



EUCIS-LLL

5 December 2013 - Synthesis report

Policy Debate

“Measuring progress in lifelong learning”

EUCIS-LLL organised its third Lifelong Learning Week in the European Parliament, Brussels, from 2 to 6 December 2013. This year, the Week had a particular focus on the upcoming European Elections of Spring 2014. At this occasion EUCIS-LLL organised an international seminar on “Measuring progress in lifelong learning” on 5 December. This seminar was about rethinking progress measurement in learning in a partnership approach, as citizens’ voice should count in defining what quality education is and how to measure it.



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Opening session

David Lopez welcomed the participants and introduced the debate.

Sophia ERIKSSON WATERSCHOOT

**Head of Unit A1 on Education and Training in Europe 2020 Governance,
DG EAC, European Commission**

It is timely and relevant to have this debate now, as there is a lot of recent data and evidence available to analyse (e.g. Education and Training Monitor, PIAAC, PISA) which can help to take **stock of progress in order to look forward and set priorities.**

Education is not an EU competence, but the Commission can still do quite a lot to support and complement actions and reforms in Member States. There are different tools to our disposal: Education within the overall EU agenda for growth and jobs with country-specific recommendations, ET 2020 and its Open Method of Coordination (using inter alia benchmarks, indicators, peer learning), the Erasmus+ programme, the European Structural and Investment Funds and a number of surveys and studies for evidence gathering which can inform policy-making.

Recent policy challenges identified at EU level which have an impact on education include the globalisation, the ICT “revolution” (e.g. MOOCs) and demographic changes (e.g. putting strain on the availability of teachers and using the full potential of people when the work force is shrinking). These challenges are currently discussed but might require complex solutions and Europe will have to rethink many of its aspects of education and training systems. These challenges are relevant for all education sectors, from early childhood education and care to higher education and adult learning. The Commission has contributed to this debate through its Communications in recent years: the “Modernisation of higher education” in 2011, the “Rethinking Education” in 2012 and the “Opening Up Education” in 2013. The new Erasmus+ programme will provide new opportunities for partnerships, alliances and experimentations, also across sectors, thanks to its new integrated architecture (i.e. including education, training and youth, with three key actions) and a 40% budget increase. The European Social Fund, as part of the new European Structural and Investment Funds, can also support many of the necessary reforms and policy developments.



The 2013 Education, Training and Youth Forum was an important occasion to bring different stakeholders together and try to come up with innovative ideas for new ways of working together through Erasmus+. EUCIS-LLL provided a valuable input to the Forum, in particular through the survey it conducted on partnerships prior to the event.

On measuring progress in lifelong learning, which is the theme of the debate, it is important to get the facts right. **Evidence provides a reality check** - for example PIAAC was a real wake-up call with one in five adults in the EU having low basic skills. How do we use these results and formulate objectives in terms of policy accordingly? **These results inform and influence decision-makers. Monitoring** is also important as it enables us to follow up on initiatives and reforms and to gain knowledge of what works. It **helps to understand what policies are effective.** It can also make policy-makers more **accountable.** Civil society organisations can use evidence to mirror their concerns.

We are now in a period of stocktaking and preparing the future agenda for education and training. Europe 2020 will be reviewed and ET 2020 is under-going a stocktaking exercise, involving Member States and stakeholders. The **EUCIS-LLL Manifesto gives much food for thought. Civil society’s input to this reflection is truly important.** The 2014 Education, Training and Youth Forum aims at gathering a structured contribution from civil society to the ET 2020 stocktaking and the future EU agenda on education and training.

Round table 1

What do current indicators tell us?
How to better use them?

The EU is supporting evidence-based policies and peer learning, it has developed many indicators and benchmarks and refers to international indicators such as PISA and PIAAC. How this data is used by policy-makers and civil society?

Moderator: Dr. Gerhard BISOVSKY, EUCIS-LLL Steering Committee member and Secretary General of the Austrian Association for Adult Education Centres.

 **Gina EBNER**
Secretary General of the European Association for the Education of Adults, EAEA



The PIAAC survey results showed for instance that illiterates in Austria top up one million while it was estimated around 100 000 in the nineties. In an area such as adult education where data is low, any kind of evidence is very useful. When you are arguing for adult learning it is useful to have **evidence** as it **provides basis for advocacy**. The ET2020 benchmark on participation in lifelong learning shows that it is stagnating and even worsening in some countries. Indicators can serve to **support our plea to increase investment**. We encourage our members to look at PIAAC and other indicators.

