

FEASIBILITY STUDY ON NATIONAL LIFELONG LEARNING PLATFORMS



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Context and objectives

Context

This study is part of the Lifelong Learning Platform's (LLLP) work at European level to advocate for the development of lifelong learning as a comprehensive and holistic European concept, strategy and policy. According to LLLP and the European Commission, lifelong learning covers education and training across all ages and in all areas of life, be it formal, non-formal or informal. There are still wide differences between EU Member States in terms of integrated policies in education and training or national culture and traditions as regards civil society consultation and involvement in policy design and implementation. Desk research and the study results confirm that there is an interest from education stakeholders to have more space for dialogue and cooperation but many barriers persist.

Objectives

The study, conducted by Lifelong Learning Platform in 2016-2017, investigates the cross-sector cooperation at national level and analyses the existing national cultures related to lifelong learning and the extent to which they are in line with EU policies and recommendations in 5 European countries. There is a specific focus on cross-sector cooperation, consultation of civil society by policy-makers and understanding of the lifelong learning concept by national, regional and local organisations. The present feasibility study aims to collect the national stakeholders' perception on their national context and concept regarding lifelong learning and cross-sector cooperation, knowledge about EU policies, and opinions on national platforms.

Lifelong Learning Platform
"Feasibility Study for National Lifelong Learning Platforms"
Executive Summary - September 2018

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This study was conducted and written in consultation with LLLP Members and partners during a two-year project carried out by the network in six pilot countries

With the financial support of the European Union.

Results of the survey

The respondents

Among the 129 respondents to the survey, most organisations are active in formal education (primary and secondary school education and higher education). One quarter of organisations is also involved in non-formal education and/or adult education. The other fields of activity covered are vocational education and training (20.2%), youth (14%), and early childhood and care (7%). Most respondents represent non-governmental organisations (35%), followed by higher education institutions (30%), public schools (20%), private institutions (9%), public administrations (5%), and public-private entities (3%).

Understanding of the lifelong learning concept

- 43% understand lifelong learning as “any kind of learning taking place throughout life, be it formal, informal or non-formal” (EU Commission’s definition)

A majority of respondents perceive that the lifelong learning concept is attributed to a specific sector in their country (vocational and continuing education, adult education, formal education or non-formal and informal learning). It is in Sweden that there is the highest percentage of people who seem to understand lifelong learning as defined at EU level (75%). It is below 50% for Portugal (45.2%), Slovakia (37.5%), Austria

(36%), and Hungary (31%).

