



GREEN PAPER ON EVALUATION OF ADULT EDUCATION POLICIES

With the support of the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union. This document and its contents reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

Contents	
INTRODUCTION	3
ACTIVITIES AND RESULTS FROM IO2: MAPPING THE IMPACT, VALIDATION AND EVALUATION OF AE POLICIES	4
CHALLENGES AND DRIVERS ENCOUNTERED IN IO3: TOOLBOX	6
KEY MESSAGES FOR POLICY DIALOGUE ON EVALUATION OF AE POLICIES	9
Marginal Role of Adult Education	9
Stronger Lobbying	9
Creating and Updating a Legal Basis	10
Developing Qualitative Impact Measurement - Appropriate Performance Indicators and Assessment Methods	10
Community of Practice Approach to Quality Assurance	11
Learner Voice, Learner Journey	12
Fragmentation	14
OUTLOOK	15
BIBLIOGRAPHY:	17

INTRODUCTION

The Adult Education Policy Evaluation Green Paper has collected and collated all the findings and results stemming from the implementation of the CREATE 2 Evaluate project, highlighting case studies, lessons learned, and best practices identified at implementation. Partners have contributed to the development of the Green Paper that has put forward the experiences collected during the two years of implementation of the project, the findings of IO2, challenges and drivers encountered in the development of policy evaluation tools in IO3.

Green Paper is a multi-stakeholder position paper to put forward ideas for exchange, discussion and brainstorming on the value of impact assessment and policy evaluation of Adult Education (AE) interventions. Successful completion of the IO2: Mapping the Impact, Validation and Evaluation of AE policies as well as design of the necessary training instruments in IO3: Toolbox, that enable policy makers to use the tools, the Create2Evaluate consortium has written the Green Paper that stimulates the discussion on policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation of AE.

The **purpose** of the Green Paper is to ignite the policy dialogue on the role of AE as a catalyst for social and economic empowerment in a moment in which different trends converge towards the need to enhance AE at systemic level for its many connotations linked to an ageing society and ever-changing economy. The Green Paper is positioned to provide insight and evidence to policy formulation also by engaging the various stakeholders and informing the process of policy debate.

IO4 is the last output of the Create 2 Evaluate Project that provides the supporting tools for the implementation of the AE policy evaluation tools as well as to produce impact at systemic level as it is comprised of two main elements:

The first part of it is a “**Training Suite**” which clearly defines and explains all the areas and tools for the implementation of the AE policy evaluation tools. Training Suite is designed for the target groups of policy makers to guide them with step-by-step procedures on the use and implementation of the tools to evaluate policy interventions in the domain of AE. This is a crucial element, as it provides hands-on advice on how to implement the evaluation tools in diverse operational settings.

The second part **Green Paper** is written with the aim of igniting the policy dialogue and exchange on how to advance the discourse on the importance of adult education for socio-economic development and integration. It is targeted to the whole range of local, regional, national and EU policy makers to sensitise them on the importance of robust policy formulation and evaluation in AE.

Green paper is a great **innovative** addition to the policy domain of AE, as it brings about new inputs and evidence to the policy making and evaluation in AE. It fills a gap in the public policy field for AE as now there are no policy position papers that provide a snapshot of the public policy landscape in terms of impact evaluation. It is also poised to generate immediate and tangible **impact** at macro level. Green paper will stimulate the policy dialogue on means, mechanisms, and tools for policy evaluation in AE, igniting the debate and providing valuable insight and evidence.

ACTIVITIES AND RESULTS FROM IO2: MAPPING THE IMPACT, VALIDATION AND EVALUATION OF AE POLICIES

The aim of the CREATE2Evaluate Erasmus+ project (2020-2022, Intellectual Output 2 (IO2)), is to identify reliable tools for adult education evaluation at various layers of governance. Under IO2 eight EU partners working in the field of adult education at policy and implementation level, mapped their current policy landscape in terms of adult education evaluation, assessment, and monitoring. Partners undertook a comprehensive literature review. Consortium conducted primary and secondary research, interviewed twenty-seven stakeholders in the field of adult education, and conducted a key-stakeholder survey which provided an additional thirty-six respondents. Project partners mapped and identified methods, tools, and resources to evaluate adult education programmes and initiatives that are used throughout their regions. The analysis of EU and international literature of the subject brought to us frameworks and models for policy formulation and policy design that include of course the dimension of “Evaluation” and “Assessment”, but the terms of description are too wide and abstract to be embedded without the need of experienced consultants. In general, and out from these macroscopic contexts, our observations, and the results that we collected from primary and secondary sources, indicate that indeed, evaluation processes are carried out, but to what pertains budget constraints only.

