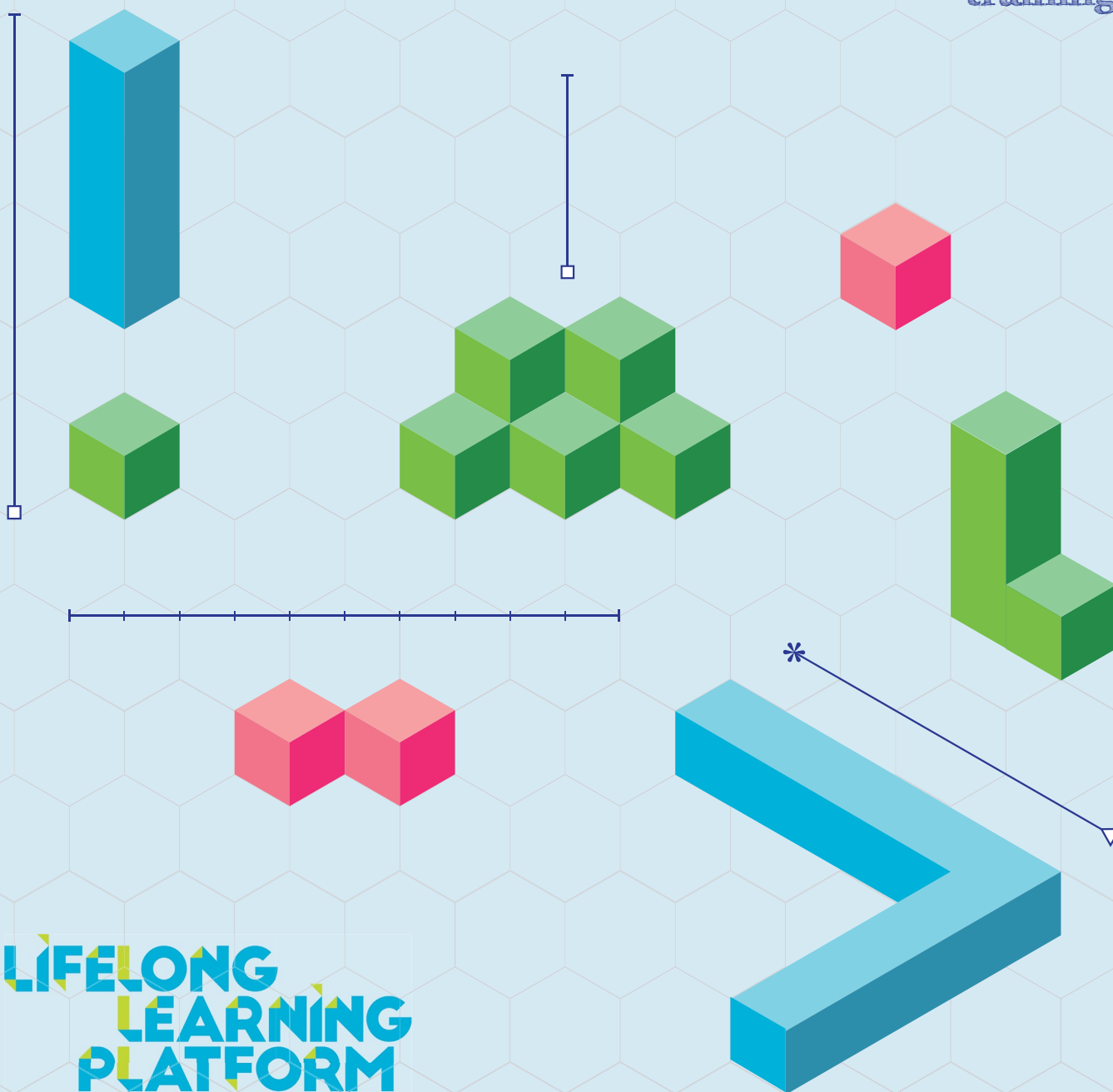


# EDUCATION & TRAINING 2020 SHADOW REPORT

A view from learning providers and civil society on European cooperation in the field of education and training





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# INTRODUCTION

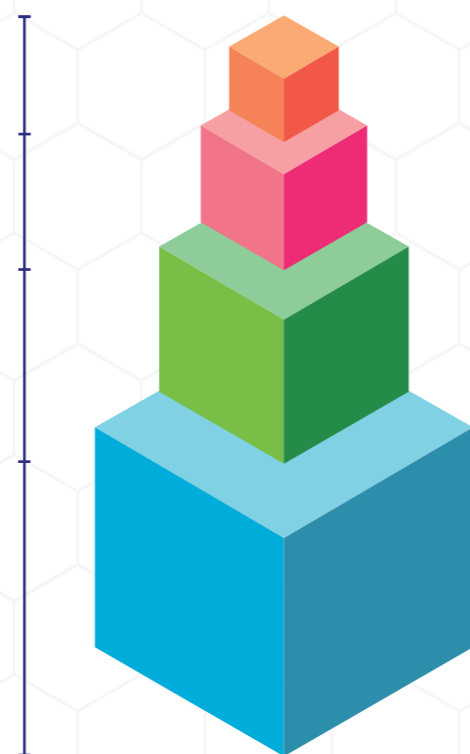
The strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) is a tool which allows Member States to exchange best practices and learn from each other. One of its outcomes is the annual Education and Training Monitor that provides an overview of the performance of education systems in all EU Member States in achieving 6 different benchmarks<sup>1</sup>.

The statistics provided in the Education and Training Monitor comprise data collected by Eurostat, the OECD and the Eurydice network. Although these sources have useful applications, they focus on the attainment of specific benchmarks based on data gathered by national governments concerning the formal education system, while non-formal and informal learning and the views of education and training providers, learners and their representative associations do not always receive adequate attention.

It is this missing perspective of the educators and learners themselves that provided the impetus for the Lifelong Learning Platform to conduct this study. Involving stakeholders from Austria, Ireland, Portugal, Romania and Slovenia, it aims to produce a “reality-check” on the progress towards the ET2020 targets and a snapshot of the situation on the ground through the eyes of learning providers and civil society. It therefore seeks to complement or ‘shadow’ the quantitative analysis of the annual Education and Training Monitor by offering more qualitative insights, hence why we use the term ‘shadow report’.

While not intended as a large-scale statistically representative study, it is a pilot serving as a first attempt to bridge the gap between the institutional framework for European cooperation in the field of education and training and how this cooperation impacts and is perceived by its “end-

users”: educators, learners and their representative associations. We hope its findings will offer a useful contribution to reflections on the future of European cooperation in the field at a time when the debate on achieving the European Education Area by 2025 is high on the Union’s political agenda.



<sup>1</sup> Although Eurostat lists 8 benchmarks, only partial data are available for the benchmark on learning mobility in higher education and no data is available for the benchmark on learning mobility in initial vocational education and training (IVET), therefore only 6 are covered by the ET Monitor.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## EU POLICIES ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Respondents had a **high level of familiarity with EU initiatives on inclusive education**. A significant majority (79%) was aware of both the Paris Declaration and the Council recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education and the European dimension of teaching.

The **majority (67%) of respondents were aware of both or one of the targets considered for this study**. Nevertheless, still an important number of respondents (33%) replied that they were not aware of any of them before taking the survey.

**A majority of respondents (88%) considers that EU policies on inclusive education are having an impact on their intended target groups and that they have shaped their countries’ national policy agenda on the topic**. In both cases a slight majority (60%) consider this impact and influence to be strong. In addition, a majority (89%) believes that EU policies are having an impact on educators’ pedagogical approaches, with well over half (64%) considering this impact to be strong.

While respondents feel these policies have had a great impact at the declarative level and can be good strategic papers, there is still not enough action on the ground and often no clear plans for implementing the recommendations. If implemented, there are many issues including regarding adequate monitoring.

During the focus groups, it was underlined that the policy impact and influence of the EU at national level is very important and that having pressure from outside is very good. The European Union policies in the field can have an impact on Member States in terms of addressing the problems in their country.

More specifically, **benchmarks are considered important however, they could be more ambitious and they have limited impact without appropriate funding**.

**Among the main challenges to making education more inclusive, most respondents chose the training for teachers/educators (61%)**. Furthermore, the lack of funding (49%), regional socio-economic disparities (38%) as well as the lack of cross-sectoral cooperation (e.g. between education institutions and civil society or social services) (36%) were found to have an important impact on this matter.



Inclusive education is the building block of inclusive societies



## ON ADULT PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING

The majority consider that the EU target for their countries is reasonable (78%) and that the current rate recorded for their country reflects their national reality (78%).

The majority (67%) showed awareness of their national strategies to achieve this benchmark. However, an important percentage (33%) seemed to be unaware about their national strategies.

The vast majority of respondents (76%) considered European cooperation useful or very useful in addressing the challenge of promoting adult participation in learning.

During the focus groups it was underlined how important it is to link at EU level the different initiatives coming from Member States.

Concerning the most useful actions that could be taken at European level to promote participation in adult learning, the majority of respondents opted for encouraging cross border exchange of innovating teaching and learning practices (72%), followed by promoting European networks of organisations (40%) and enabling a space for discussion between national policymakers for policy reform (32%).

Among other actions could be taken at European level respondents mentioned allowing adult education projects to be implemented for a longer period of time and not depend on deadlines of funding frameworks, as well as cross-sector discussions between universities and adult learning institutions.

## ON EARLY LEAVING FROM EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The majority consider that the EU target for their countries is reasonable (85%) and that it reflects their national reality (81%).

The majority (75%) of respondents showed awareness of their national strategies to achieve this benchmark. However, still an important percentage (25%) seemed to be unaware about their national strategies.

The vast majority of respondents (75%) considered European cooperation useful or very useful in addressing the challenge of early leaving from education and training.

Concerning the most useful actions that could be taken at European level to address early leaving, the majority of respondents opted for: encouraging cross border exchange of innovating teaching and learning practices (75%), followed by promoting European networks of organisations (41%) and enabling a space for discussion between national policymakers for policy reform (35%).



## RECOMMENDATIONS



## EU POLICIES ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Take measures to support further the implementation of EU policies on inclusive education (and its monitoring) with close involvement of educators, learners and their representative associations which would avoid EU policies staying as mere theoretical documents.

Invest further in cross-sector cooperation (i.e. between education institutions and civil society or social services), which is also a major challenge in making education more inclusive. Fostering cooperation between education institutions and civil society as well as social services is key to tackle this challenge.

Make the training of teachers and educators at all levels a priority in terms of both policy reform and investment. This topic is perceived as one of the biggest challenges in making education more inclusive.



## ADULT PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING

**Allocate additional and bespoke funds to support the implementation of national strategies aiming to improve participation in adult learning.** Although being considered important tools, benchmarks alone are not enough to prompt governments to address this challenge. This allocation should include a nuanced approach to the economic disparities between regions within a country since it was observed that this represents one of the most predominant challenges when it comes to promoting the participation of adults in learning.

**Adapt the benchmark of adult participation in learning according to a more holistic lifelong learning approach.** It was suggested that currently the indicator used to measure this benchmark provides a limited view on this challenge (i.e. excludes European older than 65 years old). Furthermore, with an increasing ageing population, the age limit on the indicator excludes an important segment of learners.

**Reinforce the cross-border exchange of innovative teaching and learning practices.** It was suggested that programmes funded by the EU not only offer organisations structure, support and flexibility to address issues more rapidly but also the capacity to exchange knowledge across Europe through peer learning activities, research and support which is considered as a very relevant added value of the EU.

**Stronger support to European networks of organisations.** The work conducted by these networks is key for awareness raising on this challenge, allowing EU institutions to reach local and grassroots organisations which many times are not reached by EU campaigns. Furthermore, strengthening these networks would also foster cross-border and cross-sector dialogue and cooperation at European level.

**Enable more space for discussion coordinated at EU level on policy reform between national policymakers.** This suggests the need to reinforce further the open method coordination tools in the education and training field, which could be addressed in the next steps of implementing the European Education Area.

**Implement long term projects.** It was suggested that to engage adult learners time is key in order to build trust, which is an issue when it comes to short term projects. Therefore there was a call to allow adult education projects to be implemented for a longer period of time and not depend on deadlines of funding frameworks.



## EARLY LEAVING FROM EDUCATION AND TRAINING

**Allocate additional and bespoke funds to support the implementation of national strategies aiming to tackle ELET.** Results from the study suggest that, although considered to be important, the current benchmark is not ambitious enough. These allocations should include a nuanced approach to the economic disparities between regions within a country and the socio-economic background of pupils which were among the most predominant challenges regarding this issue.

**Reinforce the cross-border exchange of innovative teaching and learning practices.** The results suggest that for learning providers and civil society it is important to exchange experiences regarding best practices and the factors which contribute to becoming successfully inclusive schools. In addition, learning from small countries that manage to have a closer dialogue with their students could shed light for other Member States and for this also EU led exchanges are very important.

**Enable more space for discussion coordinated at EU level on policy reform between national policymakers.** This suggests the need to strengthen further the open method coordination tools in the education and training field, which could be addressed in the next steps of implementing the European Education Area.

**Reflect on current data collection and setting of benchmarks.** It was reported in the study that grassroots level organisations are able to report more accurate figures on ELET which could be valuable for national and EU level institutions in order to better understand and tackle this issue. Furthermore, tactfully establishing more specific targets for particular groups such as disadvantaged socio-economic groups would allow the development of more nuanced strategies especially for smaller EU countries. In addition, setting yearly national benchmarks together with longer term ones could help countries to better manage expectations and in allocating appropriate resources to tackling ELET.

**Promote further European networks of organisations.** It was suggested that strengthening European networks of organisations (from civil society to learning providers and social partners) would allow for greater cross-border and cross-sector dialogue and cooperation as well as channelling the in-depth understanding of grassroots-level organisations on ELET. These exchanges would be very helpful for organisations who seek to better represent their target groups at regional, national and European level. Furthermore, the work of these networks could support the EU institutions awareness raising initiatives.



## METHODOLOGY

For this study LLLP looked at the following ET2020 targets and EU Member States:

- **ET2020 targets:** Adult participation in learning and early leaving from education and training.
- **EU Member States:** Austria, Ireland, Portugal, Romania and Slovenia.

The rationale for the selection of these targets was based on, in the case of adult participation in learning, that the target remains the one with the least progress (currently 11.3% compared to the target of 15%) in addition to considerable disparities between countries. In the case of early leaving from education and training, it was due to the complexity of factors, the much emphasised need for cooperation with actors outside the formal education system to address these and the significant prevention role that vocational, non-formal and informal learning pathways can play. The rationale for the selection of countries was based on seeking geographical balance and a mix of high and low performers across both targets.

The study took place between January and September 2020. In order to achieve the main objective a qualitative approach was designed. This comprised:

- Consultation with LLLP Europe 2020 Policy Coherence Working Group<sup>2</sup> in order to identify suitable associations/educational establishments among their members to be involved in the study.
- Grey literature review on current EU and national contexts related to the selected targets.
- Data gathering was opened for 8 months and consisted of two main formats:
  - **Online survey** targeted at organisations from different sectors in each selected country. In total we received 480 responses: 9 from Austria, 30 from Ireland, 73 from

Portugal, 334 from Romania and 34 from Slovenia. Despite the constraints in terms of a balanced participation from the target countries, it must be highlighted for certain countries such as Austria the majority of respondents were umbrella associations therefore representing a wider range and number of stakeholders, which adds an extra layer of insight to their responses compared to other countries such as Romania where nearly all responses were from individual institutions.

- **Online focus groups** with targeted organisations from each country. This involved two focus group meetings, one focusing on adult learning and one focusing on early leaving from education and training. These meetings had a total of 12 participants from all target countries and discussed selected aspects of the survey in more detail, particularly the countries' policies and strategies for addressing ELET and improving participation in adult learning and the role of European cooperation in these areas. Participants were from a wide range of backgrounds including representatives of training providers, adult education centres, school students' unions and parents associations.

<sup>2</sup>The Working Group gathers EU wide civil society organisations such as: ESN, AEGEE, EARLALL, EFIL, SOLIDAR, ECSWE, EAEA, DARE, ALL DIGITAL, EucA, EUF, EFVET, EVTA, ESU, FICEMEA, L4WB, EUCEN, OBESSU, EVBB, EUROCLIO, WOSM, EEE-YFU, YEU and EFFE.



## EU POLICY CONTEXT

### ET2020 FRAMEWORK AND POST-PARIS AGENDA: PROMOTING AN INCLUSIVE APPROACH TO EDUCATION?

The strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) is an instrument which allows Member States to exchange best practices and to learn from each other. Its main aim is to support Member States in further developing their education and training systems from a lifelong learning perspective, covering all levels and contexts (including non-formal and informal learning).

The ET2020 framework pursues this aim through the following four common objectives<sup>3</sup>:

- Make lifelong learning and mobility a reality
- Improve the quality and efficiency of education and training
- Promote equity, social cohesion, and active citizenship
- Enhance creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training

To achieve these objectives the EU monitors the performance and development of the education and training system in each country according to a set of benchmarks and indicators. The progress in meeting these targets is reported every year in the Education and Training Monitor<sup>4</sup> comprising a cross-country comparison and 28 in-depth country reports.

Until 2020 the benchmarks have covered the

following topics:

- Early school leaving
- Tertiary educational attainment
- Early childhood education
- Underachievement in reading, mathematics and science
- Employment rate of recent graduates
- Adult participation in learning

The ET2020 framework is implemented through a variety of other tools and instruments under the **EU's Open Method of Coordination** such as **Thematic Working Groups**<sup>5</sup>. One of the thematic working groups focuses on **Promoting Common Values and Inclusive Education**. The WG is composed of experts nominated by Member States and key stakeholders and it offers a forum for the exchange of experiences and good practices, in this case more specifically, for discussing approaches to inclusive education. The main priority areas of the Working Group include the promotion of common values and intercultural competences, fostering a European dimension of education and training, support of inclusive education for all learners as well as support education staff in encouraging diversity and creating an open learning environment.

