

Topic: Unemployment. The overall unemployment rate in all 27 EU member states is currently at 6.9 percent, which equals 16.572 million people. Much room for improvement then, even for adult education. This edition of InfoLetter highlights various examples and concepts which could help to improve unemployment through adult education (pages 2-4).



Cartoon: Mester

EAEA: We want to make use of our strengths

Europe. *The European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) has elected its new President, Sue Waddington, at the AGM in Ireland.*

(Michael Sommer) The sky is high, the grass is green and the sea is stormy in Ireland – a perfect day then for the EAEA (European Association for the Education of Adults) to reform and reflect on the future. Both are successful: Sue Waddington (UK) succeeds the Hungarian János Tóth, who was in office for six years, and the members also decided at the conference, which this year took place on the coast near Dublin, on a comprehensive programme of activities for the next few years. The AGM and adult education in general gained particular significance through a speech on the topic given by President McAleese of Ireland – the first time a state president has ever attended an EAEA conference.

Making use of members' competences

On the priorities of her future work, the new president said that, "In the future we want above all to make use of our members' competences and knowledge in order to increase the value of adult education in Europe". The main areas of focus for her are reducing social exclusion and improving the integration of migrants. Within her own organisation, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), Sue Waddington is responsible for this area and has, in addition, many other roles on a European level. One of her first tasks, therefore, will be to write to all 120 members of the EAEA, asking them to work together in various themed working parties. The members' strengths are the EAEA's strengths, said Ms Waddington.

Critical assistance for the action plan

As there is no European Institute for adult education, in the future the EAEA could potentially act as a reference for adult education. CEDEFOP in

Thessalonica (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training), does indeed cover the field of adult education as a European education institution, however, the establishment is aimed predominantly towards vocational training. The EAEA embraces the path that CEDEFOP also takes, which is to measure and document non-formal competences (see InfoNet interview with Aviana Bulgarelli in InfoLetter 2/2008), but believes that adult education goes further than that – adult education is a "basic human right". The EU Commission's "Lifelong Learning" programme could be seen as a big step in this direction, even if some important aspects, such as 'learning to learn', are not covered by it. The EAEA intends to continue to assist in this programme, on which it worked intensively in the planning stages, and to put forward suggestions for improvement. It will continue to provide critical assistance in EU Commission activities, despite being sponsored itself by the EU.

Lobbying for the adult education cause and sparking specialist debate on a European level are not the only tasks of the EAEA. The organisation, whose headquarters are in Brussels, has established for itself a stable financial foundation over the last few years, allowing it to be able to make a name for itself as a service-providing organisation in the area of adult education. "We are an effective organisation and can therefore influence what is going on in a reliable manner" said Ms Waddington.

Full story in database

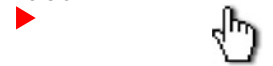


Sue Waddington



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Unemployment and Adult Education – What is the European Union doing about it?

New Grundtvig opportunities in 2009

Europe. Grundtvig is changing in 2009. You will still be able to apply for In-Service Training grants, Preparatory Visits and Grundtvig Partnerships, but added to these will be an exciting new range of funding opportunities: Assistantships, Workshops and an Initiative on Volunteering in Europe for Seniors (GIVES).

Be more purposeful in guiding tertiary education, OECD tells governments

Europe. In today's knowledge-driven global economy, countries need to build on tertiary education to generate innovation, sustain competitiveness and boost economic growth. A new OECD report, Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society, offers policy recommendations to help meet these goals.

The history of adult education

Europe. Central European researchers have studied the history of adult education in the Pecs region (in Hungary), the town which will be the European Cultural Capital in 2010.

Projects

A project review for the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue

Projects. In the "European Year of Intercultural Dialogue" the results of the research project "Shaping society together – Islamic organisations as partners in Baden-Württemberg", are helping make intercultural dialogue more targeted.

Adult education projects connect Balkan countries

Europe. According to Eurobarometer, unemployment is one of the greatest worries of European citizens. The European Union has various skills and initiatives for action in the employment area. They include the European action strategy, various financial aid funds and also a commitment-free information and experience exchange. A selection of them will be presented in this article.

(Simone Kaufhold) The social dimension of Europe is highly relevant in the everyday lives of its citizens. Their acceptance of the EU depends greatly on the extent to which European policy contributes to the improvement of living and working conditions. Since the founding of the European Community, the main responsibility for social policy continues to lie in the hands of the member states: European law only gives the EU the power to pass binding acts of law in selected cases. The action framework spans from European legislation competences to a commitment-free exchange.