The EU Commission in studying the challenges of delivering effective EU wide AE policy evaluation noted in *“An in-depth analysis of adult learning policies and their effectiveness in Europe”* (2015, p.149) the following:

- There is substantial evidence about a few policy actions that have been proven to be effective, particularly in raising rates of adult participation in learning.
- However, many of these effective policies are not in place in many Member States or are limited in scope. When these kinds of policies are in place, they rarely have explicit measurable targets, their effectiveness is seldom systematically monitored, and their performance is seldom evaluated.
- Nevertheless, there is a good base of European statistics on adult learning to improve the design, evaluation, and monitoring of these policies.
- Improving the evidence, particularly from the administrative monitoring of policy implementation, would further enhance countries’ capacity to ensure the effectiveness of their adult learning policies.

The EU commission document *Towards more effective adult learning policies* (2016) suggests adopting 6 steps towards more effective adult learning policies:

1. Increase adults’ willingness to take part in and their positive attitude towards learning.
2. Encourage employer investment in adult learning.
3. Enhance access to learning for disadvantaged and difficult to engage groups.
4. Improved the relevance of adult learning for everyone involved.
5. Assure the quality of agile learning opportunities.
6. Coordinate adult learning policy at national regional and local levels.

IO2 -Mapping the Impact, Validation and Evaluation of Adult Education Policies has identified that EU wide AE Evaluation is highly fragmented and lacks common definitions and standards. This makes it very difficult for policy makers to control and assess the effectiveness of current AE policies. Plain, coherent, and straightforward policy development is needed. Any AE evaluation framework should ensure that cross organisational policy coherence occurs in vertical and horizontal terms. Vertical coherence requires that the different levels of government – national, regional, and local – follow common policy objectives and align systems of funding, accreditation, and quality assurance. Horizontal coherence implies that there is understanding and coordination across policy areas within national or regional or local government – for example, that the Ministry for Education and the Ministry for Employment share concepts, processes and outcomes related to adult education. The challenge for the wider adult learning community is to articulate targets and indicators for adult learning that capture the humanistic conceptions and practices of nonformal adult learning. The articulation of such a metric would ensure that this domain of adult learning can no longer be considered as ‘invisible’ by the state.

Many adult education policies, at local and regional levels are not systematically evaluated. This is partly due to policy makers lacking the appropriate tools to do so.

Adult education in many countries is seen as a policy Cinderella, with scant resources and a lack of effective long-term planning and coordination between its players. A lack of policy coherence can have a debilitating impact on the development of adult education. Policy coherence means ensuring that policy objectives and processes in one area do not contradict or jeopardise those in another. (Mallows, 2018, pp.13-14)

CHALLENGES AND DRIVERS ENCOUNTERED IN IO3: TOOLBOX

According to OECD Report *Monitoring learning outcomes of adult learning programmes (2019)* “...it is important to remember that not everything we would like to measure can be measured. In fact, only adopting multiple indicators as well as **various assessment methods** can provide a clear and exhaustive picture of the impact of learning programmes on adults’ outcomes. Moreover, the use of qualitative insights can be equally important to guide understanding of results, especially regarding the wider benefits of adult education”. To understand the wider benefits of AE participation and its broader and unexpected impacts, qualitative data, triggering in-depth self-reflection and multiple perspectives, from learners and other actors could be particularly useful. Data gathered using different methods and tools such as questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, corroborated with data from official sources, such as administrative data (e.g., employment status at the time of the training and at least one year after the training, health services data, earnings) could give a more realistic view on the real usefulness of a programme.