The current ET2020 framework expires at the end of this year. A proposal for the successor framework has been put forward by the European

<sup>3</sup> Council of the European Union: Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020).

<sup>4</sup> European Commission: Education and Training Monitor

<sup>5</sup> European Commission: More information on the Working Groups.



Commission in the form of a Communication on Achieving the European Education Area by 2025<sup>6</sup>. The Communication focuses on six dimensions: 1) Quality in education and training, 2) Inclusion and gender equality, 3) Green and digital transitions, 4) Teachers and trainers, 5) Higher education and 6) Geopolitical dimension.

Promoting social inclusion and equality through education is an important dimension of the ET2020 framework which has been expanded upon and reinforced by other EU initiatives such as the **Paris Declaration on Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education**<sup>7</sup>. The Paris Declaration was adopted during an informal meeting of Education Ministers in March 2015 in light of the terrorist attacks in France and Denmark. The aim of the declaration was to reaffirm the EU's determination to support the fundamental values of respect for human dignity, freedom (including freedom of expression), democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights.

The Paris Declaration was followed up by the **Council recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education and European dimension of teaching**<sup>8</sup>. The Council Recommendation, adopted in May 2018, aims to promote a sense of belonging and strengthen social cohesion by conveying

common values, practicing inclusive education as well as teaching about Europe and its Member States.

<sup>6</sup> European Commission: Communication on Achieving the European Education Area by 2025

<sup>7</sup> European Union: Declaration on Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education.

<sup>8</sup> Council of the European Union: Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching



## ADULT PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING

Adult Learning refers to the participation of individuals (25 to 64 year old) in education and training (i.e. formal and non-formal education and training as well as informal learning). It usually addresses learning activities after the end of initial education. Adult learning is more focused on lifelong learning which *“encompasses all learning activities undertaken throughout life with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences, within personal, civic, social or employment-related perspectives”*<sup>9</sup>. The target refers to the share of 25 to 64 year-olds who received formal or non-formal education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey. It was set at **15%** and the current rate reported as of 2019 is **11.3%**<sup>10</sup>. Regarding adult participation in learning, the new European Skills Agenda released in July this year has shifted the focus from the participation in learning in the previous four weeks to the last 12 months<sup>11</sup>.

In the last 5 years, the proportion has increased by 0.7 percentage points. From all Member States, Denmark, Finland and Sweden stand out with the higher proportions ranging from 25.3% to 34.3%. On the opposite side, Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Slovakia and Greece reported adult learning rates of 4.0 % or less. In terms of gender, adult women participated in learning in a higher proportion than men (11,9% versus 9.8%). This happened in all Member States except Romania, Germany and Luxembourg where rates for men were higher. Across the Union, employers were the most common providers of non-formal education and training activities (33.8%)<sup>12</sup>. Among less common providers can be found non-formal education and

training institutions, formal education institutions and commercial institutions.

The 4th Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE)<sup>13</sup>, reports that the barriers which hinder participation in adult learning can be classified as situational barriers (those arising from one's situation in life); institutional barriers (practices and procedures that hinders participation) and dispositional barriers (attitudes and dispositions towards learning). More specifically, among the major barriers found in their review were the macro-level structural conditions such as political structures, inequality and the state's capacity to implement policies. Furthermore, participating in adult learning is many times not even contemplated by people who live in poverty who may have the belief that they have nothing to gain by it. Among the institutional barriers, the lack of access to courses and programmes and/or their high costs is one of the major ones. In terms of personal situation, the lack of time because of work and family obligations are also highlighted as a reason why adults do not attend a course or programme they had wanted to take.

Eurydice's report on Adult education and training in Europe (2017)<sup>14</sup> highlights that *“adults with the greatest education and training needs have the least opportunity to benefit from lifelong learning”*. In their findings, they report that participation in adult learning is determined by several factors including educational attainment, employment status, occupational category, age and skills. In line with the GRALE report previously mentioned,

<sup>9</sup> Eurostat: Glossary

<sup>10</sup> Eurostat: Adult learning statistics

<sup>11</sup> The source for the current indicator (last 4 weeks) is the EU Labour Force Survey. The updated indicator's (last 12 months) data comes from the EU Adult Education Survey. The Commission underlined that as of 2022 the data will come once again from the Labour Force Survey.

<sup>12</sup> Eurostat: 2016 Adult Education Survey

<sup>13</sup> UNESCO-UIL: 4th Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE)

<sup>14</sup> EURYDICE: Adult education and training in Europe. Widening access to learning opportunities.



the Adult Education Survey<sup>15</sup> indicates that the barriers are often linked to time constraints (family responsibilities or to the work schedule) as well as financial constraints and the lack of the 'prerequisites' (e.g. appropriate entry qualifications). The Survey reported that, for low-qualified people, the main barriers were their family responsibilities (21.8%), problems with reconciling education and their work schedule (13.6%), financial issues (13.3%) and insufficient 'prerequisites' ( 7.1 %). It was also highlighted by the report that one of the challenges in dealing with this issue refers to reaching out to adults and making them aware of the benefits of lifelong learning. Similarly, although outreach activities are widespread more needs to be known regarding their effectiveness in reaching out to people with low level or no qualifications.

The latest ET Monitor reports that the two most influential factors for access to adult learning opportunities are age and educational attainment with younger adults (aged 25-34) being almost three times more likely to participate in learning than older adults (aged 55-64). Similarly, adults holding a tertiary degree are more than four times more likely to participate in learning than low-educated adults. The report also presents the degree of advantage or disadvantage in learning according to socio-demographic groups, by comparing a specific group to the general population in each country. From the results it can be observed that low-qualified adults are at the most significant disadvantage in learning, followed by older adults, inactive adults, and migrants from within the EU.

Regarding employment status, unemployed adults and adults working in micro-companies have only a very slight disadvantage. In terms of migrations

status, migrants from outside the EU on average participate in adult learning more than the general adult population. Finally, in terms of whether the learning activity is job-related or not, the Monitor reports that job-related non-formal adult learning is often the most prevalent type of adult learning with 79.2% of adults replying that they had participated in at least one job-related non-formal learning activity during the previous year.



<sup>15</sup> Eurostat: 2016 Adult Education Survey



## EARLY LEAVING FROM EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Early leavers refers to people aged between 18-24 who obtained no more than a lower secondary diploma and are not enrolled in further education or training. This definition consists of two elements:

- That the person should not have obtained more than a lower secondary education (ISCED level 0-2)<sup>16</sup> and;
- That the person is not enrolled in any type of education or training in the preceding four weeks of the survey<sup>17</sup>.

The target is to reach **below 10%** and the latest rate reported by Eurostat in 2019 is **10.3%**<sup>18</sup>. Between 2014 and 2019, the overall share of early leavers from education and training fell in the EU by 0.9 percentage points. In terms of percentage points, the largest reductions happened in Portugal, Greece, Spain and Malta with each reporting a fall in excess of 4.0 points. On the opposite side, 12 Member States showed increases in the proportion of early leavers with Cyprus (2.4 percentage points) and Denmark (1.8 percentage points) being the top two. Moreover, in terms of the gap between the latest rate for early leavers from education and training and the national target for 2020, the most pronounced ones were Romania with 4.0 percentage points higher than the target and Malta with 6.7 percentage points. It is also interesting to note that most countries that had low percentages of early school leavers in 2009 continue to do so.

The European Commission considers that ELET hinders productivity and competitiveness and is an "obstacle to economic growth and employment". Furthermore, being early leavers makes young

people vulnerable to unemployment, poverty and social exclusion due to the lack of skills and qualifications acquired. The target on ELET can be linked to the Europe 2020 strategy overarching goal of smart, inclusive and sustained growth. It addresses smart growth by the improvement of education and training levels; inclusive growth by tackling a major vulnerability risk to unemployment, poverty and social exclusion; and finally it addresses sustained growth by supporting the economy's overall competitiveness levels.

In a research paper published in 2019, some common factors or drivers that are behind ELET were identified<sup>19</sup>. The drivers can be categorised in three levels: Individual, institutional and national macro level factors. At the individual level, the most influential ones are the gender and the nationality. Furthermore, in academic research, socio-economic background was found to be one of the strongest drivers in the EU.

In the latest reports by Eurostat and the ET Monitor<sup>20</sup> it can be found that on average, women have lower rates of early leaving than men (8.4% versus 11.9%). Eurostat reports that nearly all EU Member States (except Romania and Czechia) present this trend with 3 countries (Estonia, Portugal and Spain) having a gap of at least 5.0 percentage points. Although the proportion of early leaver for young men fell more than for young women (4.1 versus 3.6 points), the gap still remains at 3.5 points in 2019 (the lowest was 3 points in 2016).

In terms of nationality, the 2019 ET Monitor reports

<sup>16</sup> International Standard Classification of Education. This is the reference international classification for organising education programmes and related qualifications by levels and fields.

<sup>17</sup> European Semester thematic fact sheet: Early school leavers

<sup>18</sup> Eurostat: Early leavers from education and training

<sup>19</sup> van der Graaf, A., Vroonhof, P., Roullis, G., and Velli, F., 2019, Research for CULT Committee – How to tackle early school leaving in the EU, European Parliament, Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies

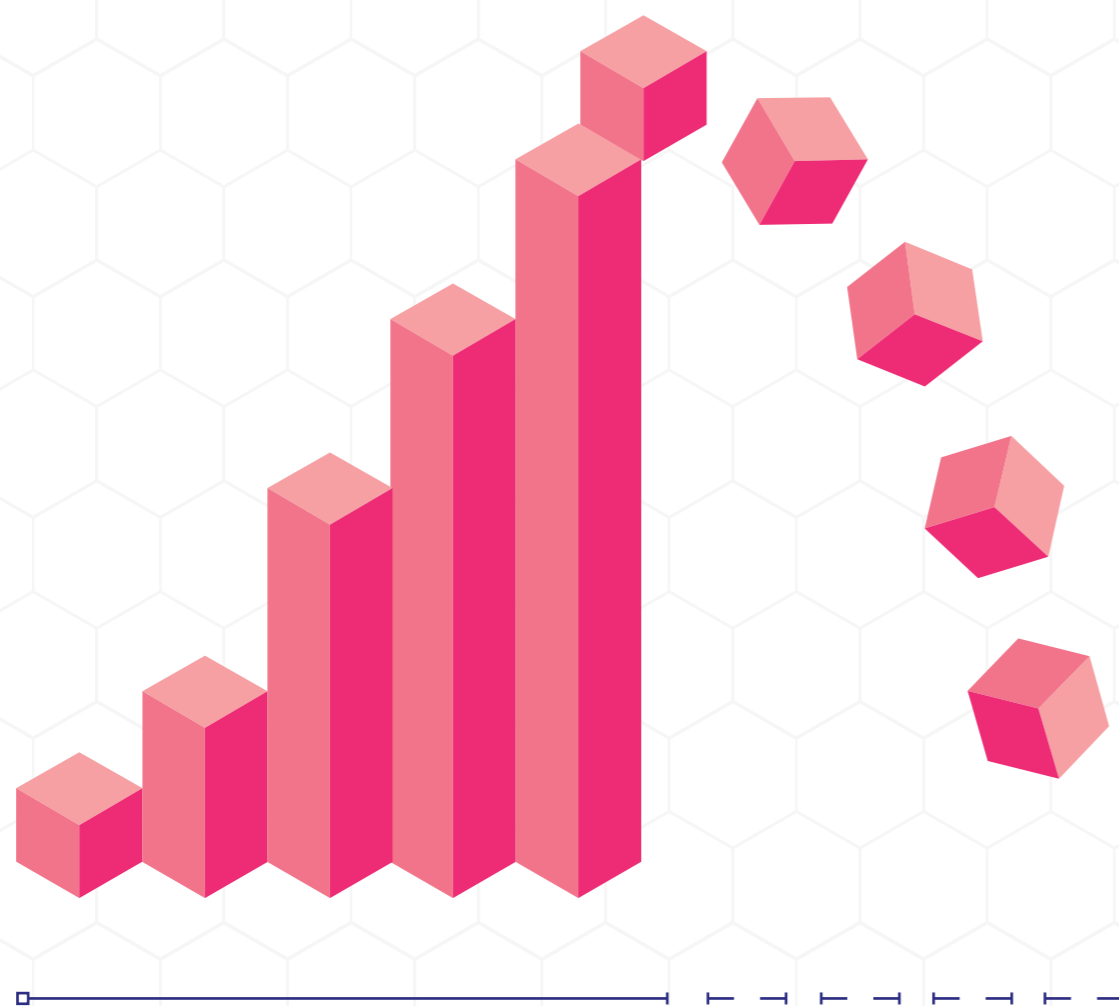
<sup>20</sup> European Commission: Education and Training Monitor 2019





that native-born young people have lower rates of early leaving than pupils who are foreign-born (9.5% versus 20.2% respectively). In the last few years, the proportion has increased for foreign born young people, particularly those born outside the EU in 2018. This trend can be observed more clearly in countries such as Belgium, Sweden, Germany,

Austria, Greece, Spain, and Italy. In countries such as Ireland, the United Kingdom, Luxembourg and Denmark, the opposite occurs.



## COUNTRIES IN FOCUS

### AUSTRIA

#### Adult participation in learning

In Austria, “adult education and training (synonymous with continuing education and training, CET) includes all forms of formal, non-formal and informal goal-oriented learning by adults after completion of an initial stage of education varying in length and irrespective of the level reached in this process”<sup>21</sup>. The sector is marked by a high degree of institutional diversity from public sector to many non-profit and commercial providers. Governance of adult education and training is scattered widely between the public sector at federal, provincial and municipal level and the education and training providers. While the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research supports associations and institutions at national level, funding vastly depends on the type of programme. This means that apart from the public sector, costs are covered by learners themselves, by companies or they are subsidised by EU funds.

Eurostat reports that participation in adult learning is above the EU average (**14.7% vs 11.3%**), however, the ET Monitor reports that there is a serious need for upskilling. This is reflected in the rate of adults that do not have at least an upper-secondary qualification (14.7%). Currently, Austria is implementing its Adult Education Initiative (Initiative Erwachsenenbildung) in order to improve access for adults coming from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Furthermore, the country is working towards addressing labour market needs linked to digitalisation. One of the initiatives on this subject is the Digital Competence Model based on the DigComp reference framework. Similarly, the Pact for Digital Competence (Pakt

für digitale Kompetenz) aims to gather relevant stakeholders including adult education institutions to foster the development of digital competences.

#### Early leaving from education and training

In Austria, General compulsory schooling lasts until the age of 15. However, since the 2016/17 school year all young people under 18 years old are required to engage in education or training after completing general compulsory schooling<sup>22</sup>. While early school leaving is below the EU average (7.8% vs 10.3%), according to the ET Monitor 2019, social and regional disparities persist. Foreign-born pupils are still more than three times more likely to leave school early than native-born pupils (17.0% vs 5.5%). Compared to 2015, the rate among native-born people has remained relatively stable at 5.5% whereas the rate for foreign-born persons fluctuated widely in the last decade (22.0% in 2009 and 17% in 2018). Disparities are also found within the migrant population with EU born migrants having an ELET rate of 10.6% which is half that of those born outside the EU (22.3%). Regarding geographical fluctuations, the results from the 2019 Monitor show that most of the improvement took place in towns and rural areas, whereas the situation in cities has remained stable. In terms of gender disparity, ELET among women fell by 3.2 pps over the last decade, leaving a gender gap which aligns with the EU average (3.2 pps).

<sup>21</sup> EURYDICE: Adult education and training

<sup>22</sup> EURYDICE: Austria overview



## IRELAND

### Adult participation in learning

In Ireland, Adult Education and Training (or Further Education and Training - FET) “covers education and training that occurs after second level schooling but is not part of the third level system”<sup>23</sup>. Another definition considers Adult Learning “as systematic learning undertaken by adults who return to learning having concluded initial education and training”<sup>24</sup>. This definition includes aspects of further and higher education, continuing education and training, community education and other systematic deliberate learning by adults, both formal and non-formal. The main national policy is set out in the White Paper, Learning for Life published in 2000.

The sector is publicly funded by the Department of Education and Skills, through SOLAS, the Further Education and Training Authority and delivered locally through the Education and Training Boards. One of the key aspects of Ireland’s FET strategy is the link of the provision of quality education and training with employability for which the early identification of evolving skill needs is crucial.

According to Eurostat, **12.6%** of Ireland’s adults participated in education and training which is almost double the proportion that did in 2009 (**6.6%**). In 2018, the Irish government launched the Skills to Advance policy which offers targeted support for vulnerable groups in the workforce, particularly for employees with skills below level 5 on the national framework of qualifications (i.e. EQF 3). Other relevant initiatives include the EXPLORE programme which targets people over 35 years old working in the manufacturing sector and addresses their lack of transversal and digital skills and the Springboard+ initiative which provides higher

education upskilling and reskilling opportunities for those in employment, the unemployed and returners to work.

### Early leaving from education and training

According to the 2019 Country Report, Ireland maintains a very good overall performance in education and the provision of basic skills. To address educational disadvantages, the country put in the place the DEIS Action Plan which aims to deliver equality of opportunities in schools<sup>25</sup>. The rate of early school leavers has maintained a declining trend over the last decade reaching 5.1% in 2019 (EU average 10.3%). The 2019 Monitor reports that early school leavers have become more marginalised and in need of stronger support for their transition into employment and/or further education. One of the tools to address this situation is the Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland 2016-2020 which will allow the government to offer a wider range of post-school options to learners. The Country Report also highlighted that people with disabilities present a higher than average rate of ELET with 27.8% vs the EU average of 23.6 % as well as one of the widest ELET gaps between people with and without disabilities in the EU (22.5 pps vs the EU average of 12.6 pps).

