

Topic: The European Year For Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion 2010. In the occasion of this European year in the current InfoLetter, information and examples are compiled from adult education. On the EU's part, along with other programmes, it is the European Social Fund which has as its primary intention to combat exclusion and poverty, first and foremost, through continuing education and employment promotion. However, at national level, adult education can also achieve a lot toward the support of disadvantaged persons.

Cartoon: Mester



European Social Fund: Flexible support for adult education

Europe. *Supporting lifelong learning is a main goal of the European Social Fund (ESF). The 76 billion Euros made available by the EU for the 2007-2013 time period will serve mostly to provide disadvantaged persons with better employment prospects, and thus combat poverty and exclusion.*

(Michael Sommer) Katarzyna is a good example. As a Polish migrant with only a poor knowledge of the German language, she barely had a chance to find a job in Germany. Then the young woman registered on a training course co-financed by the ESF at Akademie Klausenhof. The aim: to learn German and gain a better employability.

Since the ESF's establishment in 1957, the EU has spent several hundred billion Euros, in order to give Katarzyna and countless others in Europe an individual outlook. With the financial crisis in 2008/2009, the ESF has also proven itself as a flexible and effective instrument in strengthening both the labour market and the economy. For example, in Sweden 3,500 employees of the highly threatened automobile industry (Saab, Volvo) participated in professional skills development programmes in 27 projects. Thanks to the ESF, rather than dismissing their employees, companies in Lithuania are able to place them in public work at short notice. 13,000 people are profiting from this project.

Education is not a repair operation

For Thomas Bender, acting director of the ESF coordination department in the head office of Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities at the European Commission, this flexibility to act quickly with innovative projects tailored to different regions, is an essential strength of the ESF programme. The considerable funding also facilitates a great reliability and

planning certainty for the respective recipients. Bender emphasised to InfoNet that, with the new support period, continuing education is no longer to be recognised only as a "repair operation", but as a necessary possibility for the development of a country's human capital. Approximately 60 to 80% of all ESF projects are, in a wider sense, assigned to education. The EU provides not only "niche support, but a massive intervention" for supporting disadvantaged regions and people, said Bender, who is in educational work himself. The ESF is in this sense a considerable programme toward educational support.



Thomas Bender

Energy for pointless formalities

In the present support period, the ESF provides support in two areas: "Convergence" (supporting growth and employment in certain regions) and "regional competitiveness and employment". In addition, the individual German federal states develop national programmes corresponding to the regional issues, which will in turn be approved by the EU. Project management subsequently lies in the hands of the respective federal states, mostly via their own project agency.

In Germany, more specifically in the largest federal state, North Rhine-Westphalia, the government has cut the funds available for continuing education by more than 25% since 2002. Now in many areas ESF funds are used for concrete projects. This has the disadvantage, reports Reinhold Sandkamp, relevant department manager of Akademie Klausenhof, of having to devise a new project every year.

Full story in database ►

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**EUROPEAN
AFFAIRS**

Poverty between reality and perceptions: The European Year For Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion 2010
Inspired by its founding principle of solidarity, the European Union has joined forces with its Member States to make 2010 the European Year For Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. ▶

Ms Androulla Vassiliou is the new Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth. ▶

The Lisbon Treaty introduces a new form of public participation in European Union policy shaping: the European citizens' initiative. ▶

Commission publishes „Key competences for a changing world“ ▶

**NATIONAL
AFFAIRS**

Men's path to studies goes through action

Finland. It's said that Finnish men neither talk nor kiss. Statistics show that they don't study either, at least for their interest. ▶

Romani people in Hungarian public administration: an opportunity to break out?

Hungary. The Hungarian Government has initiated the admission of 200 Romani graduates to work in the Hungarian public administration. ▶

State redirects funding for professional training towards the unemployed

France. In view of the increase in unemployment the state has recently given a nudge to social partners responsible for financing training for workers. The result of which was the passing of a new reform act on training. ▶

CONFINTEA VI: Adult education and learning - From rhetoric to action

UNESCO's Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI), planned for May 2009 and postponed till December due to swine flu, was held in Belém from 1 to 4 December 2009 and hosted by the Brazilian Government with an attendance of over 1,500 participants from around 155 Member States.

(Katarina Popovic) As one of the biggest global events in adult education and learning, the conference took several years of preparation, 5 big regional conferences and numerous documents, and faced huge expectations and much hope. The conference brought together UNESCO Member States, United Nations agencies, multi- and bi-lateral cooperation agencies, organisations from civil society, the private sector and learners from all over the world, and had to cope with the global diversity of understanding and approaching adult learning. The ambitious goal to provide an important platform for policy dialogue and advocacy on adult learning, covering the broad range of issues and topics, was completed in 4 intensive days – through speeches, plenary sessions, panels, round tables, 34 workshops, exhibitions and the work of several conference bodies (The Steering Committee, The Drafting Committee, and The Commission).