Therefore, our goal in IO3 was to create a set of tools that assesses adult education policies comprehensively, covering all the stages and processes, with particular attention to:

- consistency of the objectives and results with respect to the EU agenda for adult education;
- the process of program creation itself;
- inclusiveness of the programs and focus on the disadvantaged and vulnerable groups;
- the programs' implementation, including its adjustment to the needs of the target group, the provision of the necessary equipment and the specialization of the practitioners;
- the benefit and added value of participating in AE programs for beneficiaries, in terms of improved skills, employability, social integration and well-being, among others;
- if program evaluation is carried out until program completion and the results and conclusions of such assessment are used to improve future educational policies.

Create2Evaluate offers a comprehensive set of tools developed specifically for evaluating AE programs. Programme creators appreciate a wider selection of tools, so they can pick the most fitting one for each situation. Sometimes this might be an interview, sometimes an anonymous survey. These tools can fill the current gap and contribute to the improvement of AE policies and programs. These ready-to-use tools can either be used by the educational community and policy makers for direct implementation or be a solid basis for developing a comprehensive evaluation system in AE.

Currently, evaluation still focuses more strongly on outcomes and is conducted ex post – more easily available tools that allow for a shift in focus would help the process along and encourage continual evaluation also during the lifetime of a programme.

Nowadays, this is done in some cases for newer programmes and strategies that do not yet have experience of previous implementation cycles. Where adjustments can be made early or straight-away this will strongly improve the viability of the programme and its effectiveness. Changing the attitudes towards evaluation and encouraging agencies to incorporate different points-of-view and experiences will benefit the adult education sector long-term.

Each of the resource for the ToolBox has been designed to be as territory neutral as possible, which is instrumental in enhancing their great **transferability** and replicability potential. On the other hand, the tools provided by partners wish to be greatly operational and practice-oriented, narrowed-down to what might be concrete assessment needs for policy makers and providers as well (operating at formal, informal, and non-formal level).

The **Tools** creation has been challenging and straightforward at the same time due to the inherent complexity of the task but also rewarding if we consider the potential benefits that these tools can provide to adult education and the educational community. The main challenge we have faced in developing the tools has been the lack of references related to evaluating educational programs that could serve as a starting point for adult education. This same lack of references highlighted the relevance of our work.

However, developing the surveys in frames of the project for area 2 *Programme creation at the policy/public administration level* was straightforward. The questions address central issues encountered by multiple players during previous projects. We collected input from project coordinators and managers involved in implementing projects funded by public sources as well as non-elected government agents working for ministries and thus representing the funding. We asked them what had worked well in the past and what pitfalls had tripped up beneficiaries. It became clear that separating the target groups provider and third sector would offer more precise insights, thus we developed two surveys tailored to the activities of each group. The surveys can be sent out to agents involved in the policy formulation process for the purpose of collecting feedback or be used as a basis for talks or focus group conversations. They can also easily be transferred into digital format using a preferred online survey provider and sent out to participants. The tools developed for area 2 complement each other, allowing the public agency running the evaluation process to choose a format more fitting to their needs – from anonymised virtual surveys to direct conversations with focus groups.

Area 6 *Continuity of programme evaluation and use of its results to improve AE policies* is central for taking evaluation beyond collecting data. Oftentimes, this is where the process stops – sometimes because there is no clear mandate to implement changes, sometimes because there simply is no time to develop new strategies. The tools show users how to approach validation with a few easy steps – we don't have to start off tackling major changes, we can start small and take things step by step. The success factors and case study mean to motivate people to start somewhere and try something even if it doesn't have immediate flashy results. Small things can add up over time.

Upon developing and putting together the Tools into the ToolBox, partners collected **feedback** from stakeholders on the Tools, through a simple 5 open-questions form. Along with the form, they provided basic information on the context, project, area, and specific information on the tools. Profile of stakeholders invited to piloting included: policy makers in the field of AE (local councils, staff working for national education authorities), regional public service providers relevant for AE (coordinated by the Ministry of Culture), AE training providers (public and private).