<sup>23</sup> EURYDICE: Adult education and training

<sup>24</sup> National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL): Overview of the Adult Literacy System in Ireland and Current Issues in Its Implementation

<sup>25</sup> European Commission: Country Report Ireland 2019



## PORTUGAL

### Adult participation in learning

Adult education developments in Portugal have been in line with the focus of Portuguese education policies on enhancing the qualification levels of their population. Some key developments have been the work on the National Qualification System (Sistema Nacional de Qualificações – SNQ) and the Qualifica program (2017). The SNQ was developed with the aim to promote upper-secondary education completion as the minimum qualification for the population. The Qualifica Programme has the overall goal of improving adult’s qualification and employability. To achieve this goal, the Programme’s strategy includes a wide array of educational and training responses, tools and a broad network of operators<sup>26</sup>.

Eurostat reports that adult participation in lifelong learning is close to the EU average (**10.5% vs 11.3%**) but still far from the EU benchmark (**15%**). The ET Monitor 2019 highlighted that although the Qualifica programme has been an important milestone in the adult learning sector, the development of a coherent strategy remains a major challenge. Digital skills are an important focus of the adult education policies given the growing gaps in this area despite the efforts made under the Portugal INCoDe.2030 programme. The Monitor underlined that the success of these policy developments will highly depend on their thorough monitoring as well as on the support of teachers and trainers. The latter includes the recognition of “adult educator” as an attractive and long-term career option which is supported by specialised courses and academic degrees for teaching/training of adult educators.

### Early leaving from education and training

Portugal’s rate of ELET has followed the EU’s general downward trend, however, it has remained higher than the EU target<sup>27</sup> (**10.6% versus 10%**). During the last two decades the Portuguese education policies have been focused on enhancing the qualifications of the so-called “knowledge society”. This was reflected, among other measures, in the expansion of compulsory schooling to the 12th year (or 18 years old) which took place in 2009 (Law no. 85/2009<sup>28</sup>). According to Magalhães et al (2015) “policies aiming to tackle early school leaving have assumed three main rationales: (a) social inclusion, (b) educational quality and effectiveness and (c) qualifications for work and the labour market”. As reported by the 2019 Monitor, the rate of ELET in Portugal presents large internal differences. One of them refers to gender disparities, with males presenting a higher rate (14.7%) than women (8.7%). In terms of geographical differences, there is a large gap between the continental area (11.2%) and the autonomous region of Azores (28.3%).

<sup>26</sup> EURYDICE: Adult education and training

<sup>27</sup> Mesquita et al (2015): Early school leaving – contributions from Portugal.

<sup>28</sup> Magalhães et al (2015): EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING IN PORTUGAL. Policies and actors’ interpretations.



## ROMANIA

### Adult participation in learning

In Romania, adult learning is under the responsibility of various ministries including Education, Labour and Culture. The main legal instrument for the adult learning sector is the Law of Education no.1/2011 which establishes that adult learning programs must ensure a) compensatory education (a «second chance» route into education for adults who did not obtain the basic level of school qualifications), b) continuing vocational training, c) civic education and d) personal education designed to enable people to play an active role in society<sup>29</sup>. Funding for the adult learning sector originates from public-private partnerships as well as European Union funds<sup>30</sup>.

Eurostat reports that Romania has one of the lowest rates of adult learning in the EU (**1.3% versus 11.3%**) with as much of 2.4 million adults only having attained a low level of education. However, the ET Monitor highlights that recent developments such as the programme Invest in Yourself are a step in the right direction for the adult learning sector in Romania. Another important development is the establishment of Community centres for lifelong learning which aim to support the upskilling efforts at national level. The Centres' aim is to encourage adults aged between 25 and 64 to participate in lifelong learning activities.

### Early leaving from education and training

In Romania, ELET is defined as “the percentage of 18-24 year olds who have completed at most lower secondary education (equivalent to grade 8), and are no longer in education/training”<sup>31</sup>.

The investment in education is one of the lowest in the EU affecting heavily the pre-primary and primary levels which are key levels to prevent early school leaving. Another issue in the country is the lack of an integrated approach to prevent ELET<sup>32</sup>. Eurostat reports that Romania has one of the highest rates of ELET at EU level (**15.3%**). An early warning mechanism is currently being developed in order to improve data collection and strengthen coordination among relevant institutions. European funding (namely ESF) has been helpful when it comes to developing second chance programs.

The ET Monitor highlights that this issue persists due a combination of factors including socio-economic aspects and gaps in the provision of quality education. Regarding regional disparities, in rural areas with high poverty rates the early school leavers reach around 25% whereas in towns it is 15% and in cities 4.2%. In terms of the situation of minorities in Romania, according to the Country Report 2020<sup>33</sup> 53% of Roma had completed primary education only and the ELET rate for persons with disabilities is 41.4%, among the highest in the EU and more than double the EU average (19.6%). Furthermore, Romania has the highest rate of ELET for girls at EU level (16.1% vs. 8.9% EU average).

<sup>29</sup> EAEA (2011): Country Report on Adult Education in Romania

<sup>30</sup> EURYDICE: Adult Education and Training.

<sup>31</sup> Strategy to Reduce Early School Leaving 2015-2020

<sup>32</sup> World Vision Romania: Inequalities in Romania

<sup>33</sup> European Commission: Country Report Romania 2020



## SLOVENIA

### Adult participation in learning

In Slovenia, the provision of adult education is regulated and supported by its own legal framework, mechanisms and instruments. The government finances various programs targeted at adults from compulsory education and vocational training to non-formal education programs. Furthermore, the Slovenian government also supports institutions such as the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, the National Institute for Vocational Education and Training and the National Education Institute. These bodies have key roles on researching and developing programs, methods, approaches, instruments and knowledge in their respective fields as well as on the training of trainers, and testing, evaluating, acknowledging and certifying programs<sup>34</sup>.

Eurostat reports that although the participation in adult education is just slightly below the EU average (**11.2% vs 11.3%**), the share has diminished over the last decade (in 2010 it was 16.4%). Currently, there are considerable mismatches between low-skilled jobs availability and low-qualified adults. Key to successfully tackle this issue is addressing the recommendations regarding the improvement of adult learning governance in the country which were raised as part of the National Skills Strategy work with OECD. Furthermore, a new Master Plan for Adult Education is being developed for the 2021-2030 period. This plan will define the national policy for adult education and which adult education programmes will be provided as public services. Furthermore, another issue that Slovenia faces is the shortage of adult educators and sufficiently qualified CVET trainers and educators.

### Early leaving from education and training

Slovenia presents an integrated structure for compulsory basic education where primary and lower secondary education are merged as a single nine-year basic school structure (It is attended by children aged six to fifteen)<sup>35</sup>. The European Commission reports that Slovenia's education system has an overall good performance<sup>36</sup>. This is reflected in the rate of ELET which is one of the lowest in the EU (**4.6% versus 10.3%**). The 2019 Monitor highlights that Slovenian pupils show good average skills in maths, reading and science as part of PISA results. It is remarked, however, that there are concerns over the gap when it comes to reading skills with boys performing significantly worse.

<sup>34</sup> EAEA (2011): Country Report on Adult Education in Slovenia

<sup>35</sup> EURYDICE: Slovenia Single Structure Education

<sup>36</sup> European Commission: Youth Guarantee country by country - Slovenia January 2020



# RESULTS: SURVEY AND FOCUS GROUPS

## OVERALL ANALYSIS

Most respondents for the survey came from Romania (70%) and are involved in formal education (88%). In addition, 22% of respondents are involved in non formal education and 16% in informal education.

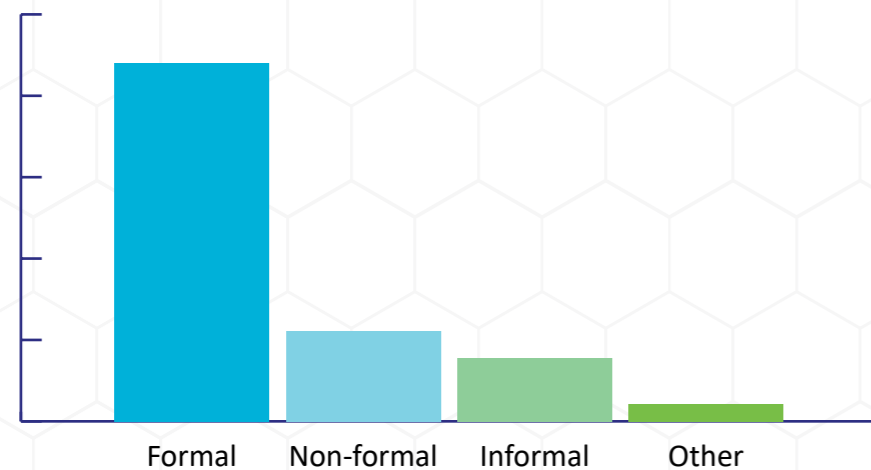
It is important to highlight that some respondents identified as belonging to more than one modality of education.

Furthermore, the sector of education most represented in the answers is School education (67%) followed by Vocational education and training (26%). The majority of respondents work with secondary school pupils (52%), children under 13 years old (35%) and youth (32%). Adult education also made up one fifth of responses (21%). Education and training institutions represent 90% of

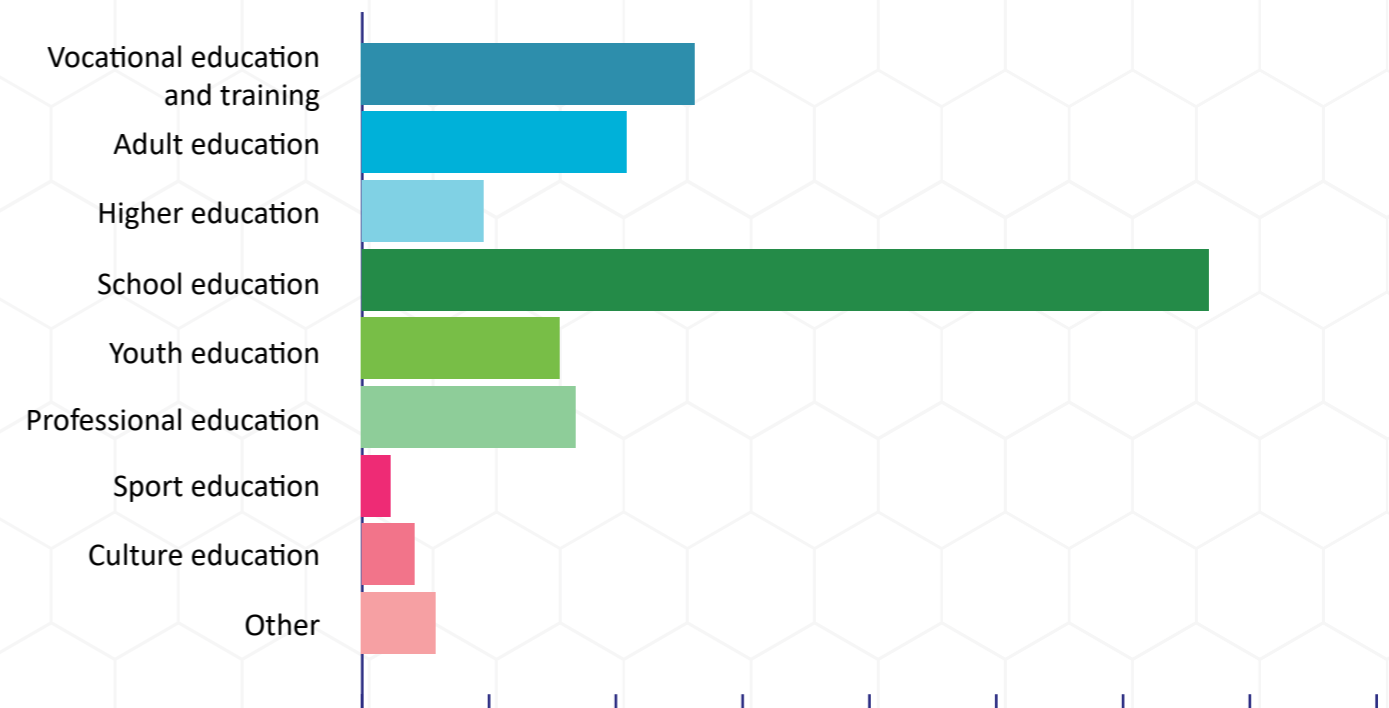
respondents with the rest belonging to civil society organisations, regional/local authorities and social partners. As explained in the methodology, these results should be looked at taking into account the heavy participation of Romanian respondents who mostly came from secondary schools.



How would you describe the type of education in which your organisation is involved?

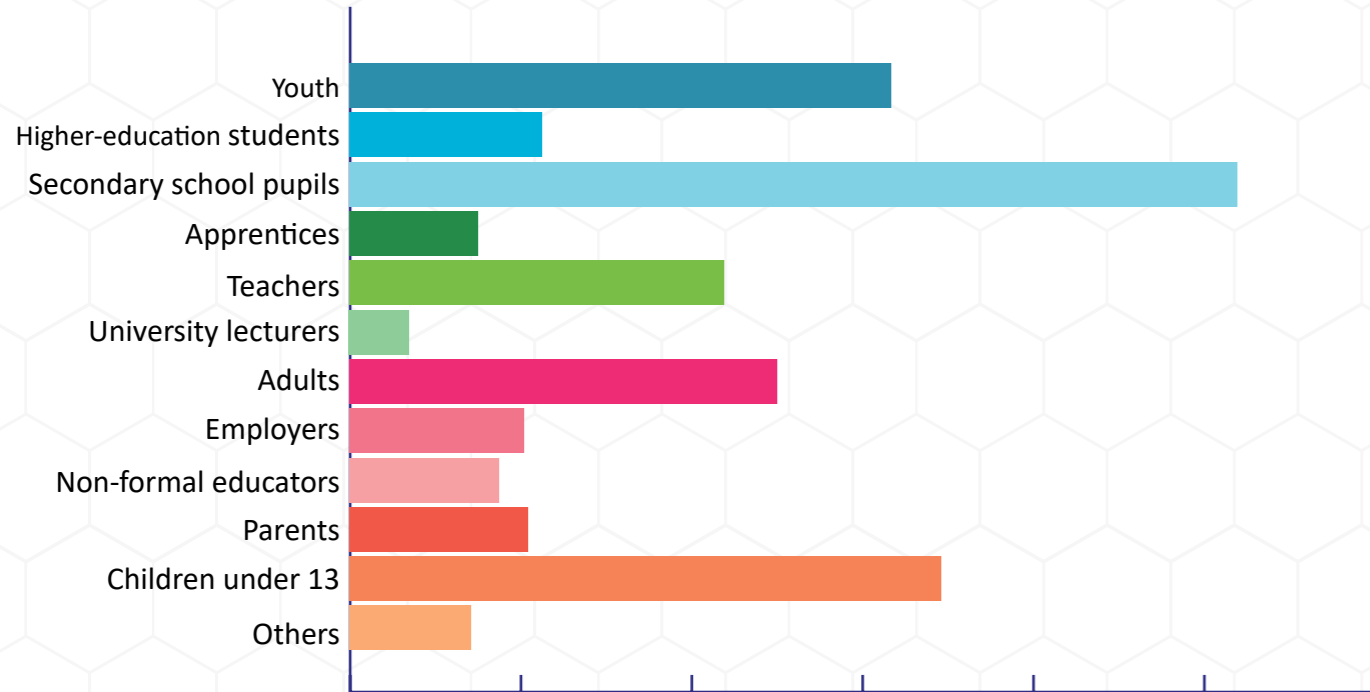


In which sector(s) of education does your organisation work?

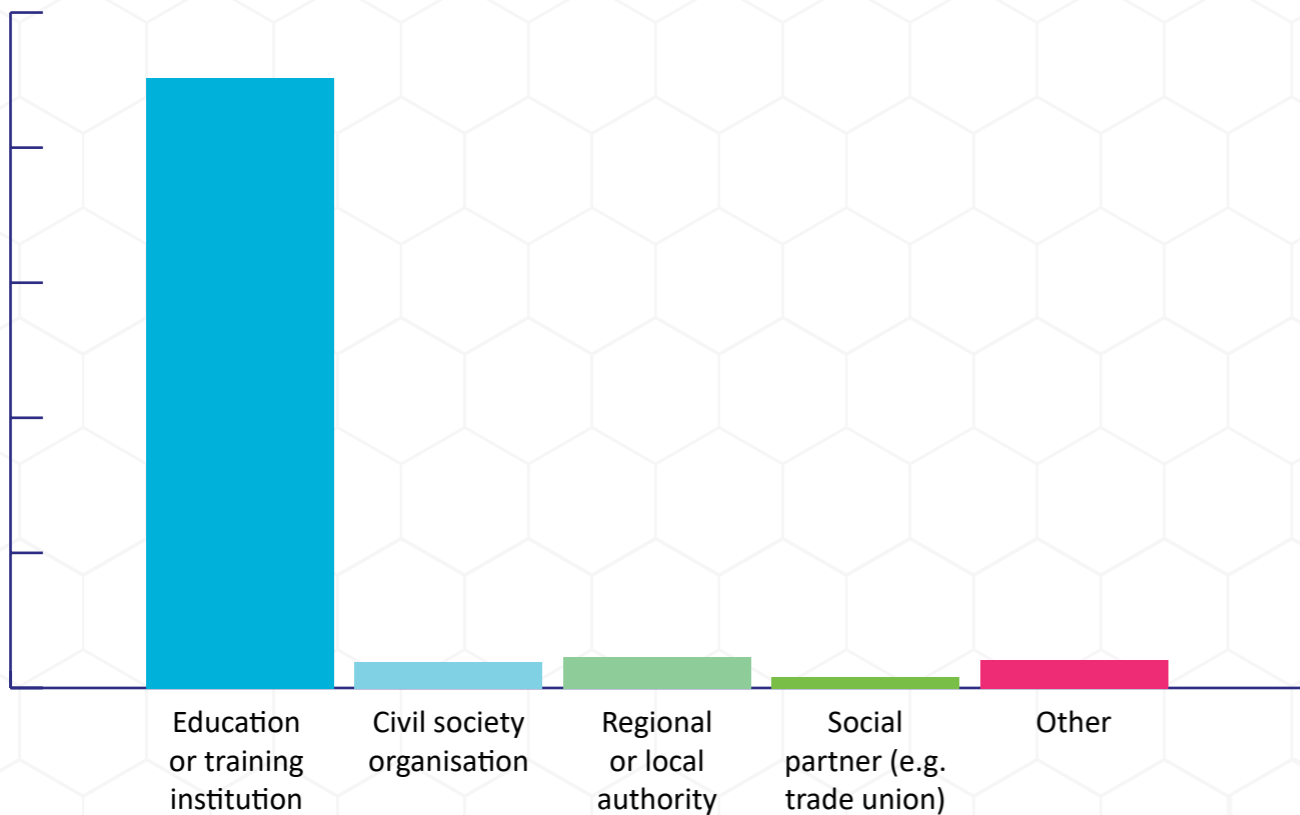




What target groups does your organisation work with?