What is missing is the direction we are taking, supported by the evidence. In the last few months and years, there have been some voices saying that maybe we should concentrate on the elites or on the young people. PIAAC shows that there is a **need to keep up the competences levels across age ranges** for example by looking at the low-qualified adults as well.

What we still know little about is how learning impacts life. We know that learning has a **huge impact on broader areas** such as health and we should go deeper and it may enlighten the financing debate.

 **Dr. Martin NOACK**
Senior Project Manager, "The European Lifelong Learning Indicators", Bertelsmann Stiftung

23 countries were surveyed in the ELLI project through four dimensions of learning according to the Delors report: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be. The foundation identified key indicators from different European and International sources in each category. We think that the resulting [ELLI Index](#) has been **helping the policy agenda setting**.

Building on ELLI, we developed the [German Learning Atlas](#) comparing municipalities in Germany. It had a huge impact on the municipalities themselves but also on the media. One municipality even composed a learning report measure that is updated every two years to **evaluate education policies**.

Bertelsmann Stiftung has now started a new project on adult education. How many resources does the community have, how many disadvantaged people, how can we improve the situation (i.e. guidance, validation)? We are currently identifying comparative indicators on this level. We want to address groups that do not receive the political attention that they deserve and we need to approach them where they live, learn and work.



Jan NIESSEN

Director of Migration Policy Group
“Education in the Migrant Integration
Policy Index”



Mantas SEKMOKAS

Policy Officer, Adult education policy sector,
DG Education Culture, European Commission



Working on indicators is a risky business; you have to be careful on how to present your work. Our experience is that **governments are into what they call outcome indicators** to which we add: “outcomes of what”? MIPEX is more **looking at input indicators**: what types of policies do you have and what are they leading to. General measuring tools have not enough sensitivity to monitor how specific groups are actually doing, and how they are affected by policies in place.

In MIPEX we looked at 7-8 crucial areas for migrants’ well-being ranging from access to citizenship to antidiscrimination, residence rights and education. We looked at what is in place. It is a **descriptive exercise** and it is narrative. When you want to know what policies could be better, it **becomes a normative exercise**.

We measure equality and equal treatment because our normative framework is saying that the best option is when immigrants and their descendants are treated equally to EU citizens. So **we measure what promotes equality**. We also demonstrate where MIPEX is used to **influence policies and academic research**.

Policy work at the EU level is becoming more and more visible. A lot of changes have taken place in recent years, including in statistics, research and data. However, in the light of the principle of subsidiarity, the European Commission’s role in education policy is a supporting role: fostering mutual learning and the exchange of experience and good practice and innovation. Thus key developments are to be sought at the National level.

Tools to analyse and evaluate National policies and their efficiency are being developed, but **this needs time**, capacity as well as dedication of the policy makers. This is well illustrated by the development of the OECD’s Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC), the results of which became available after almost a 10-year long intergovernmental development and implementation process.

What can and should be done further? It is indeed important to **evaluate the effectiveness of policies while considering both the costs and the benefits**. We are for example currently improving our understanding of the levels of investment in education, while international surveys like PIAAC provide evidence on outcomes. Still there is scope in MS to improve the quality mechanisms that underpin all these processes before we can bring them together to measure which policies are more effective. There is also a **proliferation of indicators, data and research evidence**. It is difficult for any one institution to take stock of all this.

Fundamentally there are two main ways of using evidence – **firstly to signal policy priorities and secondly to build up concrete policies or ways to intervene by using that evidence**. Thus NGOs like EUCIS LLL, think tanks and other relevant organisations could support policy making by both finding evidence to identify policy priorities as well as promote their use in policy development and implementation.

Discussion

It is important to put lifelong learning at the centre of the next elections!

Measuring is not taking action: we need to build on those indicators.

Gina EBNER outlined that what we need to do is take the person and see what (s)he needs to have a good life: job, family, health... for us in adult education it is a crucial concept. The ELLI goes in that direction. For example parenting has a strong impact on one's education. We need a flagship initiative on adult education, a big approach that asks everyone to make a commitment to learning, from bottom to top.

Martin NOACK stressed the importance of the local level and of the four dimensions of the ELLI. There are three ways how disadvantaged groups can be included more in adult learning: they should have access to new learner-centered pedagogies e.g., using digital tools, to guidance systems where they live and to the validation of non-formal and informal prior learning.