Feedback has been collected on the following aspects:

- **Relevance:** How relevant is the tool for the organization's activity and how well meets the needs of the organization
- **Effectiveness:** Does the tool has potential to improving organization's activities?
- **Impact:** Does it have an impact on the organization and beyond the organization?
- **Innovativeness:** Whether the tool is innovative for the organization and whether they used similar instruments before.
- **Transferability:** Could the tool be adapted for other contexts or used by other organizations?

8

Multiple answers pointed to open conversations between various agents to improve the quality of policy and programmes; examples include focus groups, structured and unstructured interviews, working groups, etc. It is, however, tough to find qualitative standards for the education sector as guidelines since most evaluation is still of results, not processes. Interview partners also voiced scepticism towards burdening the conversations with an overly academic approach. One major caveat is that increased standardisation does not improve the usefulness of results and agents would much prefer to have honest, detailed, unstructured answers that will shed actionable intel than to be weighed down by academic rigour.

During formal interviews with stakeholders, and in the process of compiling feedbacks and impressions collected throughout validation of the CREATE2Evaluate curricula, the common perception emerging from the ecosystem of both policy makers and practitioners is that, at times, the whole translation process from policy to practice is more time consuming and energy demanding due specifically to the fact that people are not in possess of easy-to-access knowledge, know-how, and resources.

During the validation phase, all the stakeholders and policymakers, we contacted, expressed their interest and gratitude for carrying out this initiative. Many of them stated that they do not have these kinds of tools and consider them very relevant to improving AE's educational policies.

QUESTION: Could you imagine that framework / model / resources inspired by CREATE2Evaluate can be embedded by local policies as structural and integral part of the deployment and transition of policy into strategy?

KEY MESSAGES FOR POLICY DIALOGUE ON EVALUATION OF AE POLICIES

Marginal Role of Adult Education

Adult education plays a marginal role compared to formal education in all countries, among other reasons, due to the limited budget available. The disadvantaged status of adult education makes essential the evaluation of educational programs. Such an evaluation will determine which phases of program formulation can be improved or optimized and allocate limited resources more efficiently.

Adult education beneficiaries have circumstances and needs (economic, social, vital) that are different from those of other target groups of training programs. Therefore, they require educational programs specifically tailored to their reality, and these programs must be properly evaluated to detect their weaknesses and improve them from year to year.

In most cases, the three basic skills (reading, writing, and numeracy) are not directly addressed in the programmes. On the other hand, greater focus is given to VET and work related-skills for employment and (re)integration in the labour market – which per se is not a negative result, but it is just indicative of the mismatch between policy and practice level. AE as a policy item overlaps with other policy domains (social, VET, education, employment, liberal education, civic participation etc.), making it difficult for local policy makers to “grasp” the concept of AE, despite ageing society and lifelong learning dimension.

- Perceived “distance” of how AE is considered and perceived between the different policy layers (i.e., Cedefop and EU strategies clearly mention AE, but the lower you go down the policy layers, the more blurred the concept gets i.e., distance **between Brussels and local authorities** on what AE is and what it does)
- AE is **not** perceived as a **stand-alone policy** item.

Stronger Lobbying

Evidence from the analysis suggest that grass-root AE programmes are too dependent on the cycle of EU funding opportunities (both centralised and managed at level of local government). This is indicative of the fact that many national AE systems are not “financially” self-reliable and cannot proper diversify their training offer to a cohort that would be willing to pay for new capacity building opportunities (i.e., established entrepreneurs).

Funding is a continual point of contention. While there is some basic funding in most German federal states, the amounts are by no means enough to keep providers afloat and the pressure to constantly acquire projects drains resources (especially manpower) from the regular activities which are still as important.

The sector’s precarious funding is mirrored in low wages for permanent staff as well as freelance trainers, on which it relies heavily. The coming years will see a

generational shift in the staff layer and the relative unattractive nature of the AE job market already has many providers fearing they will not find qualified personnel.