What profile(s) best describes your organisation?

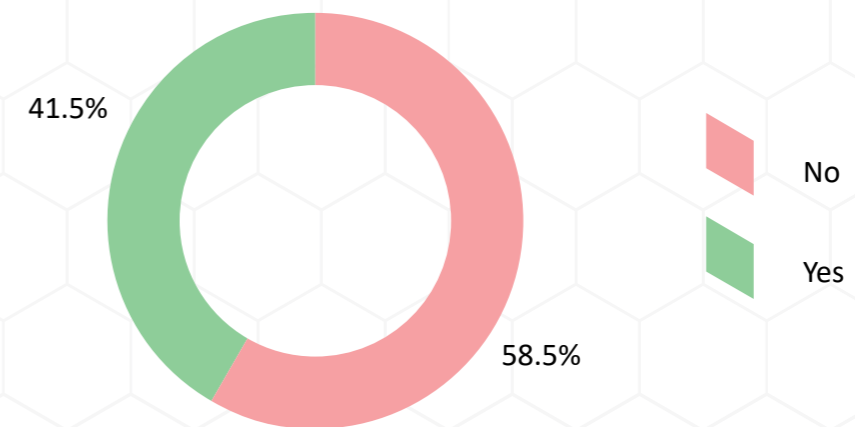


On the same lines, this is reflected in the level in which respondents work, with 70% conducting their activities at local level. Regarding their affiliation to national or European networks, the majority responded that they do not belong to any (national

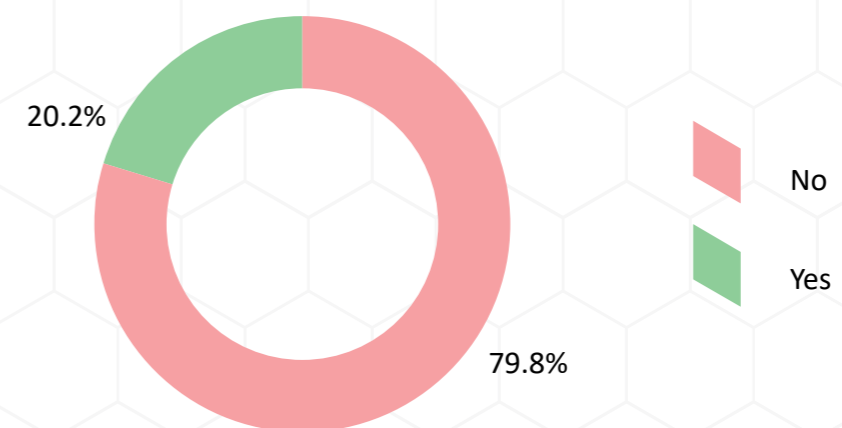
58% and European 80%). It is important to note that organisations working at the local level may be indirectly part of European networks through the umbrella national networks.



Is your organisation member of a national network?



Is your organisation member of a European network?





## EU POLICY ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Respondents were also asked about EU policy on inclusive education. **The majority of organisations answered that they are aware of both the Paris declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education (2015) and the Council Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education and the European**

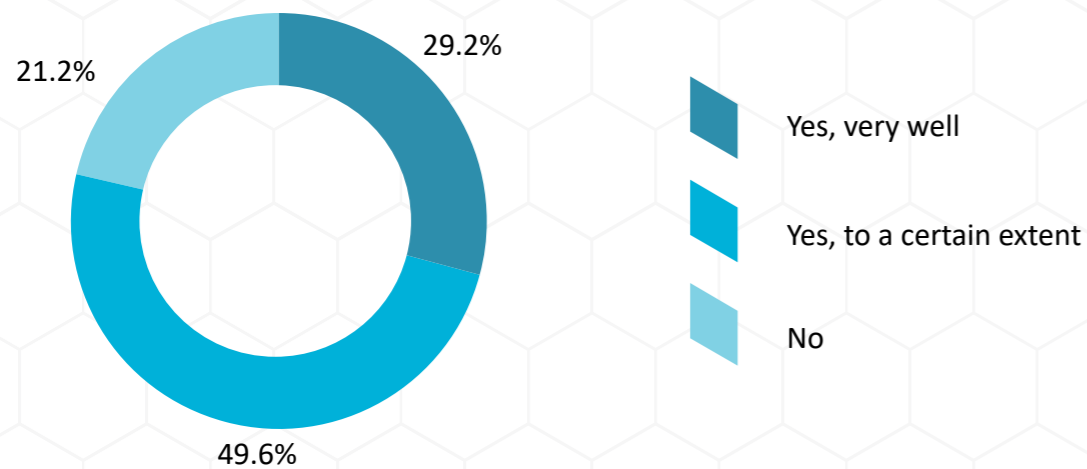
**dimension of teaching (2018).** In the case of the former 29% remarked that they know the declaration very well and 50% to a certain extent. Regarding the latter, 34% responded that they know the Recommendation very well and 45% to a certain extent. Just over one fifth of the respondents are not aware of either of them.

Regarding the two specific targets selected for this report, 31% mentioned that they are aware of both targets. Given the high presence of secondary school respondents, evidently the organisations only being aware of the target on ELET (28%) was significantly higher than those who are only aware of the one on adult participation in learning (9%). **Nevertheless, still an important number of respondents (33%)**

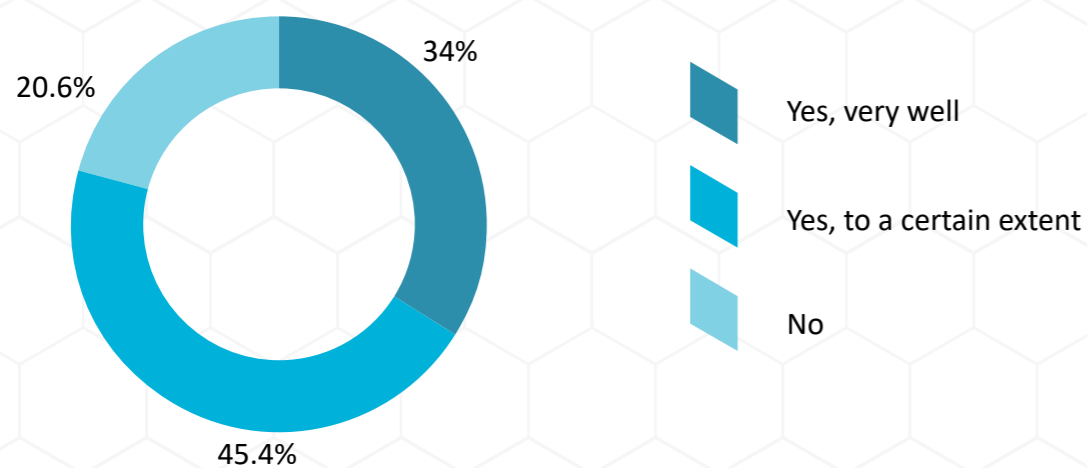
**replied that they were not aware of any of them before taking the survey.** It was suggested during the focus group that currently the indicator used to measure this benchmark provides a limited view on this challenge. Furthermore, with an increasing ageing population, the age limit on the indicator excludes an important segment of potential learners.



Before taking this survey were you already aware of the Paris declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education (2015)?



Before taking this survey were you already aware of the Paris declaration on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching (2018)?



Are you aware of the ET2020 target benchmark regarding early leaving and adult education and the progress of your country towards achieving them

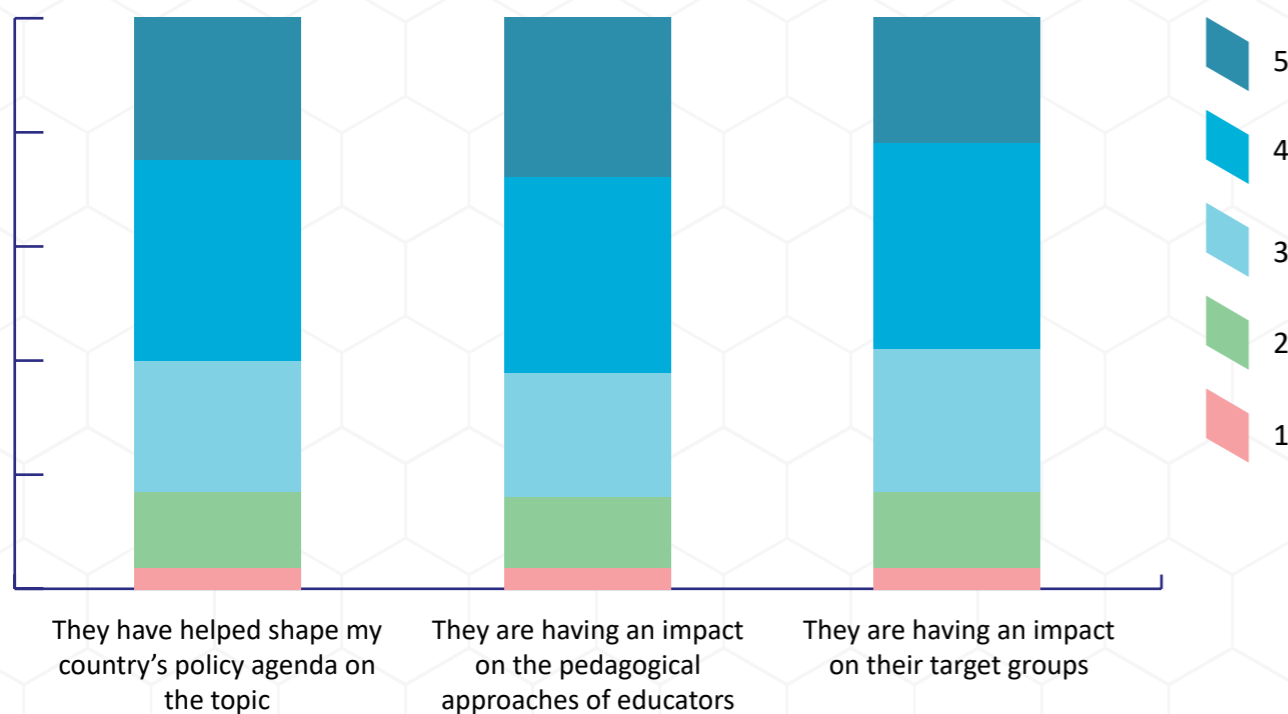


When asked about their opinion on the impact of EU policies on inclusive education in their own countries, the majority responded that it is significant. As it can be seen in the image below, on the scale of 1 to 5, the majority (60% awarded 4 or 5) considers that these policies have shaped their countries' national policy agenda on the topic. Similarly, **the majority considers that they are**

**having an impact on the pedagogical approaches of educators (64% awarded 4 or 5) as well as on their target groups (60% awarded 4 or 5).**



To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding these EU policies on inclusive education? Choose on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (a lot)



Participants in the study underlined that these documents are perceived as general orientations. Comments were also made highlighting that a declaration or recommendation is not enough to generate an impact and that CSOs are more involved in promoting these policies whereas public institutions many times ignored them. Other participants mentioned that **while these policies have had a great impact on at the declarative level and can be good strategic papers, there is still little action on the ground and there is no clear plan for implementing the recommendations/if implemented there are many issues and they are not adequately monitored.**

Practitioners mentioned that European documents are usually not mentioned in negotiations with the

responsible authorities neither at particular schools by headmasters or teachers nor on the regional or national level (Ministry of Education). In some countries, it was mentioned that the national policy exists parallel to what is outlined as a focus by the European Commission. In others, there are issues with bureaucracy which blocks the effectiveness of measures implemented regarding inclusive education.

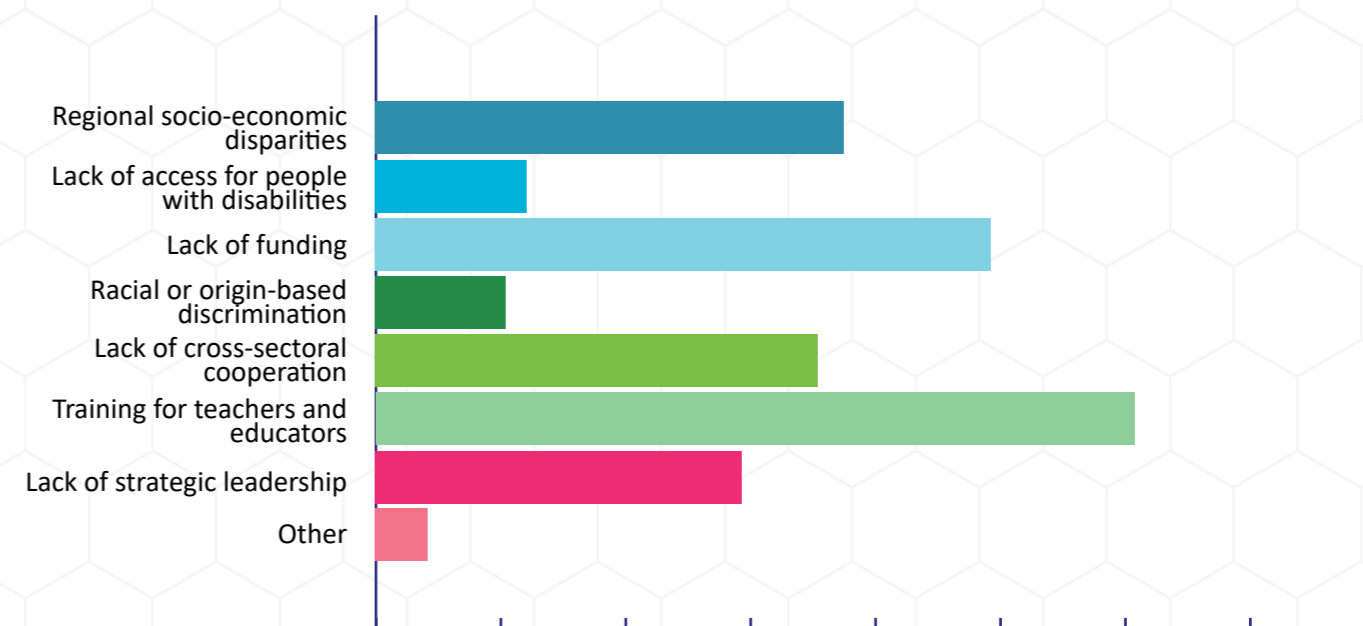
During the focus groups, it was underlined that the impact and influence of the EU is very important and that having pressure from outside is very good. **The pressure from the EU can influence the Member States in addressing the problems in the country. More specifically, benchmarks are considered important however, they could be more**

**ambitious and they are not enough without being accompanied by funding.** It would also be very positive if the various initiatives at EU level would be linked and present a common attitude towards education within Europe. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU can have an important role in influencing public discourse towards important issues such as adult education, lifelong learning and early school leaving.

**Among the main challenges to making education more inclusive, most respondents chose the training for teachers/educators (61%).** Furthermore, the lack of funding (49%), regional socio-economic disparities (38%) as well as the lack of cross-sectoral cooperation (e.g. between education institutions and civil society or social

services) (36%) were found to have an important impact on this matter.

What are the challenges to making education more inclusive in your country?



