Opportunities and obstacles for systemic change through incentivisation to open doors at national, regional and institutional levels: The **prevention and reduction of social exclusion** (related to LLL and adult education) through public policies

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European Commission DG EAC Workshop: The continuing vocational training and adult education component of Lifelong Learning: new needs for research and policy development

Downes P. (2011). A Systems Level Focus on Access to Education for Traditionally Marginalised Groups in Europe: Comparing Strategies, Policy and Practice in Twelve European Countries. LLL2010: Dublin, Educational Disadvantage Centre

12 countries:	83 education	196 semi-structured
Austria; Bulgaria; England; Estonia; Flanders/Belgium; Hungary; Ireland; Lithuania; Norway; Russia; Scotland; Slovenia	**institutions in total (formal, nonformal, prison)**	**interviews in total**

*Incentivisation to increase access – through competing funding opportunities at national, regional , institutional and faculty/departmental levels based on evidence of a coherent systemic plan to increase access for socially excluded groups

*Some key features needed for such coherent systemic plans

The need for a formal obligation on institutions from the State(in their performance agreements) to improve access and for incentives for third level institutions such as differentiated funding from the State based on implementation of access goals

A notable theme emerging from the Norwegian national report is that of incentives such as differentiated funding from State for third level institutions based on implementation of access goals:

On the question of what approaches to take with regards to inclusion of marginalised groups, [the interviewee] argued that differentiated funding of students should be applied: *I believe that we should be more creative and constructive and perhaps say that not all students should be financed in the same manner. If a student possesses certain characteristics, the institution should be eligible for higher economic funding* (Stensen & Ure 2010).

The Scottish national report highlights this key role of incentivisation for universities to open their doors to a more diverse student population:

In addition to teaching and research funding, the funding council provides higher education institutions (HEIs) with a Widening Access and Retention Premium (WARP). This funding was introduced to help higher education institutions to improve the retention rate of students from deprived backgrounds. The amount provided to an HEI is based on the number of students from deprived backgrounds; there is a considerable variation between elite and post-92 students in terms of intake of this group of students (Weedon, Riddell, Purves & Ahlgren 2010).

An Austrian interviewee from university management level confirms the lack of interest in widening the access accordingly: *In my judgment, I don't see such incentives* (Rammel & Gottwald 2010).

This promotion of incentives clearly invites a role for funding from EU and national levels. The implementation of such incentives also needs to be predicated on the appropriate structures and strategies being in place at national level.

State-led incentives to different faculties and departments within third level institutions to increase access: A faculty and department level focus to increase access

There is little evidence in the national reports of a distinctive faculty or departmental level of strategic focus on access to education for socio-economically disadvantaged groups. It is an area ripe for further policy development.

A central driving committee at state level for lifelong learning, social inclusion and access for marginalised groups

The Slovenian national report observes that there is a central driving committee for lifelong learning:

A special unit for adult education – an adult education sector has been established within the ministry that is responsible for designing national policy and legislation in adult education and executing administrative tasks regarding adult education and its implementation. It is placed in the Directorate of secondary and postsecondary education and adult education. As it may be evident ministerial departments for primary education and secondary general education have no tasks related to adult education. It is the ministry of education and sport that is administering and coordinating lifelong learning (Ivančič, Mohorčič Špolar & Radovan 2010).

It emerges from interviews with government officials in the Austrian national report that there is a central committee at national level for lifelong learning but not for access and social inclusion issues in education

Financial barriers to such central driving committees at national level for access and lifelong learning are adverted to in the Lithuanian and Estonian national reports. In the words of one Lithuanian official interviewee:

> *As there is a crisis now, I don't think that we should create new structures; we should coordinate the existing ones better. We don't need one more structure that would help to implement a life long learning strategy that you mentioned. What we need is that each level according to its competence would concretise its activities in this range* (Taljunaite, Labanauskas, Terepaite-Butviliene, & Blazeviciene 2010).