Funding opportunities are often strictly regulated and tied to very specific targets – what does not respond to a particular crisis or follows a trend gets lost. However, continual funding is crucially important to keep topics on the table that are less ‘hot’ but cover the essential basics. A sustainable approach to education seeks to build lasting expertise and strong structures rather than constantly making providers run after new projects to the detriment of working conditions and job commitment.

Even though the AE sector has been the main work horse in the integration efforts of the previous years it does not receive the overall attention and care by the authorities that it deserves. A stronger lobby is needed to achieve open acknowledgement for the crucial role played by AE in facilitating the constant development of a strong, democratic, empowered society – acknowledgement that should take the shape of a strong legal framework, financial stability, and job security.

10

Creating and Updating a Legal Basis

The laws governing the publicly funded adult education sector provide the population with a sense of security in the knowledge that their education and further development are worth the investment and support. The laws and regulations must, however, be updated regularly to reflect society’s changing needs. For instance, *Ireland’s White Paper on Adult Education - Learning for Life (2000)* is twenty-two years old and has not had a serious review of implementation in the intervening years.

Except for Hamburg, all German federal states have adult education laws or acts, which guarantee their populations the right to further education beyond the (free) regular school system. With this also comes the right to public funding for providers who meet the criteria. While this funding does not even begin to cover a provider organisation’s cost, it is reliable income (covering between 15 and 20% depending on the organisation) with public aid also available as the Covid-19 crisis has shown. While the adult education sector was hit very hard the federal states were able to dole out emergency aid to eligible providers.

Developing Qualitative Impact Measurement - Appropriate Performance Indicators and Assessment Methods

Where evaluation/quality management is not a specific requirement (as it is often the case in programmes funded by the EU, but not so much in regional or local ones) programmes are often still created in relative vacuums. Legal experts compose regulations that may be reviewed by colleagues but rarely by representatives of practice. Opening the formulation process will make it lengthier and finding a common language between administration and practice can be a challenge; however, it will also create richer, more efficient programmes that respond more appropriately to reality.

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is the independent State agency responsible for promoting quality and accountability in education and training in Ireland. Ongoing

monitoring and periodic review of a programme is used as an opportunity to evaluate that programme with the benefit of the experience of programme delivery incorporating feedback from staff and learners. Such evidence is reflected in learner enrolment and programme completion rate data; learner, teacher, trainer, employer and/or industry feedback and evaluations of the programme. AE centres are guided by the QQI programme monitoring and review handbook. There are 3 phases to programme review:

- Phase 1 - self-evaluation,
- Phase 2 - external evaluation and reporting,
- Phase 3 - revalidation.

However, it has been noted in the interviews during the piloting phase, that if a practitioner is unfamiliar with the language and meanings of the programme monitoring and review process, then they are lost.

The three-steps approach: assessment > tailoring > validation lacks in implementation. Many training programmes rely on generic curricula which are out of the focus of Council's recommendation. This questions the idea if tailoring guideline is put in practice.

There are many factors that appear to be significant in designing effective, coherent policy. However, above all, effective cooperation between all stakeholders is key and for that to happen stakeholders need to be clear about their own responsibilities and what they stand to gain and there needs to be trust between them (Mallows, 2018, p.15).

- The feedback loop between “evaluation” and definition of new policies is fragmented and not linear.
- In the context of AE, evaluation is more common at practice rather than policy level: case in point, AE interventions and programmes are always evaluated, but not the policies underpinning those AE programmes.

Community of Practice Approach to Quality Assurance

Currently, experts from third sector organisations (e.g., universities) are taken onboard for consultation and this is a good sign towards an increasingly open policy approach. However, these insights can still be academic and depend on these actors having strong and diverse networks. While this input should not be shunned, casting a wider net, and including the expertise of the “base” (providers, trainers, learners, ...) should be the next move. Including the voice of provider organisations and even learners would be a way of grounding programmes more soundly in the everyday practice of implementation. Additionally, it will also facilitate perspective taking among all agents involved – not just from policy makers and administrators but also from providers; gaining a deeper understanding of the others’ perspectives, hopes and challenges will serve to create a stronger community in the AE sector.