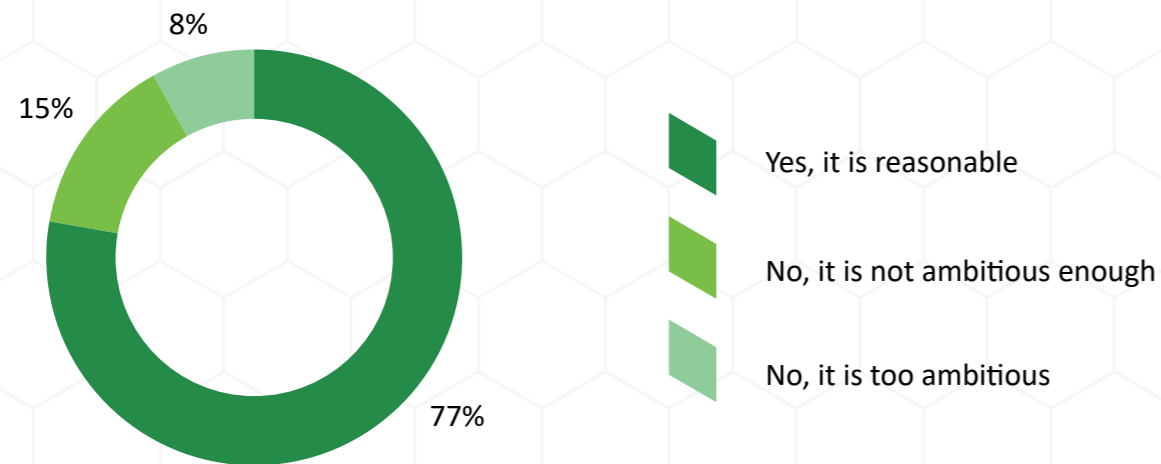


## ADULT PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING

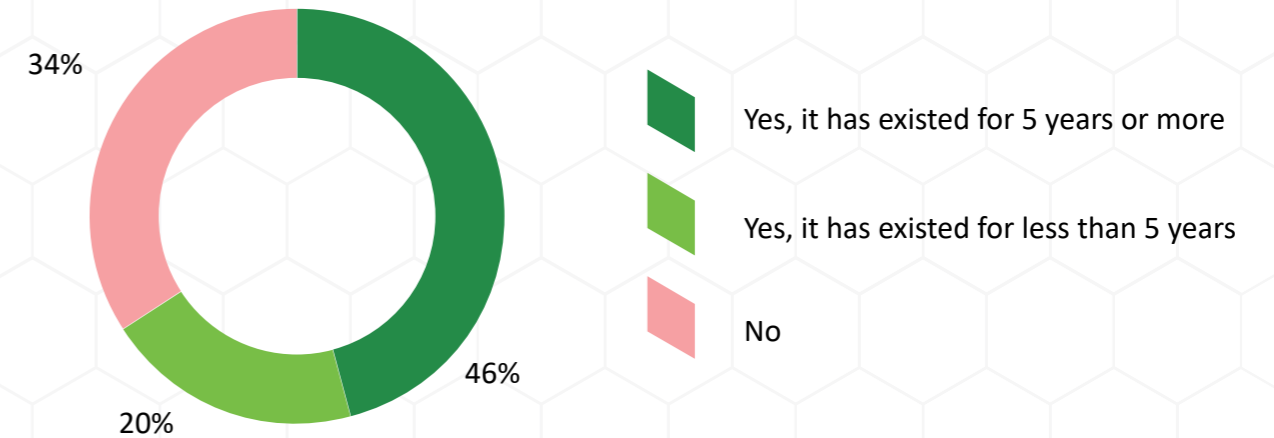
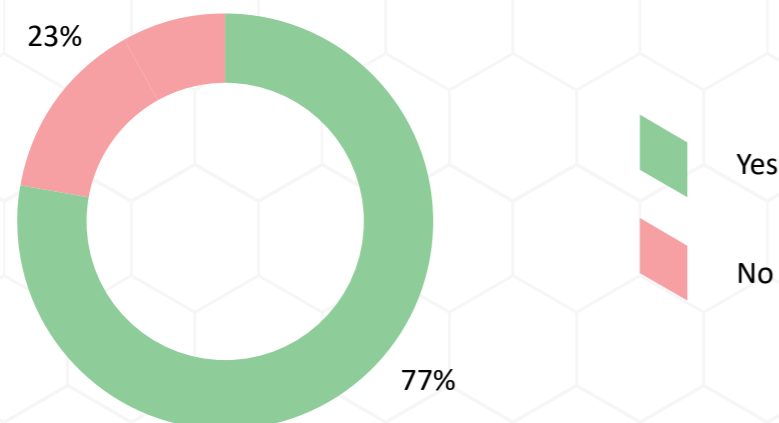
60% of organisations responded to the questions focused on adult participation in learning. The majority consider that the EU target for their countries is reasonable (78%) and that the current rate recorded for their country reflects their national reality (78%). When asked about national strategies to achieve this benchmark, the majority (66%) answered that there is one, with 46% mentioning that it has over 5 years and 20% that it has less than 5 years. **An important percentage (33%) seemed to be unaware about their national strategies.**

**It could be inferred from this contradiction that there is either no clear strategy at national level or it has not been properly communicated at all levels.** It is also important to stress that the results obtained are based on the respondents' perception or knowledge so it may not reflect accurately the fact that there is a strategy in place or not.

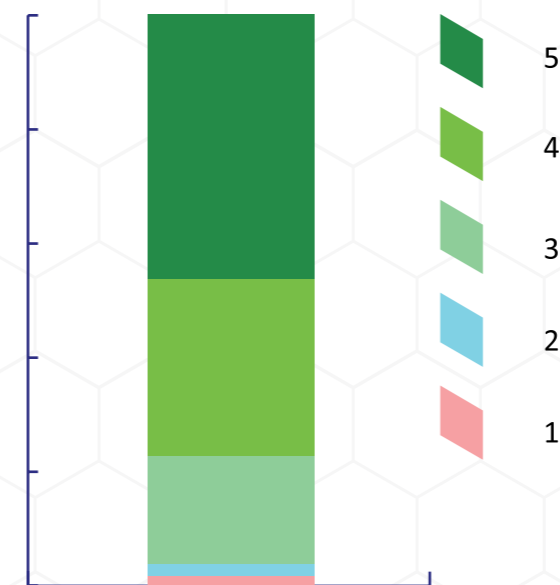
Do you think that the benchmark set by the EU on adult participation in learning is reasonable?



Do you consider your country's current rate of adult participation in learning, as outlined in the Education & Training Monitor, to be an accurate reflection of your national reality?



The vast majority of respondents (76%) considered European cooperation useful or very useful in addressing the challenge of promoting adult participation in learning.



How useful do you think EU cooperation can be to tackle this challenge? Choose on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (a lot)

During the focus groups it was underlined how important is to link at EU level the different initiatives coming from Member States. Furthermore, programmes funded by the EU give practitioners in each country more flexibility to identify and address needs rapidly. These programmes offer organisations structure and support as well as provide funding and flexibility to address the gaps which national governments do not address. Moreover, it also gives organisations the capacity to exchange knowledge across Europe through peer learning activities, research and support.

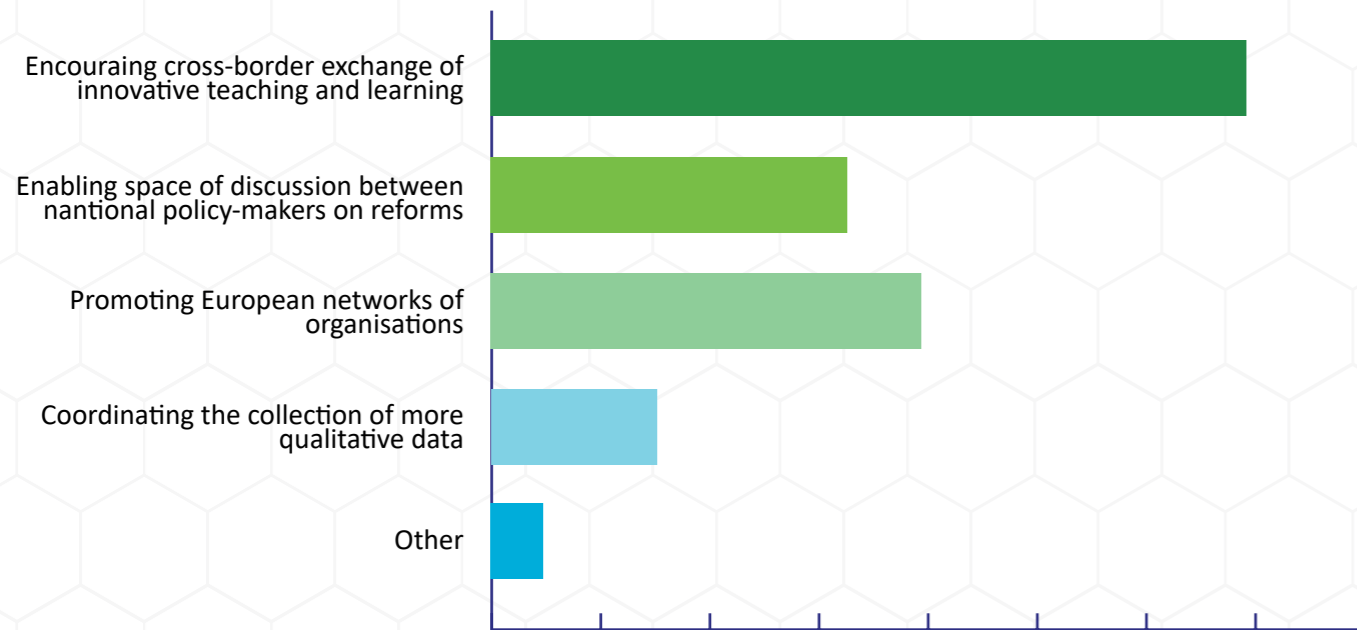
Among the actions at European level that could be more useful for achieving the target were mentioned: encouraging cross border exchange of innovating teaching and learning practices (72%), promoting European networks of organisations (40%) and enabling a space for discussion between national policymakers for policy reform (32%).







What action(s) at European level do you think could be most useful to tackle this challenge, in your opinion? (up to two answers)



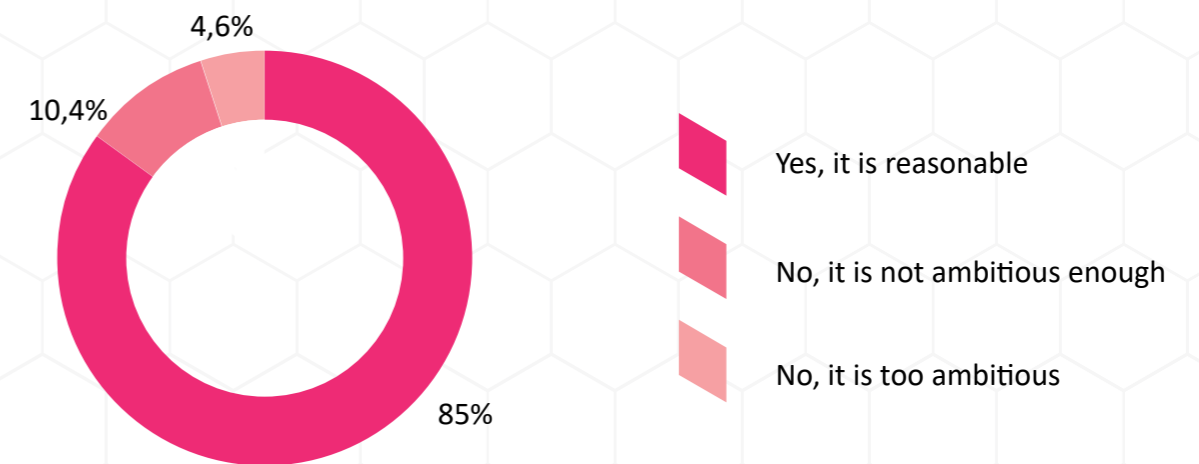
Among other actions could be taken at European level, respondents mentioned recognition of informal qualifications, foster learners to take an active role in informing lifelong learning processes, allow adult education projects to be implemented for a longer period of time and not dependent on deadlines of funding frameworks,

cross-sector discussions between universities and other institutions, having the possibility to develop common EU legislation on adult education.

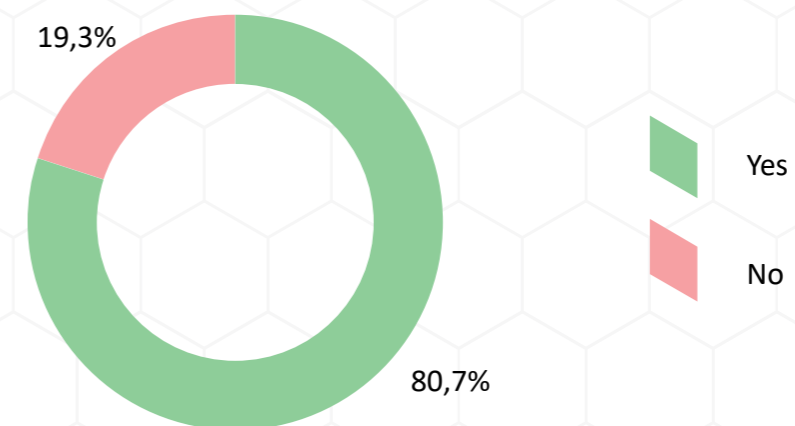
## EARLY LEAVING FROM EDUCATION AND TRAINING

68% of organisations responded to the questions that it reflects their national reality (81%). The majority consider that the EU target for their countries is reasonable (85%) and

Do you think that the benchmark set by the EU on early leaving is reasonable?



Do you consider your country's current rate of early leaving, as outlined in the Education & Training Monitor, to be an accurate reflection of your national reality?





Participants in the focus groups advocated for more ambitious targets related to early school leaving, suggesting no one should be left behind during school time. However, a more ambitious European target could also discourage countries who have high rates of school leaving therefore it was suggested that having reasonable yearly targets adapted to each country's reality could be more beneficial in order to boost motivation and avoid overwhelming the national actors with unreachable benchmarks. Furthermore, it would be interesting to learn what successful schools are doing, what are the main factors for success, and then exchange this know-how among national and European stakeholders. In addition, learning from small countries that manage to have a closer dialogue with their students could shed light for others and for this also EU led exchanges are very important.

Regarding the setting of benchmarks, it will be important to pay attention to the statistics coming out in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis since the impact could switch the situation considerably even for countries who have achieved the benchmark. It will be paramount to reach young people to discuss their situation and avoid developing one size fits all solutions.

Moreover, there was a consensus during the focus group that having specific targets for specific groups on one hand could be useful in some cases since it would allow for getting a better understanding of specific target groups' background and the issues they face in order to steer the solutions that fit the people concerned. Similarly, it would help student unions and civil society organisations in representing their target groups better at policy level. On the other hand, it could be a two sided sword which, if not treated carefully, could negatively impact the efforts to tackle this issue and cause more fragmentation among the overall population.

When asked about national strategies to achieve this benchmark, the majority answered that there is one, with 53% mentioning that it has over 5 years and 21% that it has less than 5 years. An important percentage (25%) seemed to be unaware about their national strategies. Similar to the case of adult learning the disparities among the answers reflect issues at national level regarding the implementation of national strategies regarding the target.

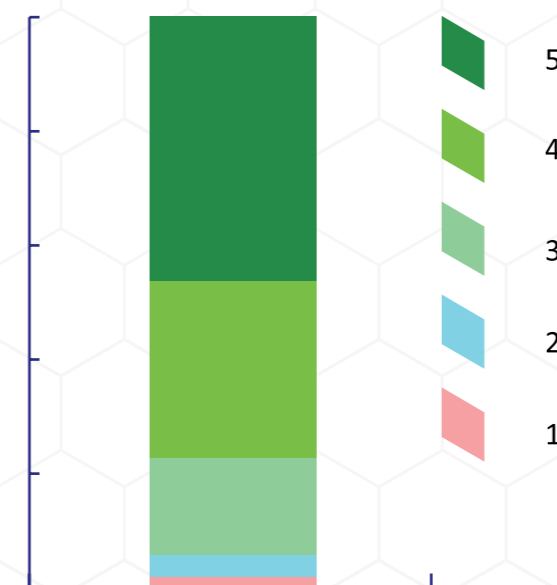
**Regarding how useful European cooperation can be to tackle this challenge, most respondents considered it very useful (75%).**



**Among the actions at European level that could be more useful for achieving the target were mentioned: encouraging cross border exchange of innovating teaching and learning practices (75%), promoting European networks of organisations**

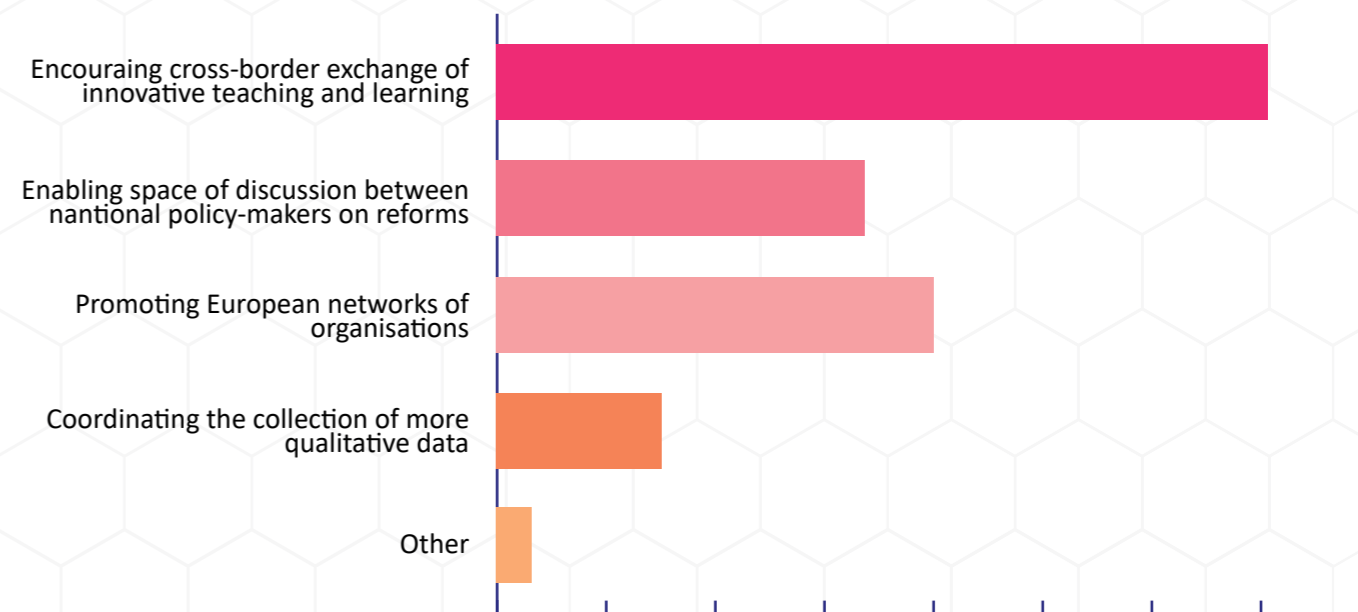
(41%) and enabling a space for discussion between national policymakers for policy reform (35%).

It was mentioned in the focus group that EU cooperation which is not directly related to education is also vital to achieve the benchmark set forth by the Commission. For example, in the countries that receive funds linked to poverty reduction, it can indirectly affect the rate of school leavers. EU cooperation will also be key in order to improve digitalisation of schools and make sure that all students, teachers and parents have the appropriate equipment and competences. Furthermore, as with adult learning, the EU influences the national discourse on the topic and it helps in spreading awareness of the importance of tackling this issue. However, further debate is necessary after documents such as the Country Reports are published. It was highlighted that it would be beneficial to put together the Commission and Member States in order to see how Member States could be supported and foster cooperation among them to achieve the benchmarks.