Clarification of the criteria to ascertain socio-economic disadvantage given the observed tendency, especially in Central and Eastern European countries, for targeting to occur for more easily identifiable target groups like those with a disability or from an ethnic minority – in contrast with groups experiencing socio-economic disadvantage

The Lithuanian national report illustrates that socioeconomic disadvantage is not a criterion for targeted access to university:

The college does not provide any public information on student social profiles. *A few years ago there was a priority to farmers' children given in order to help them to enter those agricultural study programmes. But later it cleared out that we cannot distinguish any group. The entrance only depends on achievements at secondary school* (Taljunaite et al., 2010).

It is evident from the Lithuanian national report that disability is a clear category for analysis in relation to access, in contrast to the lack of analysis regarding access and socioeconomic disadvantage

A Ministry for Social Affairs official in Estonia lists the following target groups, once again illustrating the lack of distinct criteria for socio-economic disadvantage:

- *We have 8 risk groups. One person can belong to several risk groups:*
- *Persons released from a penal institution, disabled people, people who do not speak Estonian.*
- *People aged 55+ years;*
- *Young people aged 16 to 24 years;*
- *People who do not speak Estonian and need a language course;*
- *Caregivers;*
- *Long-term unemployed;*
- *Disabled people;*
- *Persons released from a penal institution* (Tamm & Saar 2010).

The Slovenian national report observes that target groups for access to education supports do not exist on the basis of socio-economic disadvantage:

> In Slovenia, institutions usually have not set up any specific targets for the inclusion of different risk groups. The only risk group identified in Slovenia with regards to quotas are students from other countries. The ministry defines these quotas. They vary from 1-2 %. Other groups are not defined (Ivančič et al., 2010).

Representation of target groups, including ethnic minorities in the decision making processes at national level regarding access to education

The Russian national report reveals a lack of such involvement from those groups being targeted, according to the response of a senior official of the Committee for Labor and Employment, St. Petersburg:

Let's go back to the risk target groups. Are their representatives involved in these committees? *No, not really* (Kozlovskiy, Khokhlova & Veits 2010).

The Irish national report offers examples of university consultation and partnership with members of the Irish Travelling community:

In relation to ethnic minorities, University A targets Irish Travellers, acknowledging that they face particular challenges throughout their education. The Access Service includes members of the Irish Travelling Community in all of its initiatives. They work with local Area Partnerships, communities, Irish Traveller support groups, youth agencies and schools and with the parents and students of the Travelling community to overcome some of the barriers they encounter as they progress through the education system. They run a scholarship programme for Traveller students making the transition to the senior cycle of secondary school (Dooley, Downes, Maunsell & McLoughlin 2010).

A regional strategy for access

The Slovenian national report indicates that the need for a regional strategic dimension and practice is recognised but not yet implemented:

Regional adult education programmes are also foreseen but none has been adopted so far. By and large a majority of communes have not yet prepared an adult education strategy and do not have any money intended for adult education although they are founders of people's universities which are supposed to develop into community education centres (Ivančič et al., 2010).

The role of municipalities in Slovenia is key to the success of a regional strategy for access to lifelong learning

The interview with the Head of a Continuing Training Department of a vocational school in the Estonian national report is explicit that there is an absence of regional strategy for lifelong learning and access:

> *There is no regional strategy concerning adult education. The local authorities, enterprises and schools should be involved more. The school cooperates with different partners, including general educational institutions* (Tamm & Saar 2010).

A Slovenian interviewee implies that national or regional influence would prompt a strategic approach to access but in the absence of such direction the institution adopts neither strategy nor structure in this area:

There is also no formal committee to promote and implement an agenda for increased access in the college and they are also not systematically monitoring the number of marginalised students. *We would tackle this if the number or pressure were, let's say, bigger* (Ivančič et al., 2010).