Knowledge about EU and national policies in lifelong learning

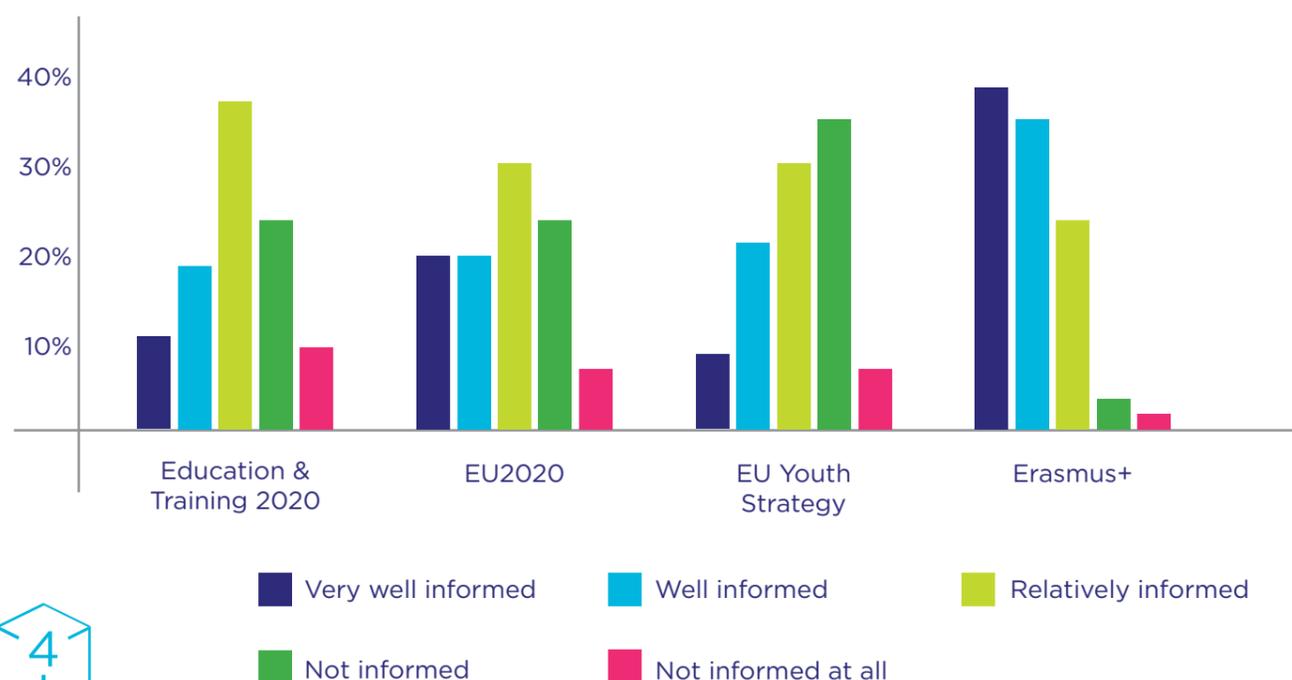
- Lifelong learning is not a government priority according to 35.4% of all respondents

If more than 20% of the respondents consider that there is a lifelong learning strategy in Austria and Sweden, it goes down to 68% in Portugal and around half in Slovakia and Hungary.

- Knowledge about EU policies is without surprise higher on Erasmus+

Most of that knowledge comes from the EU level rather than the national one: education stakeholders mostly get their information from EU institutions (50%), from European organisations (31%) and Ministry of education (31%), other information channels are the national commissions on education (24%), civil society organisations (26%), and other sources (20%). “Others” include newsletters, media, partners, universities, other ministries, national agencies and professional or personal networks.