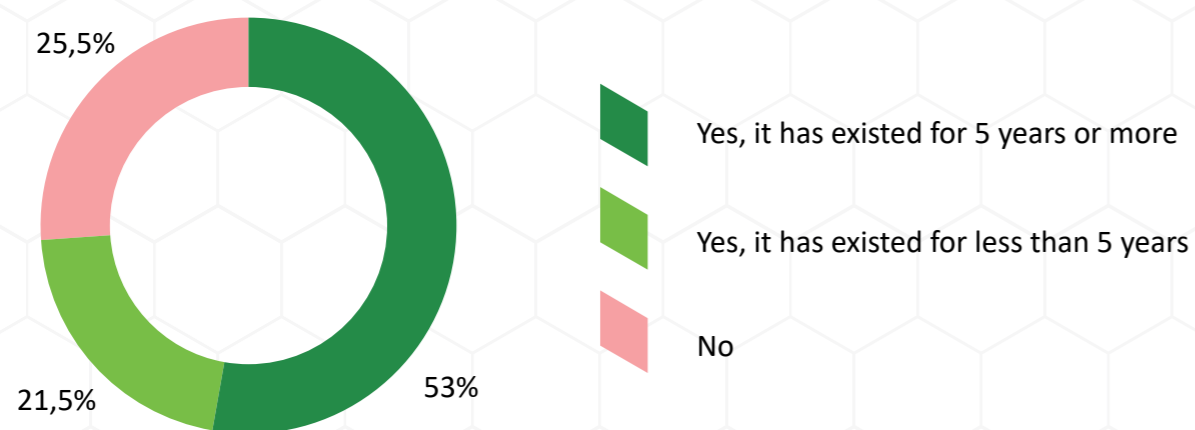


How useful do you think EU cooperation can be to tackle this challenge? Choose on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (a lot)

What action(s) at European level do you think could be most useful to tackle this challenge, in your opinion? (up to two answers)



Does your national government have a specific strategy to achieve this benchmark?





## AUSTRIA

### Profile of respondents

The respondents<sup>37</sup> from Austria are involved in different types of education, with 78% of respondents being involved in formal education, 67% in non-formal education and 33% in informal education. Similarly, the organisations work with various sectors, among which, the top 2 are School education (56%) and Vocational education and training (56%). Regarding the target groups the organisations work with/represent, at the top can be found teachers with 56%, followed by parents, non formal educators/trainers, adults and higher education students with 44%. Organisations are balanced between civil society, social partners and education and training institutions (22%). The respondents work at different levels, with the majority working at national (67%) and regional (56%) level and 22% at local level.

### About EU policy on inclusive education

The majority of organisations are aware of both the Paris declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education (2015) and the Council Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education and the European dimension of teaching (2018). In the case of the former 22% remarked that they know the declaration very well and 56% to a certain extent. Regarding the latter, 22% responded that they know the Recommendation very well and 44% to a certain extent.

Regarding the two specific targets selected for this report, 33% mentioned that they are aware of both targets and 33% of the organisations mentioned

that they are only aware of the target on ELET. An important proportion of respondents (33%) replied that they were not aware of any of them before taking the survey.

When asked about their opinion on the impact of EU policies on inclusive education in their own countries, the majority responded with a 3 in the scale of 1 to 5, suggesting that there is a perception of a moderate impact overall. The majority (41%) gave a score of 3 and 4 to the statement that EU policies on inclusive education have shaped their countries' national policy agenda on the topic. Moreover, the majority gave a score of 3 to the statements referring to the impact on the pedagogical approaches of educators (57%) as well as on their target groups (57%).

In Austria, it was highlighted in the survey that these **documents need to be more promoted and that they are not talked about in operative work**. Similarly, they are not mentioned when communicating with the responsible authorities neither at particular schools by headmasters or teachers nor on the regional or national level (Ministry of Education).

It was also underlined during the focus group that the impact of the EU is very important and that having pressure from outside is very good. However, the setting of benchmarks needs to be accompanied by adequate funding in order to achieve the objectives set by them. Another aspect highlighted by Austrian participants in the study was the appearance of **separation between different policies and that it would be greatly beneficial for the various initiatives related to inclusive education to be**

<sup>37</sup> Graphs can be found in Annex I

linked. Among the main challenges to making education more inclusive, most respondents (56%) chose the **training for teachers/educators, regional socio-economic disparities** as well as the lack of strategic leadership.

### Adult participation in learning

The opinion of participants was divided on whether the benchmark set by the EU on adult participation is a reasonable one. However, the majority (75%) recognizes that the current rate as outlined by the ET Monitor is an accurate reflection of their national reality. One of the main characteristics mentioned during the focus group was the **fragmentation of the adult education and training system**. Since the system started in the 1920s, it has remained organised by social partners, cities and foundations at the local and regional level. Therefore, Austria has 9 different systems for promoting adult education. Overall, this sector is more grassroots and the role of the central government is focused on the formal education system. **During the focus group it was mentioned that the need to coordinate among the different actors has become more important due to the consequences of the pandemic**.

It was underlined by participants that there is no national funding in Austria and no legal claim for all individuals who want to take part in lifelong learning. These individuals have to go into programmes of enterprises or the national employment office. The unemployment service covers a lot of the costs of adult education, especially vocational training. During the focus groups it was highlighted how politics have a great impact on participation in adult education. In Austria there was a small decrease in the rate of adult learning after many years of a positive trend which happened after the change in government that saw an end to numerous projects/initiatives targeted at women (often unemployed women) and the elderly.



It was also explained during the focus groups that **there is a tense relationship between the University and the adult education sectors**. It was highlighted that there does not seem to be any real argument for these tensions but rather it might be based on emotions and imagined competition. Moreover, it was suggested that in Austria the sector of general adult education is not only underfunded but also underestimated. General adult education could play an important role on issues such as education for democracy and social cohesion.

Another aspect that needs improving is the **cooperation between research/science and adult education sectors**. It was highlighted that where there was cooperation, good measures and methodologies have been developed. Also, there is a need for State acknowledged certificates. In Austria, there are many certificates in the validation sector, there is a system of continuing education academy which validates the qualifications and competences of adult educators. However, **it would be beneficial if the qualifications of adult educators would be approved by the State**. It was underlined that in Austria there is always the question of whether validation can be afforded or not. Participants in the focus groups highlighted that a change in the law would be required in order to make access to validation, to guidance and adult education part of the national legislation.

Regarding the benchmark it was highlighted that the four weeks used by the indicator is not an appropriate period, it is too short. Likewise **the age group limitation is not appropriate any more given the current context of ageing society**. This situation calls for a widening of the age group range. Furthermore, if the aim is to talk about lifelong learning **the benchmarks and overall EU strategies cannot be focused only on employability**. Moreover, it was noted that there are doubts of the reliability of the labour force indicators used to measure the progress on the adult learning benchmark. Austrian practitioners underlined that the Adult education



survey is a much better indicator, however the issue is that this survey is only conducted every 3 years. In the survey 75% of respondents replied that there is a national Austrian strategy to achieve this benchmark and that it has existed for over 5 years and 25% replied that they are not aware of any strategy. Various respondents highlighted the Lifelong Learning Strategy which is guided by five core principles: life Phase orientation (all ages), placing learners at the Center (flexibility of learning), lifelong guidance (facilitating the learning process), competence orientation (recognition of informal learning) and Promotion of participation in lifelong learning. The strategy is structured along ten lines of actions, e.g. providing second-chance education free of charge, helping to ensure basic competences for adults as well as introducing procedures of validation of non-formal and informal competences in all educational sectors. It was also highlighted that in Austria the establishment of the national qualification framework is delayed. Similarly, it took some time to establish some kind of system for validation and right now there are many initiatives that begin to be part of the system.

Regarding how useful European cooperation can be to tackle this challenge, all respondents replied with a score of 4 or 5 indicating that it can be useful or very useful. Among the main actions at European level that could be most useful to tackle this challenge, **respondents highlighted encouraging cross-border exchange of innovative teaching and learning practices (70%)** and enabling space for discussion between national policymakers on policy reforms (50%). It was underlined that **a bit more pressure from the EU would be good to push forward all the important strategies that have started over a decade ago such as the qualifications framework and overall the impact that the EU has on this sector is very important.** More specifically, EU funding has allowed for innovations such as guidance and validation to be developed.

## Early leaving from education and training

The majority consider that the EU target for their country is reasonable (67%) and that it reflects their national reality (83%). Participants in the focus groups highlighted that the target should be more ambitious and ideally the main goal should be not losing anyone during the school time. Regarding the establishment of specific targets for certain groups, some participants in the focus groups underlined that this topic should be approached rather carefully and with awareness that it could provoke negative reactions from the groups that are being targeted and cause further fragmentation in schools' populations. A better way to address this situation would be to make sure to implement an individual and holistic approach, this way making sure that no pupil is left behind. Moreover, it was also underlined that using more targeted benchmarks could be useful in order to get to know the background can help you understand their issues and steer the solutions that fit the people concerned. For this is crucial to involve young people in the discussions.

Participants in the focus group mentioned that the figures reported seem realistic. Looking closely at the national data, it was explained that the most important factor for early school leaving was the level of education of the parents (which surpassed whether or not the pupil was native-born or from a migrant background). An aspect that was brought to table during the focus groups was that information exchange between the Ministry of Education and regional stakeholders such as Chambers of Labour could greatly improve. For example, the results of the National Education Standards tests are widely shared. Through this tool, schools are evaluated against an expected value with some schools scoring higher than the expected value, indicating that these schools' practices are rendering better than expected outcomes. However, other relevant stakeholders are not aware of what factors explain

this high performance. This information could help other schools as well as other organisations in their efforts to support schools with higher presence of vulnerable pupils.

When asked about the Austrian national strategy to achieve this benchmark, everyone answered that there is one, with 17% mentioning that it has over 5 years and 83% that it has less than 5 years. Participants in the study highlighted that the Austrian strategy is based on three principles: prevention, intervention, compensation. The country has tried to reduce compensation and foster prevention and intervention. At school, there is established a system of youth coaching and social work in school with help to prevent early school leave. However, participants at the focus group highlighted that there are calls from relevant actors such as parents and Chambers of Labour to further expand this system, especially in schools with higher presence of vulnerable pupils. Austrians are now more aware of the importance of having non teaching staff at schools to support pupils, parents and teachers.

Since the legislation change in 2016 which determined that all young people until 18 years of age are required to continue education beyond compulsory schooling, the initiative Education until 18 - AusBildung bis 18 was initiated in order to guide pupils and parents navigate the available options for further schooling. This same year, the strategy against early school leaving was updated (from the 2012 version). It was underlined by participants in the focus groups that this change in legislation and in the strategy has helped the country in improving the rate of NEETs. There has also been important work in terms of interculturality, meaning that the government provides information in several languages in order to reach out to the most vulnerable groups such as children with a migrant background or to refugees.



Regarding how useful European cooperation can be to tackle this challenge, most respondents replied with a score of 4 or 5 (83%). Among the main actions at European level that could be most useful to tackle this challenge, respondents highlighted **enabling space for discussion between national policymakers on policy reforms (83%) and encouraging cross-border exchange of innovative teaching and learning practices (67%)**. It was mentioned during the focus group that it would be interesting to conduct studies at European level on good performing schools to get a better grasp of what are the success factors related to early school leaving. This cooperation will be even more important as the statistics coming out in the aftermath of the crisis are published. Exchanging lessons learned would be very valuable for all Member States.

## Conclusions

It can be concluded that in Austria there is a high level of awareness of EU policies on inclusive education as well as a positive perception of European cooperation and of the importance of EU funding for the success of their inclusive education programmes. However, there needs to be more promotion of these policies and further fostering of cooperation among regional, national and European actors in order to surmount the regional disparities which will be very likely further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Cooperation is also key to address the obstacles posed by their fragmented national system. Only by working together, the country will be able to successfully address the challenges of promoting adult participation in learning and early leaving from education and training.



## IRELAND

### Profile of respondents

The respondents<sup>38</sup> from Ireland are involved simultaneously in different types of education with 70% in formal education, 50% in non-formal education and 22% in informal education. A similar situation takes place regarding the sector of education with the top 3 being Vocational education and training (76.67%), adult education (60%) and youth education (53%). Furthermore, 67% of respondents work or represent adult learners, 60% youth learners and apprentices 43%. The majority (80%) of organisations consider their profile to be an education and training institution with the rest belonging to civil society organisations and regional/local authorities. Moreover, most respondents work at local (60%) and regional level (57%), with a minority working at national level (17%). In terms of affiliations, the 80% of respondents belong to a national network, but only 33% to a European network.

### About EU policy on inclusive education

The majority of organisations are aware of both the Paris declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education (2015) and the Council Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education and the European dimension of teaching (2018). In the case of the former 70% remarked that they know the declaration to a certain extent. Regarding the latter, only 3% responded that they know the Recommendation well and 63% to a certain extent.

Regarding the two specific targets selected for this report, 23% mentioned that they are aware

of both targets. A small proportion (10%) of the organisations mentioned that they are only aware of the target on ELET and 13% are only aware of the benchmark on adult education. **Over half of respondents (53%) replied that they were not aware of any of them before taking the survey.**

When asked about their opinion on the impact of EU policies on inclusive education in their own countries, the most popular answer was 3 and higher on a scale of 1 to 5. These results suggest that most respondents feel that there is a moderate to strong impact in terms of how these policies have shaped their countries' national policy agenda on the topic (69%), as well as on the pedagogical approaches of educators (62%) and on their target groups (69%).

Respondents to the survey highlighted that national policy exists largely regardless of what is being outlined as a priority or focus by the European Commission. In the experience of participants in the study, EU influence is positive. More specifically it was underlined that **EU policies and programmes not only give guidelines, structure and support but also provide funding and flexibility to address those gaps which the national government does not.** Furthermore, through their programmes the EU also gives organisations the capacity to exchange knowledge across Europe (peer learning activities, research, support). In short, Irish practitioners consider that **the connection and network they built through EU programmes is really powerful and that they are much stronger working together with other practitioners across Europe.** Among the main challenges to making education more inclusive, **most respondents (60%) referred to the**

<sup>38</sup> Graphs can be found in Annex II



**lack of funding, followed by lack of cross-sectoral cooperation (57%),** training for teachers/educators (37%) as well as the lack of strategic leadership (27%).

### Adult participation in learning

The majority (83%) of participants considered that the benchmark set by the EU on adult participation is a reasonable one. Furthermore, 91% recognizes that the current rate as outlined by the ET Monitor is an accurate reflection of their national reality. Overall participants in the study consider that Ireland has a good quality adult education system in which the educators are specifically adult educators. They are specifically tailored to teach adult education, they are not school teachers, they are adult focused and have adequate competences for the job. During the focus group it was shared that adult education programs in Ireland were quite fragmented but that at the moment there are attempts to bring more cohesion. It was also noted that over the last few years since Ireland faced an economic downturn there has been a massive emphasis on the economy and skills for employment, skills to advance/for work/to compete. Although skills is a good aspect to discuss, **people who want to learn to integrate into society and for overall social cohesion should not be forgotten.** Moreover, participants underlined that the **COVID-19 pandemic has shed light on the existing gaps and although online/blended solutions have had an important number of participants, these people may not always be the ones who grassroots organisations really need to engage.**

Participants in the survey highlighted that the progress reported may not be completely accurate since there may be adults who have taken part in upskilling that are not aware that this is also part of adult participation in learning / lifelong learning. In addition, another issue in the reported figures is that **the data collected still excludes people who**

**are older learners, homeless, asylum seekers, traveler community and other vulnerable groups.** Moreover, it was also underlined that the benchmark is homogenous in regard to the previous education experience of adult learners. In order to build an inclusive strategy for lifelong learning this indicator would need to be broken down to cover those who left school early to provide a better reflection of the national reality. Furthermore, it was mentioned that more reliable and more granular data is required and that the current period of time used for data collection is very short and unrealistic.

It was reported that the current economic situation in Ireland where employment rates are very high has had an impact on the number of adult learners coming forward to attend. During periods of high unemployment people are more inclined to look for educational routes to enhance the employment opportunities. A good practice from Ireland is the model of **Community education** which can take place both within education training boards or organised by independent organizations who do not receive government funding and rely on fundraising. The latter are largely focused on non-formal education. **Community education allows for low educated people to take their time in building trust with their trainers before moving towards a higher level.**

The majority of respondents replied that there is a national Irish strategy to achieve this benchmark, with slightly less than half (48%) remarking that it has existed for over 5 years and 30% replying that it has been in place for less than 5 years. Participants in the survey mentioned that Ireland has two documents that speak to the country's efforts of reaching the 15% target for participation in lifelong learning by 2020. The National Skills Strategy 2025 is the primary strategic document. In this strategy however Ireland moves the goal to 2025 for reaching the 15% target, with a target of 10% by 2020, which has been met. A further strategy that was established by the Department of Education



and Skills is the Action Plan for Education 2016-2019. Respondents expect that an Action Plan for Education will be updated when a new government is formed later in 2020.

It was also mentioned that Adult education is dealt with through the Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019, and in the new FET Strategy 2020 - 2024 which is due to be published this year. This strategy deals with upskilling/reskilling, lifelong learning opportunities, as well as having a huge social inclusion aspect. The Further Education and Training strategy aims to develop opportunities for adults to participate in further education and training. Moreover, the Education and Training Board is implementing the Back to Education Initiative in which they are working with young people and adults in order to give participants an opportunity to combine a return to learning with family, work and other responsibilities.