In Ireland extensive network of community education providers work in partnership with ETBs, using their local reach and connectivity to develop learning projects to address local needs and empower their learners and communities. However, approaches to

community education across ETBs are inconsistent which means level and focus of funding differs substantially from region to region. While the strength of community education must remain a 'ground up' approach, there is a need to ensure that there is general support for good ideas and projects across the system, and that communities benefit in the same way from financial and other support regardless of where they are based.

There is a missed opportunity to mainstream many of the powerful and innovative community-based learning projects that already exist. Technology also offers significant potential to build on adult and community education and widen access to the most marginalised groups, particularly those in rural areas who cannot travel to major FET or HE colleges in more urban areas, or who are constrained from leaving their homes due to care duties or other circumstances. The exploitation of digital technologies could most certainly benefit AE providers in outreaching their (potential) audience, but an overwhelming amount of data confirm the overall lag of AE institutions in embracing long-term oriented digitalisation pathways. Compared to other education environments, AE and VET seem the ones lagging the most: urgent measures are needed, both in the sense of available infrastructures and digital literacy of trainers. Numerous resources are provided by the EU Commission (see for instance DigComp 2.2, DigCompORG and DigComp EDU) but again these opportunities seem getting lost in the transition from macro- to microlevel.

A community education framework should therefore be developed by SOLAS, ETBs, community education providers, learners, and other relevant stakeholders (for example, Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Department of Rural and Community Development, Pobal, Aontas and the Wheel) to ensure a more consistent approach. (Ireland, 2020)

The idea of creating advisory bodies (made up of experts, stakeholders, and of course learners) to advise policy makers on practicability of policy programmes has gained clout in recent years – consulting the groups that will implement measures and those who are meant to benefit from them early-on will improve chances of the programmes being successful, seeing uptake and having actual impact on people's lives. This approach should receive more attention as a way of involving civil society in processes that can otherwise be dominated by experts; the shift to co-creating the learning experience should not start in the classroom but much earlier at programme inception stage.

Learner Voice, Learner Journey

The concept of the Learner Journey, at each point interacting with the system, helps to conceptualise policy coherence. The centrality of the learner voice in shaping Adult Education policy and provision is currently a significant omission.

It can be challenging to put the learner voice at the centre of the policy review process because of the transient nature of the learner. Learner engagement can be also a challenge. AONTAS is Ireland's National Adult Learning organisation, is a key driver of ensuring learner voice is articulated and heard by policy makers. Within AONTAS the Community Engagement Network represents 100 independently managed

providers who work collaboratively, sharing information and resources and engaging in professional development. AONTAS (2019) recommends that the government addresses the need to create a recognised and accepted system for measuring the outcomes of non-formal education, specifically community education in Ireland. Their strategic plan for 2019-2022 will focus on:

1. Learner Voice for Action: Creating an inclusive lifelong learning society
2. A Thriving Community Education Sector
3. Lifelong Learning for Sustainability

The vast heterogeneity of (future) learners that benefits from AE programmes represents certainly an indicator of great responsiveness of these ecosystems to the many needs emerging from society. Highlights from literature and practice confirm that the topic of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) is indeed extremely timely and relevant. At the same time, it is this heterogeneity that adds new layers of complexity to the discussion carried out by CREATE2Evaluate partners. In compliance to a learner-centred perspective, the education provision cannot ignore age, gender, and socio-cultural background of targets:

- Minor migrants
- Second generation migrants
- In school age
- In adulthood
- Women
- Unskilled Adults
- Refugees
- People with disabilities
- People living in disadvantage and rural areas

Pieces of evidence from the Italian context, and corroborated by results presented at project level, seems confirming that the responsiveness to this Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) identity goes missing once dropped into practice. The reasoning is not easy to assess, but most might be due to the lack of an organisational culture prone to identify its institution and the people participating in it as co-leaders of DEI paradigms.