- A majority thinks that EU policies have an impact at national level

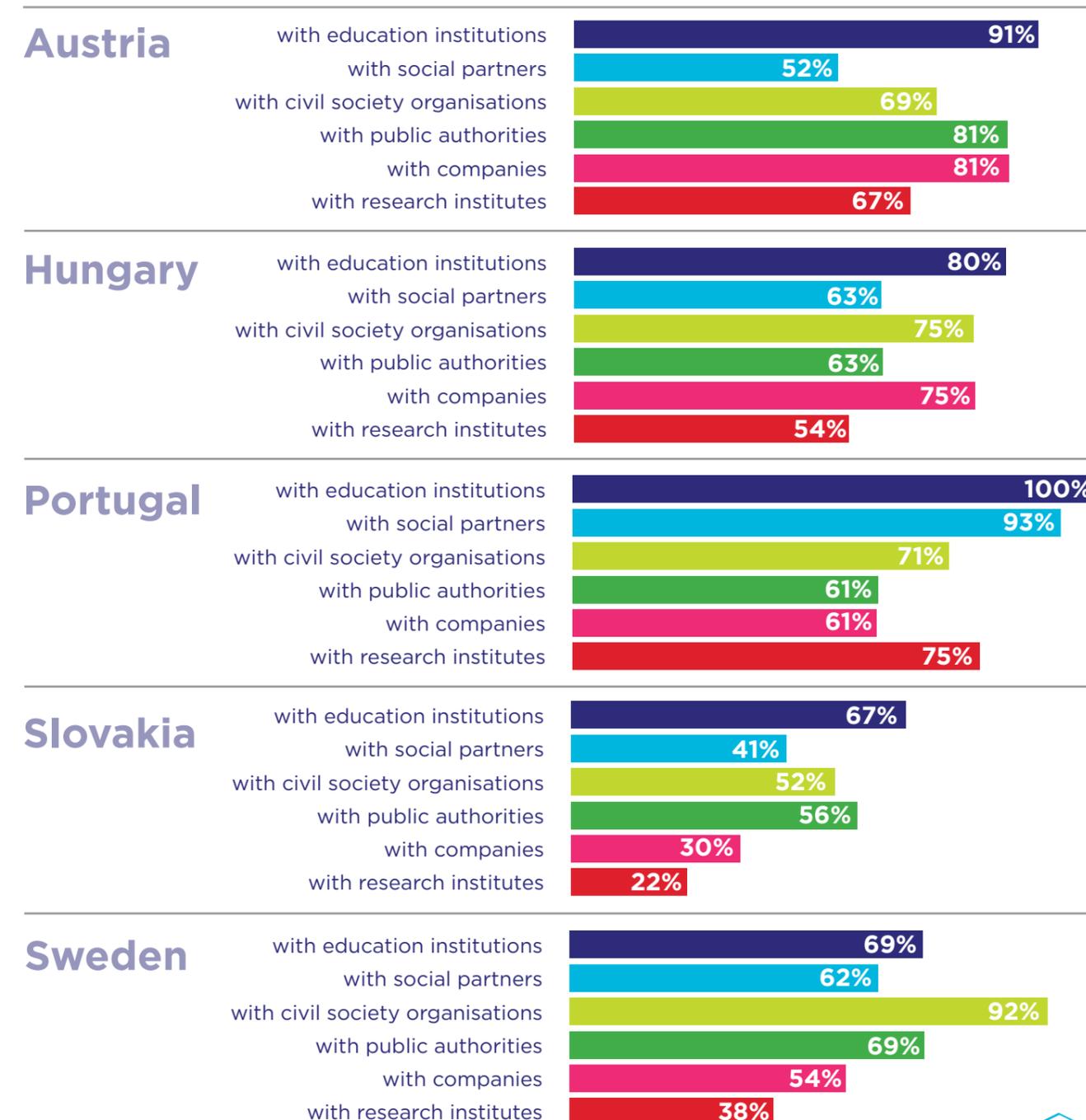


A majority of respondents declared that it has an impact on their national level (53%), and a significant percentage responded, “it should have one” (27%). Only a few responded that it does not have any impact (6%). 12% of respondents do not know whether they have an impact on their national context or not.

There is strong cooperation with other educational institutions (although with huge differences between countries) but limited with research institutes. Education stakeholders cooperate mostly for: training and learning activities, mobility and exchanges, social and cultural activities and other type of cooperation at EU and international levels.

Cross-sector cooperation and partnerships

Level of cooperation according to respondents



Cooperation with public authorities

Cooperation with public authorities is not systematic

Only 4% of responding organisations “always” cooperate with public authorities on national policies in education, training, and youth. 72% cooperate “sometimes”, and 24% never cooperate. National consultation culture is stronger in Sweden (9% cooperate “always” and 72% “sometimes”) and Austria (9% “always” and 81% “sometimes”). It is much lower in Hungary (0% “always” and 50% “sometimes”).

The dissatisfaction of organisations regarding their level of dialogue or cooperation with public authorities is substantial, with a third of them (35%) not being satisfied. None of the organisations is “totally satisfied” with its dialogue or cooperation between policy makers and CSOs in their country. 5% are “very satisfied” and 23% are “satisfied”. Overall, satisfaction is higher in Austria and Sweden. In Hungary, more than half of the organisations are not satisfied.

The reasons are: The lack of resources, the lack of interest or trust between policy-makers and education stakeholders, the public authorities’ focus on formal education, the lack of understanding and communication, the bureaucracy of public

administrations and the political agenda (elections and short-term politics).