Powerful words

The conference was preceded by the FISC – International Civil Society Forum, which was held from 28 to 30 November at the University of Belém, hosted by the ICAE, where numerous representatives of civil society, non-governmental organisations and associations gathered to develop recommendations for CONFINTEA VI, which should help the conference to move from rhetoric to coherent action. Marked by the powerful words of Paulo Freire and delightful voice of Mercedes Sosa, in a spirit of solidarity and cultural exchange, FISC activities – speeches, discussions and workshops – drew attention to the right to education, non-formal education and learning, to the problems of marginalised groups, the lack of financial support, appropriate governance, suitable data collection, amongst other things. Although not so highly formal and structured, the FISC gave a framework for exchange and a platform for the civil society, that helped toward developing a strong united position, reflecting the views of thousands of people from all over the world.

On the other hand, CONFINTEA VI itself, formal by nature as a Category II intergovernmental conference, was attended and marked by the presence of high national delegations, official addresses, outstanding guests' speeches, etc. The important role was given to the host country Brazil and its representatives, and the adult learning issues specific to South America had a significant place during the conference. The participants debated a wide range of issues, including policies and governance for adult education, literacy as a key competence for lifelong learning, quality assurance and the assessment of learning outcomes, participation and inclusion, as well as financial mechanisms. The workshops es-



established a very good framework for more intensive exchange on specific issues, and the outcomes and recommendations of every single activity were considered for the final outcomes of the conference.

Positive atmosphere

The positive atmosphere in the huge Hangar conference centre was created thanks to the good facilities, the presence of kind hosts, numerous cultural activities throughout the day (every coffee-break had a touch of samba, playing or dancing, with the highlight of a carnival at the end), multiple possibilities for meetings and exchanges, the hard-working Conference Secretariat as well as a series of activities and events.

The conference's main achievement is probably the call for governments to "take forward, with a sense of urgency and at an accelerated pace, the agenda of adult learning and education" and to redouble the efforts to meet adult literacy goals. The general feeling of the 'world facing various types of crises' dominated the conference, which prompted discussions on how adult education and learning can help individuals and societies to cope with them. The conference can be seen as a "wake-up call to governments and the international community that, without a greatly reinforced effort, the Education for All goals will never be achieved," as Davidson Hepburn, President of UNESCO's General Conference, said.

Belém Framework for Action

In the final document "Belém Framework for Action" (adopted after extensive negotiations, with hundreds of amendments from national delegations and several caucuses working during the conference, and with the input of The Commission), the policies and recommendations having common value and relevance around the globe were laid down. Adult education and learning are put in the framework of lifelong learning, encompassing all types, forms and contents of education, with the strong reference to their role in achieving strategic goals, such as MDGs, EFA and others. The Belém Framework for Action stresses that "adult learning and education have a critical role in responding to contemporary cultural, economic, political and social challenges," and underlines the right to an education that should meet the needs of the individuals and those of their society. The documents stress the importance of literacy as a key to lifelong learning and an "inherent part of the right to education... and a prerequisite for the development of personal, social and political empowerment.

Full story in database ▶

Unemployed women in educational projects

Poland. *In Poland, the social issue of social groups facing the threat of exclusion from society only emerged after 1989. As a result, experiences in this area are limited. On account of its scale, the group to attract the most attention was, and still is, the unemployed, including those in long-term unemployment.*

(Anna Walulik, Wit Pasierbek) People who have lost their jobs and are left without assistance experience a variety of problems. These are most frequently equated with a lack of financial resources. In the meantime, the issue generates further problems in the psychological and spiritual spheres. The vocationally inactive comprise another group whose experience of problems closely approximates to that of the unemployed. To a large extent, the group consists of women who made the decision not to continue working while bringing up their children. It is for this reason that some regions are targeting groups of unemployed women with forms of education launched under the EU's Human Capital projects.

Small towns and villages have proved to be a 'fertile' environment for the process of social marginalisation and the problem of women in long-term unemployment is particularly evident in such communities. This situation, so disadvantageous to women, is something that local government institutions are endeavouring to meet head-on by creating educational programmes targeting that particular social group. One such project was created in the Commune of Szamocin, located in the Wielkopolskie Voivodship.

