

# Access to Higher Education for Traditionally Marginalised Groups in Europe

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Workshop 5 : Opening Higher Education for Adults  
Theme 2: 'One Step Up': Enhancing Adult Competences

*It's Always a Good Time to Learn*

Final Conference on the Adult Learning Action Plan

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# LifeLong Learning 2010

- LLL2010: *Towards a Lifelong Learning Society in Europe: The Contribution of the Education System*
- Supported by the European Commission under the Sixth Framework Programme.
- Engaged 14 institutions across Europe incl. Central and Eastern Europe and Associated States.
- Prof. Ellu Saar, Tallinn University
- <http://lll2010.tlu.ee/>
- Sub-Project 5:
- *A Systems Level Focus on Access to Education for Traditionally Marginalised Groups in Europe: Comparing Strategies, Policy and Practice in Twelve European Countries.*
- SP5 Co-ordinator: Dr. Paul Downes
- Irish National Report:
- Dooley, Downes, Maunsell and McLoughlin (2010)

The logo for 'LifeLong Learning 2010' is displayed in a white banner at the top of the slide. The text 'LifeLong Learning' is in a green, sans-serif font, with 'Life' in bold. To the right of the text is a green graphic consisting of several curved, overlapping lines that resemble a stylized arrow or a fan. To the right of the graphic is the year '2010' in a bold, green, sans-serif font.

# **LifeLong Learning** 2010

- **AIM:** To analyse the role of education institutions and non-traditional educational contexts in promotion of the access of adults to the education system, particularly those adults from backgrounds of social marginalisation.
- **METHOD:** Interviews with senior management of education institutions, senior government officials and other stakeholders in adult education, such as nonformal education institutions and community groups and those involved in prison education.
- **KEY LEARNING:** Lead to the development of a wider framework of common structural, process and outcome indicators which, with the support of the European Commission, can provide a renewed opportunity for scrutiny and transparency in the area of access to education for marginalized groups.

## Overview of Presentation:

- With a focus on the objective of embedding a coherent EU strategy of **lifelong learning for all** (**'Strategic Objective 3: Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship'** [EU Council (2009/C 119/02)].
- This presentation will draw from the twelve SP5 National Reports to **identify key and persistent challenges and barriers** within EU and national LLL policy and practice in relation to access to higher education for those that are traditionally marginalised.
- To **recommend strategic priorities**, to you the conference delegates, and to the European Commission, for consideration in the development of the **Adult Learning Action Plan**, which are necessary to widen access to higher education for these target groups.
- To address the 'deep-rooted forms of inequality within the higher education system' (Field, 2003, 24).

# **Key Policy Priorities for Consideration**

- **I. A Central Driving Committee at Member State Level for Lifelong Learning and Access for Traditionally Marginalized Groups.**
- **II. Non-formal Education which is Community-Based as a Route to Engage Traditionally Marginalised Groups with Higher Education.**
- **III. Strategic Leadership on Access to Higher Education in Prisons.**

## **I. A Central Driving Committee at Member State Level for Lifelong Learning and Access for Marginalized Groups.**

- Why? National reports observe that policy responsibility for adult learning is relatively fragmented (Cf. Gábor Halász) and particularly so in respect of access. Acknowledging the State's role in setting the agenda for transformation of educational system regarding access.
- A key corollary - must be the availability of statistical information on access and participation.
- Opportunity to proof national and regional level decisions regarding their impact, perhaps even unintended impact, upon traditionally marginalised groups – providing opportunities to address gaps in practice and barriers to implementation.
- Representation of target groups, in the decision making processes at national level regarding access to education.
- The need for formal obligation on state institutions to improve access and for incentives for HEIs to improve access for these groups.

## **II. Non-formal Education which is Community-Based as Route to Engage Traditionally Underrepresented and Socially Excluded Groups with Higher Education.**

- Non-formal as a path to formal education (SI, PI)
- Funded strategies to develop local community lifelong learning centers (SI)
- Development of outreach institutional strategies that go beyond mere information-based models (PI)
- Formal links between universities and the community/ NGOs representing marginalized groups (SI)

## Non-formal as a path to formal education (SI, PI)

- Key role of non-formal education in breaking down barriers to education and fear of failure in learners who have had previously alienating experiences within the formal education system
- The non-formal education pathway may be a key mediating structure and pathway into subsequent formal and higher education.
- Highlighted in the Norwegian national report: “Our interviewees were eager to point out that learners may start out with non-formal courses but as they become more confident with learning environments separated from their daily life, they gradually build up **courage** to enrol in formal education. By offering formal and non-formal training, FU is able to cater for both needs, possibly in the same learning institution” (Stensen & Ure, 2010).



## Non-formal as a path to formal education (SI, PI)

- Participation as Key: In the Slovenian national report when respondents were asked which programmes were particularly helpful in giving adults with low levels of prior education confidence to continue in education and/or engage actively as citizens within their communities.
- **EXEMPLAR: Slovenia: People's University** : 1800 students of non-formal education. Reference made to the distinct role of the non-formal sector in relation to traditionally marginalised groups accessing formal education:
- *“Yes, this is it, because people have barriers many time. And in this way, by non-formal education, you can stimulate lifelong learning. That there are new things every time, that they can adapt to changes, to society, can't they? That they are active, not marginalised, isolated. And that by this we try to affect the quality of their lives, don't we?”* (Ivančič et al., 2010).