Interest in participating in national lifelong learning platforms

- **Respondents are largely interested in participating in national lifelong learning platforms**

Respondents were asked whether they were interested in participating in national or regional lifelong learning platforms that would allow them to better express their views at EU, local and national levels. The participants were largely interested (60% “yes”, and 39% “maybe”), though the next questions show that their primary interest in such platforms is not to have a voice in policy-making but rather to have better opportunities for cooperation and exchange of best practices between education stakeholders.

- **The 3 main reasons why they would like to participate in such platforms are:**

1. To exchange best practices and share knowledge (55% strongly agree, 40% agree)
2. To meet new collaborators and expand potential partnerships (37% strongly agree, 53% agree)
3. To get information on funding (32% strongly agree, 49% agree).

Outlooks and recommendations

The process for launching pilot projects

This section is dedicated to the concrete setting up of permanent national lifelong learning platforms in EU Member States. It considers the following issues: the process of the creation and the different stages leading to it; the function or role of the platforms; the key conditions for their success; the challenges that may arise from its creation to its sustainability; and the organisational aspects.

Recommendations in EU and national contexts

At European level

- European policy initiatives should encourage and support cross-sectoral cooperation and dialogue

at national level e.g. structured dialogue in Youth (Erasmus+), European Semester national consultations, NQFs bodies etc.

- European programmes and funding schemes should support transnational cooperation, peer learning activities and exchange of good practices between countries to build on existing examples of cross sectoral cooperation and help them develop and/or encourage national stakeholders’ forums and gathering.
- Efforts to raise awareness about EU lifelong learning policies and initiatives at national level are needed. The EU should improve its communication and make better use of civil society organisations at EU level and their transnational networks.
- An appropriate European call for proposals should be opened to launch a national platform with prior fundraising efforts to ensure co-funding.

- The European Semester process has highlighted the need for cross-sector cooperation in education and training in its recommendations while running the national consultations. These practices could be used to further strengthen and make such national gathering and dialogue among stakeholders more systematic.

At national level

- The platform / forum initiative should be launched in one or a limited number of pilot countries by a consortium of strong civil society organisations supported by LLLP and its members. To begin with, pilot projects can take the form of ‘forums’ or more informal gatherings.
- The consortiums shall act as key pivots in the selected country and do a great deal of research

work on lifelong learning national policies (legal documents and implementation), mapping of stakeholders and mobilisation of additional financial and human resources.

- The audience of the platforms / forums should initially be composed of civil society organisations from as many education sectors as possible.
- The platforms/forums should take regional contrasts into account in its analysis of the implementation of lifelong learning policies. This is relevant especially when education is a regional competence.
- The organisation of LLL Forums and informal gatherings can be the start of the creation of more regular forums that in some cases would lead to permanent platforms, provided that there is some commitment and willingness to pursue the initiative.