Data from the Statistical Office of the State Employment Office reveals both a preponderance of women among the long-term-unemployed inhabitants of the region and an upward trend in this area (exceeding 75% in 2008). In respect of the job market, a lack of suitable vacancies, issues of age and problems related to poor education and qualifications all have an impact on the difficult situation which unemployed women face. These factors make it impossible to participate in crucial aspects of life and constitute a destructive experience, which results in low self-esteem, passivity and a lack of faith in personal potential. For women, unemployment is thus an experience which determines their social marginalisation. An analysis of the social situation and the lives of these women reveals that the predominant barriers are a lack of specialised vocational skills, poor education and qualifications, a lack of analytical and organisational skills and an inability to operate actively on the job market.

New skills – new possibilities

A project was established with a view to reducing the intensification of social isolation, the decline in social and vocational activities and financial degradation. Entitled New skills – new possibilities, it was addressed to 9 unemployed women of working age, all of whom had been receiving social assistance on a long-term basis. The project aimed to raise the participants level of self-esteem; increase their faith in their own potential; enable them to acquire communicative skills; increase their motivation; enable them

to acquire the social skills which will make operating actively on the job market easier; obtain, update and add to their vocational qualifications; and acquire new vocational skills and areas of competence. The project was drawn up to incorporate instruments for active integration (activation in respect of vocational and educational matters, as well as health care and social issues) and conducted by social workers, career advisors and psychologists.

Full story in database ►

Breaking social patterns

Denmark. *Motivating early school leavers for learning is one of the main challenges for adult education. A recent study shows that Danish non-formal adult education has created learning environments that is able of breaking social patterns – thanks to special pedagogic approaches.*

(Michael Voss) "I enlisted, because I had a depression. I never really fitted in anywhere. Actually, most of the time I just stayed in bed and did nothing.

Then I heard of this place. And I thought: OK, if it is not all about reading, it may be all right.

And for the first time I had an experience of being understood and accepted as I am. There was a fantastic atmosphere.

Full story in database ►

The crisis quadruples job creation course attendance

Turkey. *In crisis-hit 2009, attendance on job creation courses quadrupled as against the previous year. In Turkey, job creation courses aimed at adults aged 15 and above are provided by Popular Education Centres attached to the Ministry of National Education, Continuing Education Centres attached to universities, private education centres and non-governmental organisations.*

(Gokcen Camliyurt) Certain deficiencies within the vocational training system have lead to a national shortage of semi-skilled staff. The Labour Institution is endeavouring to alleviate this shortage by means of organising courses. Rising unemployment caused by the global economic crisis has made the Institution's mission even more crucial. While in 2008 the number of courses organised by the Institution for the benefit of unemployed persons aged 15 and above was around the 1,000 level nationally, in crisis-hit 2009 the number of such courses rose to more than 9,000. These courses are only available to the unemployed. No fee is charged to the participants – such people for whom jobs are unavailable also receive "pocket money" of 15 lira (11 euro) for each day that they attend training.

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NATIONAL AFFAIRS

Sweden. Following a government decision 4,000 unemployed young people are now going to be offered three months' education in the country's adult education centres. ►

Norway. In Norway there are no more than around 500 Roma. They now want to start learning to enable them to cope better in society. ►

Romania. President Basescu delivers a speech, which may well destine him for either continued presidency or continued prosecution. He chooses to emphasize three priorities. The first is education, the second is poverty. ►

Germany. With "Giving Europe a soul", the social institute Kommende Dortmund is to educate East European seminarians about the church's responsibility in the process of European unification and encourage active participation. ►

Germany. Germany promotes the integration of older people in the employment market through an extensive programme. ►

Greece. Second Chance Schools (SCSs) is the EU Initiative to combat the social exclusion of early school leavers. ►

Sweden. One new proposal is to introduce special "mentors for engagement". ►

Lithuania. In the context of the global financial crisis, attention for financial education in Lithuania has been growing steadily. ►

Switzerland. The FSEA has conducted an investigation into what effect the crisis is having on continuing education. ►

Portugal. Background: Adult Education System in Portugal. ►

PROJECTS

EU. ComNet - A resource pack to enhance networkers' skills ▶

UK. Money management training programme to improve job-seekers' skills ▶

Norway. BRIDGES introduced the use of Language and Culture Guides (LCGs) as a tool for communication, learning and access to society. ▶

Austria. Mauthausen concentration camp: Guide Training ▶

Austria. Integration and Dialogue: five-part series of seminars ▶

Hungary. Adult Education Civil Network efficient civil partnership and professional representation in Hungary ▶