One European Commission employment initiative is the cooperative network EURES (European Employment Services, 1993), which serves to promote the mobility of workers within the European economic area. Public employment agencies, unions and employers' associations are all part of the network. The coordination of the network is the task of the EC; the main aims being to inform and advise workers and to support employers. On the network's Internet portal, for example, Henna from Finland reports on how she found a job in Germany and Lithuanian Indre reports on her experience in Portugal. This initiative reaches out to two groups in particular: jobseekers and employed persons, however not so much to the unemployed.

EURES is also one of the main organisers of the European Job Days events, which have been initiating direct contact between jobseekers and employers since 2006. The focus of these yearly events is the recruitment of employees on the spot. What is significant is that the majority of the participants are there because they want to change their jobs, as was the case in Brussels in September 2008. The unemployed are again in a minority here. The participants are young, mostly female and boast a high level of education. The jobseekers themselves who go to the event, like Claire from Brussels, also rate it as "user-friendly and practical".

Another important instrument is the European Employment Strategy (one pillar of the Lisbon Strategy), which was developed to improve the exchange of information and opinions between the member states in order to create more and better jobs in the EU on the basis of a tried and tested procedure.

Employment policy guidelines relating to adult education are rather vague and call for the increase and optimisation of investment in human capital as well as for training and further education systems to be geared more towards new qualification demands.

The subtle difference: the new Strategic Priorities 2009

Europe. (Simone Kaufhold) On 8th October 2008 the European Commission published its Strategic Priorities for 2009: Although the majority remains unchanged, there are some interesting adjustments, in particular in the policy areas of validation, mobility and the exploitation of results. Proceeding with the validation of non-formal and informal learning is of prime importance for the Commission and has now become one of the priority areas for actions in 2009, along with those already in the original call. This should encourage the motivation of adult learners and thus also increase their participation in educational opportunities. According to the EU report on education published in 2008, increasing participation of 25 to 64 year-olds is still a key objective: In 2010 it should increase to 12.5% Europe-wide, rather than the current 9.7%, and the large gaps between the Eastern European countries (1.3% participation) and the Scandinavian front runners (32% in Sweden) should be closed. In order to achieve this objective, access to education should be made fairer and a quality framework, which considers learners, teachers and adult education centres alike, should be promoted.

2009 to be the European Year of Creativity and Innovation

Europe. The European Commission welcomes the news that the European Parliament, meeting in plenary session in Brussels, has, by adopting its report, supported the Commission proposal that 2009 be designated as the European Year of Creativity and Innovation.

In the parliamentary debate before the vote, Mr Ján Figel', Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth, explained how "education systems are subject to competing pressures: they have to face a growing range of challenges, as they equip young people with the knowledge, skills and attitudes they will need in our rapidly-changing society and economy, while also continuing to meet traditional educational requirements."

The Commissioner reiterated that "education can best meet these competing challenges by remaining true to itself and fostering young people's broad personal development. It must allow enough time and space for their innate talents and creativity to develop in a balanced way, combining ever-more important 'soft' competences, such as a sense of initiative or intercultural skills, with the so-called 'hard' skills in specific subject areas like mathematics and science."

Adult education centre comes to the rescue of the unemployed

Finland. *Non-formal adult education is taking the form of guidance for the unemployed in Finland, where the paper industry is laying off thousands. The worst hit area is Valkeakoski, in central Finland.*

(Sirkku Määttä) Take, for example, Pekka Nieminen (an imaginary person). Pekka has worked in the paper industry for five years. He is a pulping professional. Now he is being threatened with unemployment, as the local paper giant discontinues production in Finland.

This is the second time Pekka's plans for the future have been dashed in the past five years. Before it was a plywood mill that was being wound down. He was retrained and became properly qualified as an employee in a pulp mill. Now these skills are no longer needed either.

Valkeakoski College to the rescue

Pekka has access to a network of public services, including his local employment office, a vocational adult education centre, and an adult education centre, i.e. Valkeakoski College.

The unemployment office refers someone who has lost their job to the first stage in the process, Valkeakoski College. The college mainly offers non-formal adult education services to the city's residents. A day-long course is intended to familiarise people who have lost their jobs with the services of the employment office.

"The services of the employment office – information on vacant positions - are on-line. We teach people how to use the internet. We have to, because those who have been laid off are of all ages and by no means everyone has got a computer at home," says Kilkki-Rekola.