Participants in the survey mentioned the recently established EXPLORE programme which targets workers in manufacturing with low digital skills. Furthermore, a new database is being implemented to capture the profile of adult learners which will help provide a relevant and responsive adult education strategy. The work of the national adult literacy agency has also been highlighted, this agency does a good job at keeping the government in the loop about what is happening at local level.

Another aspect that was touched upon was the barriers to access relevant information and support around what education options adults have, where to go and what to simplify in the language used in the sector. The National Adult Learning Organisation (AONTAS) has developed the One step up webpage in order to address this need. Furthermore, this organisation is working on research around a potential policy on recognition of prior learning.

**Regarding how useful European cooperation can be to tackle this challenge, most respondents**

**replied with a score of 4 or 5 (57%), suggesting it is perceived as useful or very useful.** Although EU influence is perceived positively, practitioners consider that there is a huge issue when it comes to the **narrative coming from the EU level in terms of skills and labor market activation. They consider that this leads to forgetting about the wider benefits of lifelong learning.** Moreover, it was underlined that the **renewal of the European Agenda for Adult Learning at EU level is seen as a very important development** and it offers continuity to the projects being developed in Ireland connected to this agenda. However, there was criticism in terms of the level of funding allocated to non-formal education as this targets more vulnerable sectors of the population and is in dire need of appropriate funding.

As previously mentioned the renewal of the Agenda for Adult Learning has been very positive news for Irish practitioners. It was highlighted that the work around this agenda gives them guidelines, structure, flexibility and the capacity to identify and address needs more rapidly than as part of formal national programmes. It also gives organisations the capacity to exchange knowledge and build networks across Europe through peer learning activities, research, and support. These networks strengthened the work they do in their own countries. Furthermore, EU cooperation is also key in terms of professional development for adult educators. Many times these professionals do not have the funds to pay for professional development. For the last number of years, projects financed under the European Agenda have enabled the delivery of free professional development for adult educators.

Among the main actions at European level that could be most useful to tackle this challenge, respondents highlighted **promoting European networks of organisations (52%), encouraging cross-border exchange of innovative teaching and learning practices (48%)** and enabling space for discussion between national policymakers on policy

reforms (35%).

### Early leaving from education and training

The majority consider that the EU target for their country is reasonable (81%) and that the current data from the ET Monitor reflects their national reality (73%). Participants in the survey mentioned that the relative good results in this area stems from the focus given to education and training as a result of the financial crisis in 2009. Other participants underlined that the reported national rate hides the socio-economic disparities within and between cities and towns across the country. For example, it was mentioned that among the Traveller population in Ireland, 28% of people left school before age 13, while this drops to 1% for the general population. This and other disparities must be recognised within European policy development. Just as not all EU countries are made equal, neither are their populations within their borders. Another aspect that cannot be showcased by the quantitative data is the disengagement from pupils which at times happens long before they actually decide to leave school.

When asked about the Irish national strategy to achieve this benchmark, the majority answered that there is one, with 73% mentioning that it has over 5 years and 8% that it has less than 5 years. Respondents in the survey pointed out that Ireland established their own national benchmark for 2020 as 8%. In terms of specific strategies, participants in the survey mentioned the Action Plans for Education published by the Department of Education and Skills for the period of 2016-2019 and the National Skills Strategy 2025 launched in 2016. It was explained that the current strategy of the national government is to support and put resources into the secondary school system to keep all students in school to complete the leaving certificate or the



leaving certificate applied and not look to explore other initiatives which could achieve better results for a certain percentage of the age profile.

Participants also mentioned the National Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy which covers youth education initiatives, the Youthreach programme, Community Training Centres and Local Training Initiatives to cater for the young unemployed. Furthermore, the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (V.T.O.S) Programme provides second chance education for students that are over 21 years of age.

**Regarding how useful European cooperation can be to tackle this challenge, most respondents replied with a score of 4 or 5 (69%), suggesting they consider it useful or very useful.** Among the main actions at European level that could be most useful to tackle this challenge, respondents highlighted **promoting European networks of organisations (65%), encouraging cross-border exchange of innovative teaching and learning practices (46%)** and **enabling space for discussion between national policymakers on policy reforms (42%).**

### Conclusions

It can be concluded that in Ireland, learning providers, civil society and social partners have a good level of awareness of EU policies and their own national policies on inclusive education. In addition there is a very positive perception of the added value of EU cooperation which should be further strengthened with adequate funding and through the improvement of data collection in order to avoid excluding key sectors of the population. Moreover, Ireland has strong foundations when it comes to Community Education and training of adult educators which should continue to be developed and properly funded.



## PORTUGAL

### Profile of respondents

Most respondents<sup>39</sup> from Portugal are involved in formal education (94%). From the different sectors the most present are organisations working in school education (49%), vocational education and training (47%) and professional education (45%). The target groups these organisations work with or represent are secondary school pupils (64%), youth (55%) and adults (45%). Regarding their profile, 92% categorise themselves as education and training institutions. From all respondents, the majority works at local level (54%), followed by national (37%) and regional (27%) levels. In terms of their affiliations, 53% of respondents are part of national networks versus 36% who belong to European networks.

### About EU policy on inclusive education

The majority of organisations are aware of both the Paris declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education (2015) and the Council Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education and the European dimension of teaching (2018). In the case of the former 40% remarked that they know the declaration well and 45% to a certain extent. Regarding the latter, 38% responded that they know the Recommendation well and 41% to a certain extent.

Regarding the two specific targets selected for this report, 34% mentioned that they are aware of both targets. 34% of the organisations mentioned that they are only aware of the target on ELET and 7% are aware of the benchmark on adult education. An important proportion of respondents (25%) replied

that they were not aware of any of them before taking the survey.

**When asked about their opinion on the impact of EU policies on inclusive education in their own country, the majority awarded 4 or above on a scale of 1 to 5, suggesting a strong impact or influence of these policies at national level.** More specifically, the majority awards a 4 and above (72%) in terms of how these policies have shaped their country's national policy agenda on the topic. The same can be said when referring to the impact on the pedagogical approaches of educators (64%) as well as on their target groups (64%).

Although some participants underlined that a declaration or recommendation is not enough to generate an impact, others highlighted that **the EU can influence the government in addressing specific problems in the country.** It was also mentioned that there are some **new approaches regarding inclusive education but participants see that the level of bureaucracy is somehow blocking the effectiveness of the measures implemented.** Furthermore, other respondents mentioned that there is reduced information spread about these documents and therefore it does not reach institutions/organisations working at local level. Moreover, the importance of the EU extends to the funding they are able to provide in order to implement the various policies recommendations put forth by the European Commission.

Among the main challenges to making education more inclusive, **most respondents (66%) referred to the training for teachers/educators, regional socio-economic disparities (51%), lack of funding (48%) as well as the lack of cross-sectoral cooperation**

<sup>39</sup> Graphs can be found in Annex III

(e.g. between education institutions and civil society or social services) (45%).

### Adult participation in learning

The majority (73%) of participants considered that the benchmark set by the EU on adult participation is a reasonable one. Furthermore, 81% recognizes that the current rate as outlined by the ET Monitor is an accurate reflection of their national reality. During the focus group it was underlined several governments have been increasing the scope of what adult education centers can do in terms of validation but also as a door for lifelong learning in general. Similar to what happened in Austria, these improvements were halted between 2014-2017 when the country changed government. During this period the established programmes on the sector were shut down. Moreover, there was good participation in the programme until 2009-2010 after which the financial crisis provoked a drop in the participation level. These events have had an impact on the country's progress related to the adult learning benchmark. **It was highlighted that in Portugal there are several plans, several initiatives, but there is neither an overarching national strategy nor political consensus among parties. This situation has led to most initiatives in the sector becoming heavily dependent on European funding such as the European Social Fund.**

Some participants in the study did not fully agree with the reported figures and also highlighted that they might be excluding people who are unemployed. In addition, some participants mentioned that in Portugal there is a significant number of people who despite the need to upgrade their qualification level and skills, do not participate in lifelong learning activities.

**The Portuguese catalogue for adult qualifications was underlined as a strength of their national**



**system.** However one of their weak points remains the offers on the digital dimension. It was shared by participants that currently the qualifications catalogue is under review. **One of the most pressing issues in the adult education sector refers to financing. More specifically for SMEs, it is very difficult to get qualifications for their workforce.** This issue is further exacerbated by the fact that also the managers and owners of these small companies have low qualifications. Furthermore, in the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic that has seen an increase in the number of unemployed people, the question remains as to how will Portugal overcome this situation. Another cause of concern for practitioners was the significant levels of people who do not know how to read or write. In addition, there is no reliable data on the number of people who have gone to school but still struggle with basic skills.

The majority of respondents replied that there is a national Portuguese strategy to achieve this benchmark, with 68% remarking that it has existed for over 5 years and 19% replying that it has been in place for less than 5 years. The Qualifica Program was widely mentioned by participants in the study who consider it as a very strong and mature validation system for adults. The programme is run by the National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training (ANQEP) which is under the jurisdiction of the Ministries of Education and Labour. By 2020, the program intended to meet the following targets: Ensure that 50% of the active population finish secondary school; Achieve an adult participation rate in lifelong learning activities of 15%, extended to 25% in 2025; contribute to having 40% of higher education graduates, aged 30- 34 years old. The programme is considered to have had a positive impact and the public has a perception of social justice. Still, adult educators/trainers/people who are involved in the process would say that just validating is not enough and that Portugal needs more effective policies in this area.



The PO ISE programme (Programa Operacional Inclusão Social e Emprego) also supports this sector through 2 of the 4 axes: Priority Axis 1 seeks to promote sustainability and quality of employment and support worker mobility and Priority Axis 3 seeks to promote social inclusion and combat poverty and discrimination. It was also mentioned that there is legislation, where training is mandatory for all employers, but in fact the legislation is not followed and there are no consequences for companies that don't respect the 40 annual hours of mandatory training. Other relevant strategies include the National Literacy Plan (Plano Nacional de Leitura), the National Art Plan (Plano Nacional das Artes) and the National Strategy of Education for Development (Estratégia Nacional de Educação para o Desenvolvimento).

**Regarding how useful European cooperation can be to tackle this challenge, most respondents replied with a score of 4 or 5 (89%), suggesting that they consider it to be very useful or useful.** Participants in the focus group explained that **for Portugal the role of EU institutions is very important, without their various programmes, the funding would simply not be enough to implement Portugal's policies effectively.** Furthermore, the European benchmarks are important since it puts certain pressure on the national government to address the problems in the country. Although the benchmarks are not binding, the Ministry considers the Education and Training Framework as a policy that should be followed. As an example during the focus group it was shared that in 2014 when the government decided to cancel the validation system they had to reopen many of the centers with different names, different structure, different brands because there was a Council Recommendation that asked for systems to be in place by 2018.

Among the main actions at European level that could be most useful to tackle this challenge, respondents highlighted **encouraging cross-border exchange of innovative teaching and learning**

**practices (73%), promoting European networks of organisations (51%),** and enabling space for discussion between national policymakers on policy reforms (27%).

### Early leaving from education and training

The majority consider that the EU target for their country is reasonable (77%) and that the current data from the ET Monitor reflects their national reality (85%). Some respondents to the survey showed disagreement and explained that there are young pupils who jump from system to system and in and out of the system year after year which complicates the data collection. Similarly, the figures may not reflect the real rate of early school leavers who belong to the most vulnerable groups. Other respondents linked the improving figures to the change in national legislation which moved in 2012 compulsory basic education to the 12th year. Among the main reasons for leaving, it was highlighted that there are many pupils who leave school early because they prefer to start working. A worry among respondents was that although Portugal is focusing more on the youth leaving school, there are clear signs that a significant number of students are not properly learning at school and that also puts them in a disadvantageous position.

When asked about the Portuguese national strategy to achieve this benchmark, the majority answered that there is one, with 73% mentioning that it has over 5 years and 19% that it has less than 5 years. Respondents to the survey mentioned some of the main programmes linked to early school leaving in Portugal. The Priority Intervention Educational Territories Program - TEIP promotes educational inclusion in schools located in disadvantaged areas which include children 'at risk' of social exclusion. The National Program for the Promotion of School Success - PNPSE involves groups of schools and



municipalities, centered on work in the classroom and early detection of difficulties. The Second Opportunity programme (Segunda Oportunidade) targets specifically early school leavers aiming at their school and socio-professional reintegration. There is also a specific tutorial support for students in situations of failure and at risk of dropping out, enhancing the development of social and emotional skills.

It was also explained that the national government has given schools more autonomy to create their own local plans for promoting success. This approach allows the schools to adapt the strategies to the populations that schools serve and their local problems. Additionally, there has been additional funding to support projects and organisations that present innovative solutions that can contribute to reducing early school leaving. It was mentioned that Portugal still lacks a well-defined development strategy based on innovation associated with job creation in order to make it more competitive internationally.

**Regarding how useful European cooperation can be to tackle this challenge, most respondents replied with a score of 4 or 5 (88%), suggesting that they consider it to be useful or very useful.** Among the main actions at European level that could be most useful to tackle this challenge, respondents highlighted **encouraging cross-border exchange of innovative teaching and learning practices (79%), promoting European networks of organisations (69%),** and enabling space for discussion between national policymakers on policy reforms (25%).

### Conclusions

In Portugal EU influence through policies and funding on inclusive education has great relevance. This influence is key to surmount the obstacles posed by bureaucratic burdens and lack of political coherence. On the one hand, political pressure

is necessary in order to establish coherent and effective policy measures. On the other hand, adequate funding is crucial to strengthen and update the mature and well perceived programs in the country and to expand their reach towards segments of the population that are not currently reached. For this, it is also paramount to involve grassroots level organisations that can help improve the quality of data collected for both adult participation in learning and early leaving from education and training as well as help look beyond them and bring to the fore issues that might escape these definitions.







## ROMANIA

### Profile of respondents

Most respondents<sup>40</sup> from Romania are involved in formal education (91%), with organisations working with non-formal and informal education at both 15% respectively. The majority (78%) of respondents work in the school education sector and 95% categorise themselves as education and training institutions. Furthermore, the most popular target groups include secondary school pupils (54%), children (38%), youth (22%) and teachers (21%). Most of the organisations work at local level (80%), followed by national (14%) and regional (11%) levels. Regarding their affiliations, 33% of respondents mentioned that they are part of a national network and 12% said the same about a European network.

### About EU policy on inclusive education

The majority of organisations are aware of both the Paris declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education (2015) and the Council Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education and the European dimension of teaching (2018). In the case of the former 32% remarked that they know the declaration well and 47% to a certain extent. Regarding the latter, 38% responded that they know the Recommendation well and 44% to a certain extent.

Regarding the two specific targets selected for this report, around a third (32%) mentioned that they are aware of both targets. Slightly less than a third (29%) of the organisations mentioned that they are only aware of the target on ELET and a very small proportion (7%) are aware of the benchmark

on adult education. An important proportion of respondents (31%) replied that they were not aware of any of them before taking the survey.

**When asked about their opinion on the impact of EU policies on inclusive education in their own countries, the majority awarded 4 or above on a scale of 1 to 5, indicating the perception of a strong impact.** More specifically, the majority awards a 4 and above (61%) in terms of how these policies have shaped their countries' national policy agenda on the topic. The same can be said when referring to the impact on the pedagogical approaches of educators (71%) as well as on the policies' target groups (63%).

Participants from this country explained that **civil society organizations are the ones more involved in promoting those policies and that many times public institutions are not aware of them.** Furthermore, respondents highlighted that there is no clear plan to implement those recommendations and that, although they can be useful strategic papers, afterwards there is no appropriate monitoring of their implementation. During the focus groups it was also highlighted the importance of EU funding for the implementation of inclusive education policies. Practitioners in Romania also consider that **the EU can influence the public discourse through benchmarks and mechanisms such as the European Semester by bringing to discussion topics that otherwise would not be considered by the national government.**

**Among the main challenges to making education more inclusive, most respondents (64%) referred to the training for teachers/educators, lack of funding (48%), regional socio-economic disparities (37%) as**

<sup>40</sup> Graphs can be found in Annex IV



well as the lack of cross-sectoral cooperation (30%).

### Adult participation in learning

The majority (81%) of participants considered that the benchmark set by the EU on adult participation is a reasonable one. Furthermore, 76% recognizes that the current rate as outlined by the ET Monitor is an accurate reflection of their national reality.

Survey respondents shared that according to legislation the Romanian state is tasked with ensuring and sustaining (including financially) access to education and continuing professional training for among others young people and adults who have not completed compulsory education; young people and adults who return to the country after a period of working abroad; young people and adults who are residents in economically and socially disadvantaged communities and employed people over 40 years old with a low educational background with low qualification levels.

Respondents to the survey mentioned that the benchmark was reasonable for now but it will need to improve in the future. Regarding the reported figures, members of civil society highlighted the **disparities between rural and urban areas which cannot be reflected by a single figure.** In addition, they highlighted that the **small percentage of adult learners is due to lack of financial means and not enough information about adult education opportunities.** It was also mentioned that the government also sets specific targets to support adult participation in education such as, for example, people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Another aspect underlined was that the majority of training related to adult education and continuing education is done by NGO accredited training providers with resources from the projects run by themselves. An important issue around the country is the **level of motivation of adults to undertake**

**lifelong learning.** Some respondents in the survey mentioned that many adults do not participate in learning activities even if there is a necessity regarding their skills and competences.

The majority of respondents replied that there is a national Romanian strategy to achieve this benchmark, with 41% remarking that it has existed for over 5 years and 21% replying that it has been in place for less than 5 years. It was shared by participants in the study that although educational policies such as the National Lifelong Learning Strategy exist, it is not properly implemented and relevant results cannot be observed. From the experience of practitioners adults with disabilities do not have real opportunities for lifelong learning and counselling, they are excluded and marginalized.