According to the Lithuanian national report, there is a need for external review of strategies and structures of educational institutions in relation to access. This implies direction from a national or regional level for such reviews:

It may be presumed that a sceptical attitude to institutional strategies may be a reason why there is no clear structure and systemic approach while promoting the access of adults to the education system. It is acknowledged that institutional strategies work only through study programmes which are more or less based on those strategies. Moreover, even though internal evaluation is being constantly conducted, there is no external review process (Taljunaite et al., 2010).

Development of outreach institutional strategies that go beyond mere information based models

Norwegian example:

Asked whether parents with immigrant background were not reached, our informant replied, *No, it was too difficult, because it had to be a person from the local environment which could, who knew different places and who was engaged, quite simply* (Stensen & Ure 2010).

My informant had an immigrant background and her experiences and knowledge was crucial for how they decided to recruit participants to the project. She knew where to reach them and how to move forward (Stensen & Ure 2010).

The Belgian national report highlights the severe limitations to an informational approach to an abstract other:

The Sociale School Heverlee Centrum voor Volwassenenonderwijs vzw (SSH-CVO) also uses printed press (programme brochure, local newspaper, flyers, adverts, documents, etc.) and online tools (such as a website) to increase the access to their educational provision. Although this type of advertisement reaches the most people, a recent evaluation research by the SSH-CVO has shown the effects of this strategy are rather minimal (Vermeersch & Vandenbroucke 2010).

It emphasises a role for formal institutions cooperating with community leaders

Funded strategies to develop local community lifelong learning centres

Community based lifelong learning centres bring education into the centre of a local area, as is highlighted in the Scottish national report:

> The location of classes were *'where they are needed'*, a range of different premises were used and crèches were sometimes provided though the interviewees also noted that there was more nursery provision now through the education system. *We run these where it meets the needs of local people. So it could be in a church hall. It could be in a community centre. Anywhere that suits the needs* (Weedon et al., 2010).

The Scottish national report also emphasises that learners experiencing socio-economic disadvantage may be much more at ease taking classes in such community based environments

The Bulgarian national report also provides evidence for the key role of community based learning centres, for personal fulfillment and active citizenship objectives, including for formal education:

The Community centres *(chitalishta)* play a crucial role in relation to the personal and citizenship perspectives on LLL. Being unique traditional self-managed units in Bulgaria, they function as 'training fields' for acquiring skills for managing collective activities… Some community centres (*chitalishta*) conduct qualification courses for adults following curricula with internationally recognised certificates (Boyadjieva et al., 2010).

The Irish national report emphasises the important role of *An Cosán* which is the largest independent community-based education centre in Ireland:

> In relation to groups currently in the student population women from the local area attend classes. They run programmes specifically for young women in the area who are lone parents and early school leavers. *An Cosán* caters for ethnic minorities who need to improve their English language skills, confidence or parenting skills. Parents, particularly fathers and their children come to some classes together (Dooley et al., 2010).

This community centre adopts both a lifelong and life-wide focus – and combines nonformal with a focus on progression to formal education

A national strategy for education in prison

The Slovenian national report recognises that:

There are no special national policy papers on adult education in prisons while there are separate (national) strategies defining goals and measures related to specific target groups, e.g. Roma (Ivančič et al., 2010).

The Belgian report states:

It is not unfair to say that before the year 2000 there was no intense support for education in Belgian prisons. For the federal government it was a side issue (Vermeersch & Vandenbroucke 2010).

Professional development support and resource materials for teachers in prisons

There is little evidence of professional development and support for teachers working in prisons across the national reports. One exception to this general trend is the Russian national report, where a significant enthusiasm was found among teachers in prison for extra professional development opportunities and resources

The prison teachers developing their own specifically tailored resource materials for working with prisoners is an innovative example in the Russian national report to be built upon elsewhere.

OTHER KEY SYSTEMIC FEATURES RAISED IN REPORT

- Formal links between universities and NGOs representing marginalised groups
- Availability of school and university institutions free of charge during summertime and evenings for community groups from marginalised areas
- Challenge to institutional staff attitudes

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