education in Europe as well as its relationship with lifelong learning?***

Throughout Europe the concept of lifelong learning is operating as a vision, a conceptual framework for policy-making in relation to education and training and a guiding principle for provision and participation across all learning contexts. Within the framework of lifelong learning many countries are striving to increase the quantity and quality of adult learning and to ensure compatibility and complementarity between initiatives. Adoption of a lifelong learning approach has important implications for structures, the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders, the entitlements of individuals, the provision of learning opportunities, the overall quality of provision and the recognition of learning.

In the majority of countries adult education is the least regulated section of the overall education system. Multiple partners have a stake in adult education policy-making and implementation, including ministries, regional governments, local governments, social partners, public providers, nongovernmental organisations and private for-profit providers, all frequently operating from different values, objectives and approaches. Depending on the point-of-view, this diversity constitutes a 'rich mosaic or a 'confusing mélange'. Clearly, maximisation of investment by all stakeholders will depend on co-ordination and coherence in policy-making and implementation.

Public policy has to create the frameworks needed to motivate adults to engage in learning and, in addition, has to be made in the context of a wide range of other policies, including health, training, welfare. The social partners and civil society are being increasingly recognised as collaborators in this process and their involvement ranges from consultation to participation in formal structures at national and/or regional levels. Co-ordination at national and/or regional ministry level and decentralisation are the two main administrative approaches adopted to achieve overall co-ordination and coherence.

To address potential fragmentation and duplication and to move towards an overarching lifelong learning framework, many countries have established co-operative partnership models of working through a range of concrete inter-ministerial structures and mechanisms to promote coordination so as to maximise investment in adult learning.

The creation of a national/regional co-ordinating body for adult learning with policymaking and implementation, policy co-ordination and/or policy advisory roles is in evidence in a number of countries. Such bodies bring together adult learning stakeholders, including government ministries, social partners, representative of statutory providers, learners and nongovernmental interests in adult learning, especially non-formal adult education, with a view to increasing participation in and raising the quality of, adult learning.

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