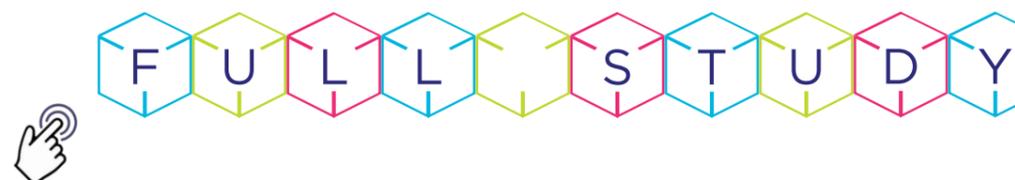
Conclusions

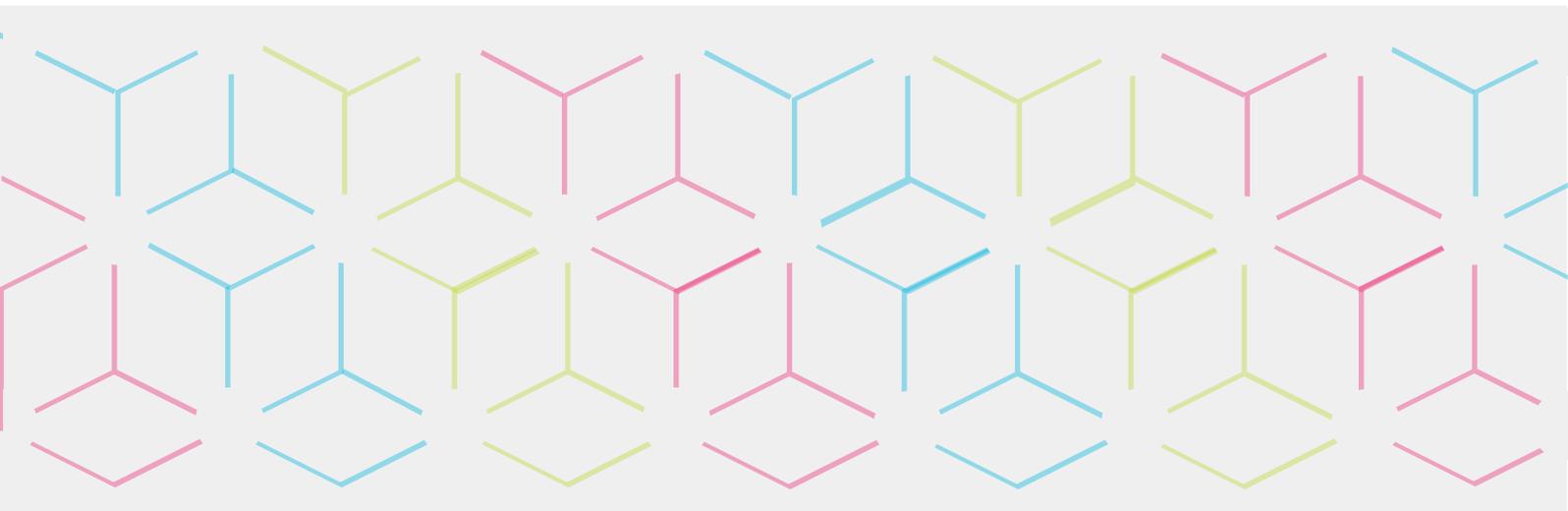
In recent years, some Member States have launched new lifelong learning strategies. It is the case in EU countries (Slovakia, Austria, etc.) but even outside EU borders (i.e. in Turkey). It shows that the EU can have impact on national policies even when not having binding power in that regard. However, the idea of setting up lifelong learning platforms is not meant to create an organisation for implementing EU policies with a top-down approach. Such platforms are very useful as network nodes between local stakeholders representing citizens from all sectors covering formal, non-formal and informal education, and the upper level, national policy-makers and public authorities who decide on the public policies in education, and European stakeholders, who try to foster policy convergence and strategic guidance for the improvement of EU education systems from a bottom-up perspective.

Platforms are therefore a key instrument to contribute to democracy, active citizenship, legitimacy of institutions, and dialogue with civil society. Civil society representations are often the organisations that best

understand the needs and issues of ‘those who are affected by the policies’ in the field of education, which is a sector that is largely managed by public actors and funding. They can be good partners for traditional representatives of professionals, trade unions and other social partners and contribute considerably to a balanced and healthy representation of interest in cooperation and dialogue with public authorities.

The writing of the feasibility study has been a valuable experience for the Lifelong Learning Platform and brings interesting perspectives for policy developments at national level. The Lifelong Learning Platform will keep on promoting the idea of setting up national platforms in the coming years and will consider the possibility of conducting an update of the study in the future. LLLP will continue to advocate for the prompt organisation of lifelong learning forums, as it strongly believes in the relevance and benefits for national lifelong learning policies. LLLP will now focus on the practical aspects of establishing pilot projects with all interested stakeholders.





LIFELONG LEARNING PLATFORM

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