Jan NIESEN added that we have to question ourselves on how important those evidence-based exercises are. For instance, language courses for migrants are developed on the assumption it could help integration. But people did not reunite their families at the end thanks to language classes, we proved that. We have to know what we are doing, that is why our normative approach is measuring equal treatment. You do something not because it is the best thing to do but the right thing to do.

Mantas SEKMOKAS explained that the Commission is here to collect evidence as well as encourage Member States to share good practices, to build and implement policies in an effective way. In this way we could expect policies to have more impact, more credibility and lead to better results of education and training policies at the national level.



Round Table 2

The EU is calling for a paradigm shift towards a learning outcome approach. Are current indicators and benchmarks reflecting this shift? How should we measure progress in learning in the future?

Moderator: Dr. Gerhard BISOVSKY, EUCIS-LLL Steering Committee member and Secretary General of the Austrian Association for Adult Education Centres.

 **William THORN**
In charge of PIAAC, the survey of Adult Skills, OECD



We need to put indicators in context; with PISA and PIAAC, there is a growing interest on the outcomes of learning. It is based on the work started in the eighties in the US and Canada and spread in adult education literature. There have been developments in psychometric measurement sciences that help give better estimates of the population's performance. You have got to have **indicators that are good enough for policy; you cannot measure everything** and you often have use measures that represent reasonable proxies for the object of interest.

Measurement of the more qualitative aspects of life does exist: happiness, job satisfaction are measured by the OECD (e.g. the Better Life Index; and also Fitoussi work on well-being and GDP). Whether the measurement of many aspects of quality of life can be done on a mass scale is another thing. For instance, the quality of interactions between parents and children can be assessed by observation but not through large scale surveys. I do not think it is always necessary to have quantitative indicators to bring about improvement. Reflection on practices is also important.

 **Dr. Jyri MANNINEN**
Adult & Continuing Education, University of Eastern Finland, «BELL - Benefits of Lifelong Learning»

The BELL project is about the wider benefits of liberal adult education and it is difficult to get information on this kind of learning because it is not recognised in the statistics. We are not looking for learning outcomes but **wider benefits**, usually recognised as human capital, social capital, active citizenship... This project will be quite interesting for the quality of adult learning.



We had 9000 respondents from 10 countries and good evidence on benefits was collected. The OECD conception of **social outcomes** has been used for the study. In our study, the most important benefits are the changes in the educational experiences, becoming for example more motivated to learn further in life. Quality measurement should also include measurement of these **soft wider benefits**: sense of purpose in life, participation in community, and so on.



What are we aiming at? What should indicators measure?

Jean GORDON

Director of the European Institute of Education and Social Policy, member of the Learning for Well-being Consortium (L4WB)



The policy focus of the Institute is lifelong learning, from early childhood to adult learning; it is involved in pan-European studies for the Commission, in KeyCoNet, in the new learning outcomes study of the CEDEFOP, on NQFs and many other activities. The EUCIS-LLL Manifesto resonates very strongly with our work.

We have been developing the Learning for Well Being Consortium (L4WB) for several years now. The L4WB is focusing mainly on children and young people but is equally relevant to adult learners because it emphasises the **importance of learning in all environments with a strong focus on diversity**. If we **focus on measuring what matters**, it is quite clear now that education and training systems across Europe are **shifting to a learning outcomes approach**. **Indicators tend to measure what can be easily measured (participation, achievement) but do not seek to understand the holistic development of people (resilience, empathy, emotional literacy)**. Yes, we have to make choices and we have different indicators for different purposes and levels. **What we do not have is a set of indicators where we are really putting the child at the centre** and see what we need to look at to **go beyond quantitative indicators of the classic type, in order to have happy, healthy and meaningful lives**. We need to bring together our indicators from different sectors to develop the core competences that people need.

During the last 20 years **civil society in its broad sense has become more and more important in pushing forward agendas**, and the types of partnerships we can build have a fairly key role to play (i.e. L4WB). People do not live their lives in silos or grow up in silos, so you need to bring people from the different sectors that affect people's lives. The indicators' results can be used in various ways; if you dig down in PISA, there is a mass of precious information on relationships, self-esteem... to be exploited.

Stéphanie LANGSTAFF

NORRAG - Network for international policies and cooperation in education and training, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva



NORRAG is a network promoting critical analysis of international policies and cooperation in education and training. One of our current topics of interest is the global politics of data and measurement.