## Non-formal as a path to formal education (SI, PI)

- Many of the national reports highlighted challenges in the identification and recognition of non-formal education within formal education structures/systems including higher education.
- The Russian national report exemplifies this barrier to access, particularly for those most marginalised:
- *“So far, non-formal education is not built into the system of formal education and there are no activities on the part of the government and Ministry of Education aimed at **making bridges between the two** in order to make the system of education in Russia modernized and more accessible for different categories of population”* (Kozlovskiy, Khokhlova & Veits, 2010).
- NOTE: A review of recognition of non-formal and informal learning shows that people with low or no qualifications are less aware of the possibilities to continue/further education than people with higher qualifications (Besson 2008, p.15).

## Funded strategies to develop local community lifelong learning centres (SI)

- Community-based Lifelong Learning Centres offer a key bridge in reaching out to marginalised communities and also in fostering the connection over time between the non-formal and formal systems.
- Bringing education into the heart of a local area, as highlighted in the Scottish national report: *“The location of classes were ‘where they are needed’* (Weedon et al., 2010).
- The Estonian national report noted the diversity of learner population engaging with educational provision in the local community: *“Non-formal education centres provide versatile and quality training in increasing volumes...available to everybody, incl. risk groups.”* (Tamm & Saar, 2010).
- While there are a range of examples of community-based lifelong learning centres across some participating countries, there is a clear need for a more strategic funded approach to develop such centres to be considered at EU Commission level. (Cf. Maria Joao Rodrigues)

## Development of outreach institutional strategies that go beyond mere information based models (PI)

- In terms of raising awareness of educational opportunities, it is clear from a range of the national reports that the limitations of information based approaches need to be more fully recognized in outreach to groups that have been traditionally marginalised. Specifically, regarding the issue of literacy assumptions in employing information based models.
- The Scottish national report speaks to working in partnerships with other agencies to target particular groups and refers to community-based, outreach strategies which provide taster programmes in community settings that may be both more convenient and less threatening for those who have had negative school experiences.
- Proactive school-based outreach by higher education institutions to disadvantaged groups is also highlighted across a number of national reports and has much potential for strategic development.

## Development of outreach institutional strategies that go beyond mere information based models (PI)

- Such interpersonal, community outreach approaches foster trust and cultural relevance, and invites significant expansion in the future if the European Commission supports it within a framework of developing community learning centres at local level across Europe.
- While much of this networking is in the context of non-formal education outreach, at least some of it is potentially transferable to formal education settings, whereby universities/HEIs could form close links with NGOs representing marginalised groups.

## Formal links between universities and the community/ NGOs representing marginalized groups (SI)

- Need to strengthen formal links between universities and the community/NGOs representing marginalized groups an opportunity only touched upon in some national reports.
- One cogent example of strong links between these sectors is provided within the Scottish higher education context: whereby;
- *“In addition to provision in formal educational settings, college staff would go out into the community and deliver courses to get people back into education. These courses were considered very successful in bringing into the more formal setting, disadvantaged groups of learners who were more comfortable initially in a community setting.”*
- *“We do a lot of ESF classes that target people who are less likely to come into education and in my department, the community classes are the way forward I think in terms of getting people into education (Department Head, College B)” (Weedon et al., 2010).*

## EXEMPLAR OF INREACH: Links between Secondary Evening Schools and the System of Higher Education

- *“The school is a part of so called University complex that is aimed at making bridges between educational institutions of 3<sup>rd</sup> /4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> ISCED levels.” (Kozlovskiy, Khokhlova & Veits, 2010).*
- *“The evening school works both with young and adult learners and therefore fully supports lifelong learning. Most students of the school come from socially disadvantageous backgrounds – early schools leavers, problem teenagers, teenagers from malfunctioning families, young single mothers, former prisoners, former military persons, etc.*
- *For many of these learners higher education is often hard to reach, even though the motivation of many of them to obtain higher education is rather strong because a diploma will enhance their career opportunities.” (Kozlovskiy, Khokhlova & Veits, 2010).*
- The 10<sup>th</sup> grade class is called **class-college** open to students who have decided to enter a HEI. They attend classes in both settings and are also considered 1<sup>st</sup> year college students, when they transfer, they automatically become students of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year.”

## Formal links between universities and the community/ NGOs representing marginalized groups (SI)

- Outcome Indicators: What impacts and changes have occurred institutionally as a result of partnership with the community?
- Structural Indicators: Is the HE institution community-accessible?: is there dedicated community space on the campus?
- Process Indicators: What are the spaces for democratic deliberation and decision-making within the HE institution, and with regard to community partnerships?
- REF: Carnegie Foundation: Elective Classification in Civic Engagement.



### III. Strategic Leadership on Access to Higher Education in Prison

- Overcoming practical problems to allow the prisoner to study in prison at third level (PI, SI)
- Opportunities for distance education and web-based learning in prison (SI)
- Individual education plans for prisoners (SI)
- Key References: European Prison Rules, Adopted by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers (2006)
- European Commission and Hungarian Prison Service: "Pathways to inclusion – Strengthening European Cooperation in *Prison Education and Training*" *Budapest*, 22-24 February 2010

# Conclusions

- **I. Strategic Policies Relating to Development of a Central Driving Committee at Member State Level for Lifelong Learning and Access for Traditionally Marginalized Groups**
- **II. Non-formal Education which is community-based can play a significant role in enhancing the access of traditionally marginalised groups to formal education from initial, through further and into higher education.**
- Need for a distinct strategic funding strand, to be developed at EU level, in conjunction with commitments from national states, a strand purely focusing on community based education and the development of community lifelong learning centres. This would resonate not only with an access to lifelong learning as strategic priority and also with EU2020 targets for 40% participation at tertiary level, reduction of early school leaving to 10% across the EU, and with targets in literacy and numeracy.
- **III. Strategic Leadership on Access to Higher Education in Prisons**
- Consideration be given as a priority for the development of coherent strategy, nationally and Europe-wide, in respect of prison-based higher education.

Thank you for your attention.

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