The lack of a long-term oriented mission seems also negatively impacting outreach potentials of AE provision: although data seem confirming that finally more and more citizens are accessing training and education services, the turnout is still considerably low among those groups and demographics that would need them the most. A univocal reason for that is not of easy consideration, but it could be linked to the fact that:

- the range of training and education offers is still relatively stagnant – it increases in numbers but not in nature, failing in turn to engage and attract the interest of whole cohorts of potential targets
- participants to the national network of AE providers are tempted to operate independently from each other, with low interest in networking and in carrying out wide-spread initiatives
- marketing and PR are still linked to traditional means, what seems a low responsiveness to new media's communication paradigms and languages.

AE initiatives are not appealing data suggest that potential targets of adult learning programmes lack of motivation/interest in getting engaged. This might be really an issue of how AE initiatives are marketed and promoted at national and local level, how AE operators target their cohort of reference, design, structure and implement communication plans, and how they manage to vector the added value of AE initiatives.

Fragmentation

A lot of qualitative evaluation is conducted in AE centres, and the valuable data that emerges remains buried there. This appears in part due to the lack of a centralised and systematic framework as well as opportunities for overarching analysis. There is a distinct lack of evaluation of adult education policies throughout the partner countries. The current system of evaluation impacts on the ability of policy makers to develop coherent policies in the adult education and lifelong learning sector and is problematic. The OECD recommends enhancing policy coordination and coherence.

The feedback loop between evaluation and policy development appears unconnected and non-aligned. This may be due to a culture underpinning policy making, or a lack of shared information about the policy cycle and processes. So, evaluation at programme level /Education and Training Boards (ETBs) level is conducted as a regulatory procedure, rather than as an enlightenment on how to do better, imaginative, and creative policy making. Systems may not speak to each other. There may be a disconnect between provider organisations and policy makers, i.e., government. For example, in Ireland policy making in AE is conducted across four statutory bodies; SOLAS; Department of Education and Science; Department of Further Higher Education Research Innovation and Science and Further Education & Training Awards Council/Quality and Qualifications Ireland are all responsible for policy making in the field of adult education.

Recent data provided by EUROSTAT offer the image of quite a stagnant EU AE ecosystem, highly fragmented and self-referential to local contexts. In general, we observed that national AE outlooks seem diverging from what should be an “EU approach” to AE and LLL. (Eurostat, 2022)

- **Fragmentation** in the policy cycle and different approaches vary not only among Member States but also geographically within Member States at local level.

OUTLOOK

The very concept of *Evaluation* as tackled by the CREATE2Project is very complex to be discussed under this EU umbrella of analysis. This would require by EU institutions the provision – both at policy and practice level – of a standardised model to which all involved stakeholders can refer to in examination of their AE programmes and policies. On the other hand, the establishment of such framework would be highly controversial and unpractical:

- controversial because by design it conflicts with the wide diversity and great heterogeneity of EU societies and cultures;
- unpractical because it would push for a one-solution-fits-all approach and contradicts the flexibility that is needed by local policy makers to meet the specific socio-economic needs observed within their territories.

15

QUESTION: What does evaluation of AE policies mean to you? Do you need the standardised model to which you can refer in case you need it?

Evaluation in the AE sector is still a patchwork pattern – at times funding comes with stringent evaluation requirements, at other times government agencies lack either the interest or the manpower to conduct activities. Where evaluation takes place, it often still **focuses** on **outcomes** instead to creation processes in AE policy programmes. Collecting information such as the number of participants and training hours are easy to collect, however, they have no bearing on the quality of programmes. Low participation numbers do not point to low interest in or need for training but may have a myriad different reason. To get to these reasons the focus of evaluation needs to shift and the earlier experts “on the ground” can be involved at inception stage the more responsive the programmes will be to actual needs.

- In the policy cycle, the “evaluation” phase is seldom recognized, addressed, and appreciated. Policy making is more interested in the input phase, development stage, and outcomes rather than in the evaluation.
- Any evaluation in AE policies is more **focused on budgetary** aspects (i.e., allocations, expenditure levels, budgetary efficiency) **rather than** on “**impact**” on users.