Learning indicators are political by nature; they are built and used depending on the way in which learning, quality and outcomes are conceived. At the global level, the growing interest in large-scale measurement of learning outcomes seems to respond mostly to an **instrumental vision of education as a tool for economic growth**, competitiveness and global integration. In this context, the focus tends to be on learning outcomes that can be easily measured, quantified and compared. Cognitive learning outcomes (knowledge and skills) are given more attention than social learning outcomes (values, attitudes and behaviours); and some dimensions such as the pleasure of learning, self-fulfilment and self-esteem do not receive much policy attention. Overall, if we refer to Delors' Four Pillars of Learning, "learning to know" and "learning to do" are today given priority over "learning to live together" and "learning to be".

To conclude, it is important to **be aware of these limitations, while encouraging a broader approach to quality learning, and continuing efforts to evaluate learning in all its dimensions**. Civil society, national governments and researchers could certainly occupy more space in policy debates about the nature and evaluation of quality learning, which is dominated by a small number of actors competing on a global scale.



Discussion

Connectivity, inclusion, cooperation... it is the difficult part to measure but exactly what we need to measure. What happens outside the classroom? Are parents involved? Are communities involved?

William Thorn outlined that PISA should be seen as an indicator of some aspects of educational quality but that it was not designed to summarise all the dimensions of the outcomes people expected from schooling. In thinking about developing indicators, it is always essential to be clear about what we want to measure. Why measure informal learning by how many people go to a museum rather than a football match? We could set up an indicator on the implementation of quality but what would it be?

Jyri Manninen mentioned that the Finnish government is currently seeing education as an expense where you can save money while others invest in education. People keep talking about low skills but many jobs do not even require skills.

Jean Gordon added that political timetables create regular problems because they are contrary to the longer term strategies. The element of time is always important in terms of implementation. We have 25 years of experience of EU funded programmes, let us build on it. When we think about quality processes and indicators, we need to consider the whole person in his/her whole life. We have to give ourselves the bigger goals otherwise we will achieve too little.

Stéphanie Langstaff stressed the importance of national and local contexts when reflecting on quality learning, education policies and measurement. She questioned the relevance and use of internationally comparable indicators and benchmarking (e.g. World Bank's SABER, OECD's PISA and PIAAC) to formulate better and context-sensitive educational policies.

Closing remarks

David Lopez
President of EUCIS-LLL

"We have to do not the best but the right thing" is an inspiring sentence. In civil society we are practitioners that want to have an impact on policies so we need to share expertise together, and this was extraordinarily reached in this Lifelong Learning Week's events. We want to continue this debate by the creation of a Lifelong Learning Intergroup. We can make some concrete recommendations to the European institutions because we want to say out loud that education is crucial for social inclusion.



Key messages

Indicators and measures...

- Provide a reality check and a “wake up call” to put light on a particular problem.
- Can inform policy-makers and be used to formulate policies that have an impact.
- Can be used to make policy-makers accountable on the choices they have made.
- Support mutual learning and comparative studies to identify best practices.
- Can be used by civil society to support their advocacy actions.
- Can also be used to raise public attention on particular societal issues and be used for “agenda setting”.
- Can contribute to define what is quality education.

But...

- Measuring is not action: decision-makers decide on where to put the money.
- The current EU indicators do not measure the social human capital of learning or the wider benefits of learning.
- Indicators measure what is easy to measure: attainment levels; other aspects such as resilience are harder to measure.
- Decision-makers define indicators that are useful for political effectiveness.
- We only evaluate output. It is difficult to assess the input side; we need more qualitative mechanisms at national level.
- There is a multiplicity of sources and not one institution can make sense of it all. We need knowledge intermediaries such as think tanks and NGOs.
- The reliability of indicators such as PISA and TIMs has been questioned.
- Time is different in research, policy-making and for practitioners
- How much does policy matter?

Ways forward...

- There is a consensus that the current indicators are instrumental and result from a political choice: indicators that are good enough because we cannot measure everything.

- But we need a more holistic picture and a learner-centred approach “what the learners need to have to have a good life”. This could impact choices such as where to invest in education and training.
- We should also look at the wider benefits of learning.
- Partnerships and civil society dialogue can contribute to define indicators that measure the things that matter
- Measuring learning outcomes is a natural development; it is about the quality of learning and about different ways of doing it.
- How to use best what already exists: some international surveys give another story; they should be better compared to give a wider picture.
- The comparison between national countries also hides wide disparities within the countries, hence the importance of comparing data at the regional level to have a clearer picture.

Basic assumptions...

- Education should be understood by all as an investment.
- We need to focus on quality education and on what it means.
- We should look at all age groups in a life-wide and life-long perspective.