Hungary. Civil Life - Good Practices for women's role in Europe ▶

Portugal. EUR-Alpha: A new European network to impel quality and empowerment in literacy ▶

Austria. Learning at the Witching Hour ▶

SCIENCE

Netherlands. A study of interventions to prevent loneliness revealed that there were few effective interventions to counteract social exclusion. ▶

Austria. New Study: Educational Disadvantages for Women ▶

PUBLICATIONS

Switzerland. Mandate for a bill on continuing education as report ▶

Portugal: "One Million New Opportunities" ▶

Austria: Learning and teaching through biography ▶

The problem of poverty as a restriction on access to training and employment

Italy. *In Italy, social problems have always been more easily visible in certain areas in the south of the country, with reference to highly differentiated target groups of people. The paradox – not just in Italy – is that poverty fails to encourage participation in the world of training and employment. What is the situation in Italy during the current European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, and how can training make the difference?*

(Teresa la Marca) "Providing citizens with enhanced and more marketable skills always makes an immediate contribution towards an improvement in economic indicators (i.e., higher productivity, lower unemployment rates, etc.), as well as social indicators (citizen ability to demand the rights associated with citizenship)", states Antonello Scialdone, Director of the ISFOL (Institute for the Development of Vocational Training for Workers), a national agency for promotion of the Lifelong Learning Programme and co-author of a recent research paper on poverty in Italy.

Poverty restricts access to higher education

A Eurobarometer research paper on poverty and social inclusion, recently presented at Brussels, showed that 8 European citizens out of 10 believe that poverty restricts access to higher education, while 74% of those who responded said they felt that poverty restricts chances of finding employment. In effect, Scialdone remarks, "In Italy, particularly in precisely those regions of the south suffering the highest levels of poverty and unemployment, the range of continued and life-long training services has to struggle hard to meet the highest standards of training quality. The territorial variable is therefore a rather delicate one. Of course, this is just another illustration of the need to increase and enhance the effectiveness of the systems and structures intended for the broadest strata of at-risk groups".

The employment and training situation in Italy is a difficult one, as shown by the fact that the proportion of individuals living below the poverty level – compared to total population – ranges from 35.5% to 45.2% in the south of the country. Cross-referenced against the most recent unemployment data for the country as a whole, this fact shows an increase in unemployment rates for 2009, to be followed by further, anticipated, increases in 2010 and 2011. These rates are in line with the unemployment rates within the Euro zone generally, in which unemployment appears destined to reach 10% in the second half of 2010 – a new record for the post-war period (OECD data).

In Italy, according to European data, the Italian unemployment rate figures are aggravated by the fact that the transition from academic education to employment is more prolonged than in other European countries, and is often complicated by long periods of unemployment and temporary employment, followed, in many cases, by a return to unemployment. The principal disadvantaged groups are as follows: the young, unqualified workers, immigrants, ethnic minorities, and persons engaged in temporary or atypical employment.

Immigrants and training

The equation "The lower the educational level = The fewer the training opportunities" is further demonstrated by the experiences of migrants themselves. A research paper on migrant integration, conducted by the Institute and covering four regions of the central north, shows that the demand for the training and education of foreign citizens living in Italy is increasing gradually, in near proportion to the increased migratory flows affecting Italy. "The study reveals one very interesting fact, though", Mr. Scialdone remarks, "it demonstrates the existence of a sort of vicious circle, in which the demand for vocational training and adult educational opportunities is significantly correlated with the cultural level of the immigrants themselves. In other words, utilisation of the structures intended to offer these programmes and opportunities increases proportionally with the educational level of the target group of persons concerned".

Measures to combat the lack of training

"There is a need for reorientation, towards an approach intended to provide training incentives. In other words", Scialdone remarks, "if we are to be successful in achieving the social integration and employment inclusion of the target groups concerned, the more vulnerable categories of persons involved will require supervision, for the purpose of preventing them from losing contact with the job markets and subsiding into inactivity. For this reason, persons participating in reintegration programmes and receiving compensation must be encouraged to maintain an active attitude of mind; they must participate in training programmes and actively search for work, because if they do not, they may forfeit their social and economic support. Only the development of skills and the utilisation of training opportunities will enable these persons to fill the so-called 'new jobs', including the so-called 'emerging' new jobs".

Full story in database ▶

Integrating immigrants: the role of libraries

Malta chaired Rebel the Libraries Network start-up conference with representatives from Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, and Turkey. Rebel means Reading Between the Lines. This is a Grundtvig Action Learning partnership intended to educate and integrate immigrants. Full story in database ▶