Member States are highly encouraged to be ‘creative’ in their policy formulation, meaning that national policy makers should tailor and finetune their policies basing on needs and skill-gaps that are particularly relevant in their territories. Regarding the issue of quality control in adult learning, it appears that the perceived preponderance of poor-quality programmes and lack of knowledge of programme outcomes can result in low investment and participation. This illustrates the need for quality assurance and programme assessment and evaluation as integral components of adult learning systems. (OECD, 2005)

Evidence collected by partners seem confirming that with no clear policy guidelines, parameters and references associated to DEI, programme managers are left in a

shaded area that gives no incentives in being further sustained and supported. The strengthening at practice level of structured evaluation practices is instrumental to better inform the policy formulation process on which training areas / needs should be tackled by AE and LLL services.

AE policy framework should ease for the AE providers the:

1. Elimination to all barriers to training services and capacity building opportunities
2. Experiment and create new training curricula / training methodologies that are both flexible, learner-centred by also stimulating and engaging for training staff
3. Provision of highly qualifying skills / competences / knowledge that is consistent to market demand and labour market / employers' expectations
4. Co-development and co-creation of transdisciplinary curricula pathways that see the participation of civil society, HEIs and private sector's representatives
5. Promotion of hybrid formulas of training, coinciding classroom hours to work-based learning
6. Sustainment of the role as key agents in fostering solidarity and inclusion

QUESTION:

What else can be made easier with the help of such a framework?

Between the lines, it is understood also that groups of interest and stakeholders proposed to the valorisation at national level of AE opportunities should also be responsible for the promotion and mainstreaming of funding opportunities for education and training – specifically for those of EU's origin, such as the Erasmus+ programme, European Solidarity Corps, INTERREG, etc. Some of the strands and actions, or as in some cases the whole programme, are specifically targeted to improve existing policy making frameworks, education and training opportunities for all, social development, and employability. The participation of local public authorities to international capacity building experience promoted and (co)financed by EU institutions would help policy makers from isolated regions of EU to network with a whole cohort of people (peers, consultants, experts, etc) and help them assessing / experiencing validation of good practices, case studies, lessons learnt.

The above-mentioned policy issues of fragmentation, developing qualitative impact measurement - appropriate performance indicators and assessment methods, community of practice approach, learner journey, learner voice should stimulate further interest on the topic, being at the same time perceived so relevant and beneficial by stakeholders and groups of interest interviewed and consulted throughout the process. CREATE2Evaluate proved that there is indeed a gap that stakeholders wish to see fulfilled, and untapped opportunities for even greater efficiency, effectiveness and responsiveness of local policy making to local-based societal challenges.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

AONTAS Strategic Plan 2019 – 2022: A Vision for Educational Equality, Available at: <https://www.aontas.com/assets/resources/Strat%20Plan/AONTAS%20STRAT%20PLAN-FINAL.pdf>

David Mallows, Adult learning, Upskilling Pathways, and the Adult Learner. 2018, pp. 13-14 Available at: https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10108080/7/Mallows_AONTAS-Adult-Learner-Journal-2018_article.pdf

European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, An in-depth analysis of adult learning policies and their effectiveness in Europe, Publications Office, 2015, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/076649>

European Commission, Towards more effective adult learning policies — Helping adults develop the knowledge and skills they need, Publications Office, 2016, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/towards_more_effective_adult_learning_policies.pdf

Eurostat, Adult Learning Statistics, 2022, Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Adult_learning_statistics

Ireland An tSeirbhis Oideachais Leanunaigh agus Scileanna 2020, Future FET: transforming learning: the national further education and training (FET) strategy, SOLAS, [Dublin], viewed 19 Oct 2022, https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/64d0718c9e/solas_fet_strategy_web.pdf

Ireland. Department of Education and Science, 'Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education', [other], Stationery Office, Dublin, 2000-07

OECD, Monitoring learning outcomes of adult learning programmes, 2019, Available at: <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/oeso-rapport-2019-monitoring-learning-outcomes-of-adult-learning-programmes.pdf>

OECD, OECD Annual Report 2005, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/annrep-2005-en>



This work is licensed under a
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 2.0 Generic (CC BY-NC 2.0) International License



www.create2evaluate.eu

Create2Evaluate Consortium:



With the support of the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union. This document and its contents reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union