

Foreword

In the wake of the European Union's (EU) Lisbon Strategy to become 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world' by 2010, the 'lifelong learning' (LLL) concept has gained substantially in importance. Lifelong Learning even became the central keyword for the EU's Education and Training programmes in the 2007–2013 period.

It is worthwhile to recall that the research project 'Towards a Lifelong Learning Society in Europe: The Contribution of the Education System' (LLL2010), on which this volume builds, responded to a call for proposals (drafted in 2002–2003) on 'Promoting the knowledge society through lifelong learning':

Research capacities on various key aspects of lifelong learning should be integrated in order to compare the various discourses, improve conceptual clarity, better understand trends in lifelong learning policies and practices in Europe as well as their implications for the creation of a European knowledge society, for social cohesion, inequalities and quality of life.

While the socio-economic and policy context has changed substantially since the start of the project, key issues regarding 'inclusive growth' remain as essential as before for Europe's future prosperity and well-being, and the project has connected its research findings to these new and evolving realities.

Since its very conception, the LLL2010 consortium has taken an ambitious and holistic approach to analyse the 'lifelong learning' concept comprehensively. While limiting itself to formal adult education, the team has integrated researchers and institutions from a wide range of countries and academic disciplines across Europe, making best use of a broad range of quantitative and qualitative research methods.

The project has identified, in a structured way, barriers and obstacles to fuller implementation of LLL strategies at various levels:

- macro level: policies at national and EU levels;
- meso level: institutions – small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and schools; and
- micro level: individuals – adult learners, trainers, managers, etc.

Connecting and integrating these research levels, the project has invested substantially in developing some new typologies, for example for formal adult education systems, for adult learners in SMEs, and so on. With its focus on formal adult education, an original and relatively under-researched topic, the LLL2010 project has provided an additional angle to qualify and refine the traditional typologies of European welfare states.

It has in particular provided some deeper insights into the 'newer' EU member states in Central and Eastern Europe on which the availability and analysis of data has been more limited. That the project has been coordinated by an organization from such a country adds to the institution and capacity building that EU programmes seek to contribute to.

An important focus of the project design and analysis was placed on social inclusion. The research design has allowed the LLL2010 researchers to explore the learning practices (aspirations and difficulties) of adult learners from less advanced socio-economic groups; in turn, this allows policy-makers to design strategies and adapt policies to address these issues. Moreover, the project has also made a valuable exploratory contribution in studying adult education policies and strategies in prisons in the countries concerned.

This volume summarizes the knowledge accumulated during almost a decade of preparation and cooperation. It constitutes a valuable contribution to the academic and policy communities, and opens up avenues for future developments. On a personal note, I would like to thank all those involved in this effort for their cooperation, commitment and perseverance on this pan-European comparative journey.

*Marc Goffart, European Commission Scientific Officer**

NOTE

- * This contribution is written in the name of the author and does not reflect the opinion of the European Commission as an institution.