Guidance for retraining

Having surfed the employment office website, Pekka can go along to the adult education centre for a second, two-day course to help him update his jobseeker's documents: his CV and sample job application.

If the job application does not do the trick, he is referred to a 20 day training course providing guidance and advice on how to seek employment. The course will help him strengthen his jobseeking skills, look into various training options, and seek new directions in life. "I always say that being unemployed is a splendid opportunity to acquire vocational training, whether it's for the first time or the third," says Kilkki-Rekola.

The importance of making your own choice

At Valkeakoski College they have noticed that it is difficult to motivate the long-term unemployed to take training courses whose purpose it is to guide them back to employment. So for Pekka, too, a new career needs to be found quickly.

If the unemployed can choose what course to take themselves, it boosts their interest levels. The City of Valkeakoski offers the freedom to choose and a free course once a year.

"We generally run out of options based on people's own choice. By far the most popular one is IT," says Kilkki-Rekola.

From paper to metal

The layoffs in the forest and paper industry affect around a tenth of the almost 10,000 jobs in the Valkeakoski area. "It's an awful lot. Some of those laid off will retire, some will change occupation and some will relocate," says Riku Immonen, manager of the local employment office. Pekka's future will be most secure if he can find work in the metal or plastics industry; there are also jobs in logistics and property.

The paper industry is hugely important for the Finnish economy, accounting for over 15% of exported goods. Forestry as a whole accounts for around 20%. The share of jobs in the paper industry account is about 6% of all jobs in industry generally. The paper industry is concentrated in a few localities, where it has an immense impact on employment and prosperity. ▶

The "Frankfurt Way"

Germany. (Peter Brandt). The German financial metropolis, Frankfurt am Main, has set up an innovative programme to help the long-term unemployed gain a qualification. 25 to 45 year olds not possessing a professional qualification can gain modular certificates based on their strengths and with greater flexibility, get back on the job market within three years.

Frankfurt am Main (alias "Mainhattan") is normally best known for being a sky-scraping financial metropolis. But recently the city has made a name for itself based on an innovative programme to help the long-term unemployed gain a qualification. The "Frankfurt Way" supports jobseekers right through to achieving their professional qualification. The main target group is made up of those people who do not already possess a professional or vocational qualification. ...▶

Little education for the unemployed

Danemark. (Michael Voss) Unskilled and unemployed workers in Denmark have few chances to improve their qualifications and competencies. Official policy compels them to get a job instead – making them the first potential victims of unemployment when the economic conjuncture turns next time.

Linda Hansen left school without any exam. Later she learned that she is dyslexic. She had difficulty writing applications and never got a real job.

Four years ago social security offered to pay both fees and social benefit if she would start studying preparatory adult education at a non-residential folk high school that specializes in educating people with learning problems. ...▶

Mentally Challenged put their hopes in the EU

Romania. When national policy hinders post-treatment reintegration of the mentally challenged in Romania, social workers focus on the possibilities for solutions within a European framework. ▶

Computer Literacy Required In Employment

Malta. Computer Literacy is now being considered as one of the basic skills required by those in employment and others intending to return to work. ▶

Malta: Adult Education and Employment

Malta. Adult Education is increasingly playing a crucial role in Employment, both in helping to increase the employment rate and the quality of work. ▶

The Jobs Club

Poland. The Małopolskie Education, Cooperation and Counselling Centre, is offering a training programme for the long-term unemployed, in response to their most pressing needs. The programme is called The Jobs Club. ▶

Stepping into Work

Sweden. Stepping into Work project offers a training program in order to make employment easier through training and co-operation with employers, make use of former's skills and knowledge, increase interest and responsibility for the local environment as well as create conditions for integration. ▶

“Learning on the Job”

Germany. The Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), set up a comprehensive programme in October called “Learning on the Job”. ▶

Portugal: New Opportunities

Portugal. The “New Opportunities” Programme marks the government strategy for adult education and training and involves more than 500,000 Portuguese citizens with limited academic and professional qualifications. ▶

An innovative policy: built upon modular training courses

Switzerland. An example of best practice for training, which favours the unemployed. ▶

Training: major unknown for the new French public service for employment

France. On the 16th October, the new French public service for employment, “Pôle emploi”, was unveiled to the citizens of France. ▶

Earned income supplement

France. France is trying to fight the battle against long term unemployment for those less qualified. Its Members of Parliament have just brought in a new social minimum: an earned income supplement (RSA). ▶