Previous strategies need to be improved and new policies which align to international adult learning and education strategies should be developed. It was mentioned in the survey that the national strategy aimed to organize permanent learning centers in each community but that this aim has not been realized. A cause of worry in the sector is the instability caused by political changes which affect the continuity of long-term strategies. Other relevant policies highlighted include the aforementioned National Education Law of 2011 which has some sections destined to adult education. Also the National Pact for Education of 2008 and the program Educated Romania supported by the presidency of 2014. The Second Chance programme was also brought up by various participants in the study.

**Regarding how useful European cooperation can be to tackle this challenge, most respondents replied with a score of 4 or 5 (76%), suggesting that they consider it to be very useful or useful.** Among the main actions at European level that could be most useful to tackle this challenge, respondents highlighted encouraging **cross-border exchange of innovative teaching and learning practices (77%),**



**promoting European networks of organisations (37%),** and enabling space for discussion between national policymakers on policy reforms (30%).

### Early leaving from education and training

The majority consider that the EU target for their country is reasonable (88%) and that the current data from the ET Monitor reflects their national reality (81%). Respondents to the survey commented that Romania is constantly reforming the school system due to political instability which also interferes with school management. Others mentioned that the figures might not be completely realistic due to the quality of the data used. It was noted that non-governmental organisations tend to report more accurate figures. During the focus group it has noted that the vast majority of school leavers come from Vocational education and training.

Migration and financial difficulties were mentioned among the main reasons for school leaving. Poverty is a widespread phenomenon and this affects the levels of early school leaving. For example, there are students who leave school to travel abroad with their parents and only some of them continue school in the new country. In rural areas some children do not even go to school at all and there are villages that don't even have a school. During the focus group it was mentioned that together with socio-economic issues, the quality of education is a big reason why pupils leave school. In the case of minorities, participants in the study mentioned that the Roma population is one of the most vulnerable groups in the country. In the case of the Hungarian minority, in the focus group it was noted that early school leaving is mainly caused by the fact that the system does not offer them a good educational setting so they cannot learn Romanian properly and this demotivates them to pursue further education. Furthermore, in Romania, there is a bigger burden on parents since they have to pay for lots of school

supplies and transport.

When asked about the Romanian national strategy to achieve this benchmark, the majority answered that there is one, with 48% mentioning that it has over 5 years and 23% that it has less than 5 years. Currently, it was mentioned that the main plan in the country is the Strategy for Reducing Early School Leaving in Romania (2015-2020) which has 4 pillars: 1) ensuring the access to education and quality education for all children, 2) ensuring the completion of compulsory education by all children, 3) reintegration of the early school leavers into the education system and 4) developing adequate institutional support. The National Education Law of 2011 was also mentioned as an important change in the national legislation. Many respondents highlighted that the main issue is not the strategy itself but the implementing and monitoring of the established plans. There have been many strategies over the years which have failed to meet their goals. Other respondents mentioned that there are schemes to support families facing financial difficulties such as social scholarships, school after school programs, free meals and free course books. It was reported that many of these schemes are financed by EU funding.

The Second Chance program was mentioned by various respondents, this program is aimed at young people who have not attended or have not completed primary and secondary education. It was also noted that there are some courses for teachers that help them learn strategies to apply at school in order to prevent early leaving from school. Some respondents noted that, in some regions, there is a partnership between schools and the town hall or the police in order to monitor the students who do not attend school. During the focus group it was noted that there are no specific policies for minorities and that the strategy for Roma people, which was published about 5-6 years ago, is rather vague and not aimed directly at the field of education.



**Regarding how useful European cooperation can be to tackle this challenge, most respondents replied with a score of 4 or 5 (74%), suggesting it is considered as useful or very useful.** Among the main actions at European level that could be most useful to tackle this challenge, respondents highlighted **encouraging cross-border exchange of innovative teaching and learning practices (78%), promoting European networks of organisations (34%), and enabling space for discussion between national policymakers on policy reforms (34%).**

During the focus group, it was highlighted that for Romania, EU cooperation is crucial both at policy and funding levels. In terms of policy, the European semester helps to shape public discourse towards topics that otherwise would not be discussed. However it is considered that further support is needed in order to implement the recommendations put forth by the European Commission.

In terms of funding, Romania also benefits from programmes aimed at reducing the poverty levels in the country. These programmes are also important to support the efforts to tackle early school leaving. Furthermore, the European Social Fund funding has contributed in the implementation of important schemes such as extra curricular hours at school, meals provided and assistance for school work. It was mentioned that proof has been found showing that those who participate in those schemes have lower risk of being socially excluded and lower risk of early school leaving.

### Conclusions

In Romania, it can be concluded that the EU will continue to have an important role in the development and implementation of inclusive education policies both in terms of political pressure and the funding allocated to tackle the challenges of promoting adult participation in learning and in preventing early leaving from

education and training. The political influence of the EU will be crucial to foster long-term policies that can withstand the climate of political instability in the country and to ensure to close the gaps in implementation and monitoring of existing policies. Civil Society can be a key asset in promoting EU policies at local levels, engaging local governments and raising awareness on these issues. In order for this to be successful, adequate funding and stronger EU cooperation will be crucial. The allocation of these funds should be directed at improving the quality of data collection in order to better understand and address the regional and socio-economic disparities in the country. In addition, given the strong link between the poverty levels and the figures on adult participation in learning and ELET, funding directed towards alleviating poverty should be linked with programmes aimed to directly address these challenges.





## SLOVENIA

### Profile of respondents

Unlike previous countries, in Slovenia<sup>41</sup> more respondents mentioned that they are involved with non-formal education (65%), followed by formal education (59%) and informal education (29%). The target group which most organisations work with or represent are adults (74%) which is also the highest represented sector of education (74%) from this country in the survey. A slight majority (61%) of respondents are education and training institutions, while civil society organisations represent 21%. Most organisations work at national level (65%), with 27% working at local and 24% at regional level. Regarding their affiliations, a majority (59%) are part of a national network versus 44% who are part of a European network.

### About EU policy on inclusive education

The majority of organisations are aware of both the Paris declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education (2015) and the Council Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education and the European dimension of teaching (2018). In the case of the former, only 9% remarked that they know the declaration well and 68% to a certain extent. Regarding the latter, 18% responded that they know the Recommendation well and 50% to a certain extent.

Regarding the two specific targets selected for this report, slightly less than a fifth (18%) mentioned that they are aware of both targets. A small proportion (12%) of the organisations mentioned that they are only aware of the target on ELET and almost

a quarter (24%) are aware of the benchmark on adult education. Almost half of respondents (47%) replied that they were not aware of any of them before taking the survey.

**When asked about their opinion on the impact of EU policies on inclusive education in their own ambits, the majority awarded 4 or above on a scale of 1 to 5, indicating the perception of a strong impact or influence.** More specifically, the majority awards a 4 and above (52%) in terms of how these policies have shaped their countries' national policy agenda on the topic. The same can be said when referring to the impact on the pedagogical approaches of educators (43%). In terms of having an impact on their target group, most respondents (45%) awarded this statement a 4 on the scale. In the survey, respondents explained that they perceive these policies as general orientations and they can have had a great impact at the declarative level, but at the level of the action there are still a lot of empty rooms.

Among the main challenges to making education more inclusive, **most respondents (59%) referred to the training for teachers/educators, followed by lack of cross-sectoral cooperation (e.g. between education institutions and civil society or social services) (56%), lack of funding (53%)** as well as the lack of strategic leadership (47%).

### Adult participation in learning

The majority (58%) of participants considered that the benchmark set by the EU on adult participation is a reasonable one. Furthermore, a majority (69%) recognizes that the current rate as outlined by the

<sup>41</sup> Graphs can be found in Annex V



ET Monitor is an accurate reflection of their national reality. Participants in the survey highlighted that adults in Slovenia are still not very aware of the meaning of lifelong learning and its benefits. There is a certain population of people who are ready to participate in activities and are well aware so they are involved and counted multiple times in the studies conducted. Respondents suggested that **more work should be done on advertising, dissemination and creating national campaigns in order to increase the awareness of lifelong learning in the country.** The majority of respondents replied that there is a national Slovenian strategy to achieve this benchmark, with half (50%) remarking that it has existed for over 5 years and 12% replying that it has been in place for less than 5 years. The Resolution about the national program of adult education 2013-2020 contained aims, priorities, activities and allocated public funds for adult education. The program had as priority areas: general adult education; education to raise the educational level of adults and training and education for labour market needs. Participants in the survey mentioned that the national strategy does not include older adults, mostly people aged over 65 years old.

**Regarding how useful European cooperation can be to tackle this challenge, most respondents replied with a score of 4 or 5 (73%), which indicates that they consider it useful or very useful.** Among the main actions at European level that could be most useful to tackle this challenge, respondents highlighted **encouraging cross-border exchange of innovative teaching and learning practices (50%), enabling space for discussion between national policymakers on policy reforms (50%)** and promoting European networks of organisations (35%).

### Early leaving from education and training

The majority consider that the EU target for their

country is reasonable (73%) and that the current data from the ET Monitor reflects their national reality (67%). During the focus group the benchmark was discussed, it was highlighted that Slovenia should strive for more and establish an appropriate strategy in which their own benchmarks are determined in order to prevent any rollback in the levels of early school leaving. This is even more crucial now since the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly impacted education systems around the world. It was noted that civil society organisations in Slovenia have had to provide support to students that were unable to follow online classes.

Regarding the setting of benchmarks for specific groups, it was mentioned that for Slovenia this would be very useful. Since they already have a low rate, it would be important to better understand the background of early school leavers in order to develop targeted policies that address their needs. Slovenia should take advantage of the fact that they are able to come in more direct contact with the students from different parts of the country. This type of data would also be useful for the work conducted by student unions and other civil society organisations who could improve their advocacy work and better represent their members.

Respondents to the survey highlighted that as a small nation, they are able to work more individually therefore allowing them to report such low rates of early school leaving. Some had the opinion that only looking at having the status of student may provide with too optimistic figures since this approach leaves behind students who, although being officially students, they are not making significant differences in their lives towards autonomy and social cohesion, the formation of personal and professional identity, and the ability to participate in society and the labour market. Furthermore, it was noted that there are some early school leavers not registered in the system.

From the discussion during the focus group it could



be pinpointed that the reasons behind the good figures on early school leaving are the flexible learning pathways offered to students and the focus on prevention supported by proper investment. In terms of flexible pathways it was explained that after basic schooling, students are offered two paths: gymnasium or VET. However, an important advantage of the Slovenian system is that if a student decides to shift their study path, the transition is rather smooth. Similarly, after compulsory VET schooling is finished, students can prepare to take the final exams of the other study path in order to apply for higher education. There are also schools for adults which allows them to take the final exam later on by enrolling in a special program. These possibilities for easy transitions encourage students to continue their education.

Regarding investment in prevention, there are social programs in place for socio-economic disadvantaged groups who obtain subsidized meals and transportation in this way ensuring that students have relatively similar opportunities to access education. Furthermore, there are advisory services in every single school which include a psychologist and a social pedagogue. These professionals support the teaching staff in solving internal conflicts at school.

When asked about the Slovenian national strategy to achieve this benchmark, the majority answered that there is one, with 47% mentioning that it has over 5 years and 13% that it has less than 5 years. Participants in study highlighted that there is no specific strategy for early school leaving but rather various programs that can be linked to this topic. Respondents to the survey mentioned the National Youth Program 2013-2022 which aims to ensure a better situation for young people in education, which would then be reflected in a more favourable situation for young people in the labour market, resulting in better living conditions. There was also a project funded by the Employment Service

of Slovenia and the European Social Fund called Project Learning for Young Adults (PUM) which targeted early school leavers looking to complete compulsory schooling and find a job. Regarding minorities, it was mentioned during the focus groups that there are some targeted measures, however, there are difficulties in obtaining reliable data since in many cases Roma children are not even enrolled in the education system which makes it hard to keep track of them.

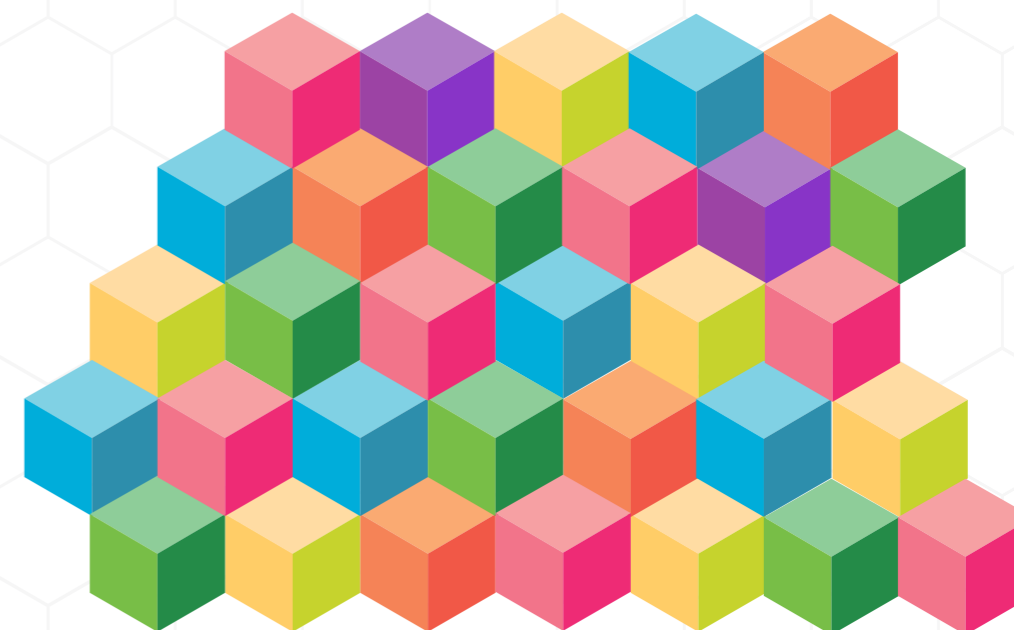
**Regarding how useful European cooperation can be to tackle this challenge, most respondents replied with a score of 4 or 5 (67%), suggesting they perceive it to be useful or very useful.** Among the main actions at European level that could be most useful to tackle this challenge, **respondents highlighted encouraging cross-border exchange of innovative teaching and learning practices (67%), enabling space for discussion between national policymakers on policy reforms (53%)** and coordinating the collection of more qualitative data (40%). Moreover, it was underlined during the focus group that in order to deal with the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis EU cooperation will be key, more specifically with regard to school's digital transition.

### Conclusions

From the results it can be observed that Slovenia's efforts to establish flexible learning pathways for its citizens and adequately funding prevention programmes is generally rendering positive results. The country could shed light on good practices for other EU Member States to follow, for this fostering EU cooperation will be of crucial importance. However, there is still room for improvement, more specifically when it comes to adapting the benchmarks in order to avoid excluding important groups such as the elderly population in the case of adult participation in learning and minorities such as



Roma when it comes to ELET. In addition, awareness raising on these issues should be improved, including maintaining the level of awareness on ELET to avoid a regression of the current positive figures, even more so now with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.





# CONCLUSIONS

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## AWARENESS OF EU POLICIES ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

It can be stated that overall there is a high level of familiarity with EU initiatives on inclusive education, however, the significant rate of respondents that were not aware of either ET 2020 target suggests there is room for improvement in the approaches taken to raise awareness of these targets. In

addition, it's important to note that respondents were reached through existing EU networks therefore the probability of being aware of EU policies is higher.

## INFLUENCE OF EU POLICIES ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

There is a positive perception of the impact of EU policies as they mold the public discourse at national level and serve as a point of pressure on national governments to address the challenges in their countries. Furthermore, it can be said that EU policies on inclusive education have a strong influence on national policy agendas and on their intended target groups, as well as on the pedagogical approaches adopted by educators.

This is a clear testimony to the added value of European cooperation in the field. However, to avoid these policies remaining only as useful strategic orientations, there is a need for more concrete action in implementing them, followed up by adequate monitoring.

## ET 2020 BENCHMARKS

The benchmarks are overall perceived as a positive orienting tool which is set at a reasonable level. However, the setting of these benchmarks needs to be accompanied by increased and targeted funding to support their implementation. Moreover, the reported rates of both adult participation in learning

and early leaving from education and training are considered to largely reflect the reality of the current situation in each country.



## NATIONAL STRATEGIES

A significant segment of respondents claim not to be aware of their country having a national strategy on adult learning and ELET which indicates there is a need to further promote them in order to reach the relevant stakeholders at different levels. Civil society and social partners can be key allies,

given their closeness to the main target groups, in the dissemination of national strategies and programmes as well as on the monitoring of their implementation.

## EU COOPERATION

European cooperation is widely considered as useful or very useful in promoting participation in adult learning and in addressing early leaving from education and training. This is another concrete sign of the added value of the EU in these areas. In both areas the actions at EU level considered to have the most potential are by far the cross border

exchanges of innovative teaching and learning practices, followed by promotion of European networks of organisations and enabling space for discussion on policy reform between national policymakers.

## RELEVANCE OF THE SHADOW REPORT

It can be seen from the results, that although in most cases the responses match what was found during the desk research, this type of study allows for a more in-depth and nuanced understanding of these challenges from the stakeholder perspective which is incredibly beneficial for regional, national and EU institutions aiming to address them. Further studies of this kind also have the potential to foster cooperation and exchange between stakeholders

in different Member States. Nevertheless, future studies must take into account that respondents' profiles vary a lot from country to another as the education and training systems and their respective stakeholders are organised in very different ways. In addition, the culture of participation in policy making at national level is also very different from one country to another.



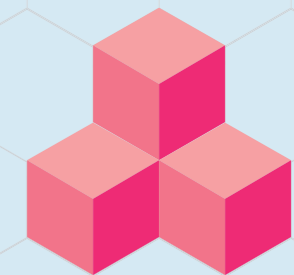
## ANNEXES

The Annexes to this Shadow Report offer a complete perspective of the respondents' answers.

[CLICK HERE TO DOWNLOAD THE ANNEXES](#)

# LIFELONG LEARNING PLATFORM

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