Re-employment of the over-45s

Italy. The Italian project PARI – Action Programme for the Re-employment of Disadvantaged Workers – may represent a good practice to be reproduced in other countries. ▶

Principal Adult Education Data in Portugal

The Adult Education sector in Greece

Adult Education in Estonia

“Taking a step forward” in Hungary

Hungary. *Unemployment figures in Hungary in 2008 have become worse than the European Union average. With the aid of European Social Fund and Hungarian State financing, the State Employment Agency plans to reduce the unemployment figures by re-training adults who do not have higher qualifications.*

(Eva Tanczos) According to the very latest labour market statistics, the employment scene in Hungary is not very favourable. Compared to the rest of Europe, the country’s position in this respect is weakening. The European Commission’s latest figures show that the recent European recession has had its effect on unemployment: in the second half of 2008, unemployment has increased by 0.2 percent in the 27 member states. In spite of the slow down, there are 2.9 million more in employment today than there were compared to a year ago. There are significant differences to be seen between the various member states. With the exception of Hungary and Lithuania, more people are employed today than a year ago.

In August 2008 there were more than 30,000 fewer employed in Hungary than there were a year ago. The unemployment rate is 7.5%, as compared to the 6.6% average for the 27 EU countries. Of Hungary’s 10 million inhabitants, the number of those in work comes to 3,914,000, of which 317,000 are unemployed. Compared to the international rate used for the 15-64 age group, the estimated employment rate is 57.1%.

It is the wave of people retiring at the beginning of the year that is, to a great extent, to blame for the changes in Hungary, but many employers were affected by the redundancies in the various state enterprises. The structural problems of the Hungarian labour market has consolidated, the position of young people setting out on their careers is worsening, as is the number of women that are unemployed. 50.3% of the unemployed have been looking for work for at least a year, or longer.

Considerable changes

In 2007, considerable changes took place in the systems, both as regards means and the way they were set up, in the interests of making the system of aid and support to help employment more lucid and more effective and to harmonise it more in the public interest. The rules and regulations of the state structure of the employment service have changed: the regional employment centres have taken over the duties of the city and the county employment centres. They reviewed the system of further aid for employment, as well as wages support, the programme of support that was available in the labour market, the way to support job creation and also help in re-training. Hopefully, these measures will help to steer the Hungarian labour market in a positive direction over the next few years.

The new re-training rules for the labour market have raised the additional earnings allowances so as to encourage job-seekers to take part in re-training schemes. A job-seeker participating in a re-training scheme can now receive 100% wages

support, instead of 60%. Those registered as job-seekers participating in a training scheme recommended by the employment agency for at least 20 hours per week, can now have access to the full additional earnings allowance.

It is also important, in cases of work-related stop-pages, that they have knowledge of what is needed in order to remain competitive. This is why in-house training may also be eligible for state support.

Re-training support for over 22,000 adults

The largest re-training programme is entitled: “Take a step forward”. Its second stage started on 1st September 2007 and will last until 31st August 2009, jointly financed by the European Social Fund and the Hungarian Government and run by the State Employment Service. Re-training support is there and available for over 22,000 adults. The fundamental aim is the re-training of adults with low school-leaving qualifications as regards technical skills. The programme covers the costs of re-training the participants. In addition to this, they are entitled to additional cash support and support for educational books. There are special mentors to help train those adults who suffer with learning difficulties. The programme’s range of possibilities ensures that those adults who have skills in areas that are now obsolete will be able to receive re-training in skills that are currently in demand in the job market. The obsolete trades that will qualify for professional re-training are those that the adult person acquired at least 15 years ago and has been unable, for at least 5 years, to find a job in that particular professional field, or else one who has not been able to pursue their original trade/ profession because of ill health. The persons eligible to take part in the programme are those aged between 18 and 62. No support can be given for the training of adults with higher and further educational qualifications. Technical training can only receive support if the training takes place in a county/region where there is a definite requirement for that type of technical skill training.

This possibility of being educated for free has aroused considerable interest. In particular in the capital, Budapest, there are great numbers of applicants for the courses. Hopefully, the country can advance a step further in dealing with the problems of unemployment.

... ▶

The death of the Celtic tiger

Ireland. Unemployment in Ireland has jumped dramatically from 4 to 6.3% in the past year with migrant workers being five times more likely to experience unemployment than Irish people.

Unemployment is a word which has largely been absent from Irish vocabulary for more than ten years to the extent that the Irish working population especially in the younger cohort have almost taken for granted the availability of paid work, and opportunities to move around in the labour market.

... ▶