

Adults in Formal Education: Policies and Practice in Europe





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FOREWORD



Throughout the last decade, lifelong learning has occupied a central place on the agenda of European policy cooperation in the field of education and training. Adult learning has, in turn, been recognised as an important component of lifelong learning.

Adult learning opportunities are essential to ensure economic and social progress, as well as the personal fulfillment of individuals. Adult education is linked to returns in terms of improved civic participation, better health and greater individual well-being. The public and private benefits of adult education and training include greater employability and better-quality employment.

Almost ten years ago, EU Member States set themselves five targets or 'benchmarks' in education and training. One of these was that by 2010, an average of at least 12.5 % of adults should participate in lifelong learning. In 2009, Member States agreed to raise this benchmark to 15 % to be attained by 2020, as part of the strategic framework for cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020') ⁽¹⁾. With the support of the Commission, Member States are now working together to achieve this commonly agreed objective.

The European Commission's Communication *'It is never too late to learn'* (European Commission, 2006) highlighted the essential contribution of adult education and training to competitiveness, employability and social inclusion. This Communication was followed by the Action Plan on Adult Learning *'It is always a good time to learn'* (European Commission, 2007), which identified five key areas for action in the field of adult education and training:

- to analyse the effect of reforms in all sectors of education and training on adult learning;
- to improve the quality of provision in the adult learning sector;
- to increase the opportunities for adults to achieve a qualification at least one level higher than before (to go 'one step up');
- to speed up the process of assessment of skills and social competences and their validation and recognition in terms of learning outcomes;
- to improve the monitoring of the adult learning sector.

⁽¹⁾ Council of the European Union, 2009. Council Conclusions on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020), OJ C 119/2, 28.5.2009.

The Action Plan on Adult Learning ran until the end of 2010 and the Commission intends to propose a new Action Plan in the course of 2011. It is therefore an appropriate time to look back at the Action Plan and its priorities and analyse how different European countries addressed the challenges.

In this context, I am very pleased to present this Eurydice report on adult education and training that has been prepared in direct relation to the Action Plan on Adult Learning, in particular its objective of providing adults with opportunities to go 'one step up' and upgrade their educational attainment. The report looks not only at the opportunities for under-qualified adults to achieve a formal qualification, but it also covers policies and measures for enhancing the participation of adult returners in higher education. All these aspects are illustrated with a wide range of concrete examples.

I am convinced that this report has produced a valuable inventory of initiatives and measures in place regarding adult education and training, and that it will be of great interest to policy-makers, practitioners and all those with an interest in effective and efficient approaches to adult education.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'A. Vassiliou', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Androulla Vassiliou
Commissioner responsible for
Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth

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INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared in direct response to the Action Plan on Adult Learning *It is always a good time to learn* (European Commission, 2007), and, more specifically, to its stated objective of increasing the opportunities for adults to achieve a qualification at least one level higher than they previously held. The document focuses on the opportunities for under-qualified adults to complete basic education or achieve an upper secondary qualification, and it also covers measures that might contribute to widening access to higher education for adults returning to the formal education system.

Scope of the report

The document includes an analysis of statistical data related to the educational attainment of the European population and the participation of adults in education and training. It also clarifies the concept of formal adult education and training. The comparative overview of policies and measures in place in European countries with respect to opportunities for adults to upgrade their qualifications forms the main part of the report.

For the purpose of comparability, the report does not cover the whole range of formal education and training programmes and/or qualifications that might be available to adults in different European countries. It focuses on programmes relating to the main national qualifications, especially qualifications that are traditionally associated with initial education and training, and it examines how these qualifications can be gained at a later stage in life. Where relevant and appropriate, the document also refers to other nationally-recognised qualifications.

Apart from formal education and training programmes as such, the report examines the extent to which learning outcomes acquired in non-formal and informal contexts can be recognised and accredited towards the completion of formal qualifications.

Structure

The report is structured into five chapters.

Chapter 1 presents an array of indicators on adult education which sets the context for further analysis of formal learning opportunities for adults in Europe. It includes data relating to human resource development in Europe as well as data on adult participation in lifelong learning, with a specific focus on formal education and training.

Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical approaches to the concept of formal adult education. It analyses and compares the different definitions of formal, non-formal and informal learning used in the field of education and training policy in Europe, and it pays particular attention to the concept of formal adult education in the framework of the Adult Education Survey (AES).

Chapter 3 provides a mapping of programmes for mature students leading to qualifications that can be, in terms of a prospective learner's progression, regarded as equal to mainstream qualifications up to upper secondary level. It examines how these 'second chance' programmes are organised, and how they are adapted to the needs of adult learners.

Chapter 4 describes the measures likely to improve the participation of adult returners in higher education. It presents policies explicitly targeting mature students as well as measures to improve accessibility to the higher education sector for non-traditional students, including adult learners.

Finally, **Chapter 5** provides information on how formal education and training for mature students is financed and it outlines the various types of support which might facilitate the engagement of adults in formal education.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 include a wide range of concrete examples which illustrate the general points made in the text and provide more detailed information on the variety of programmes, measures and policy actions which are currently in operation across Europe. These examples are distinguished from the main text by use of a different font.

Methodology

The document is based mainly on the information generated by the Eurydice Network and drawn from its descriptive database Eurybase⁽¹⁾. This applies specifically to Chapters 3, 4 and 5 of the present report. In some particular cases, the information available in the Eurybase database was complemented with data from other sources. These sources mainly include the data collections carried out in the framework of the Eurydice studies *Higher Education in Europe 2009: Developments in the Bologna Process* (Eurydice, 2009) and *The Modernisation of Higher Education* (Eurydice, forthcoming) as well as descriptions of the national vocational education and training systems produced by Cedefop's network ReferNet⁽²⁾. Chapter 1 of the present report is based on Eurostat data from the EU Labour Force Survey (EU LFS) and the Adult Education Survey (AES).

While the ISCED 97 classification constitutes the main reference point of this comparative analysis, the document also refers to the developments relating to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) as well as National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs). A reference to the latter is included especially in the case of countries that have already officially adopted a National Qualifications Framework⁽³⁾.

The preparation and drafting of the report has been coordinated by the Eurydice Unit of the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). The draft version of the report was submitted to Eurydice National Units for comments and validation. The report reflects the situation as of November 2010. All those who have contributed are acknowledged at the end of the document.

⁽¹⁾ http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/eurybase_en.php

⁽²⁾ <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Information-services/browse-national-vet-systems.aspx>

⁽³⁾ By May 2010, national qualifications frameworks had been established in the Flemish Community of Belgium, Estonia, France, Ireland, Malta, Portugal and the United Kingdom (Cedefop and European Commission, 2010).

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND INDICATORS ON ADULT EDUCATION AND TRAINING

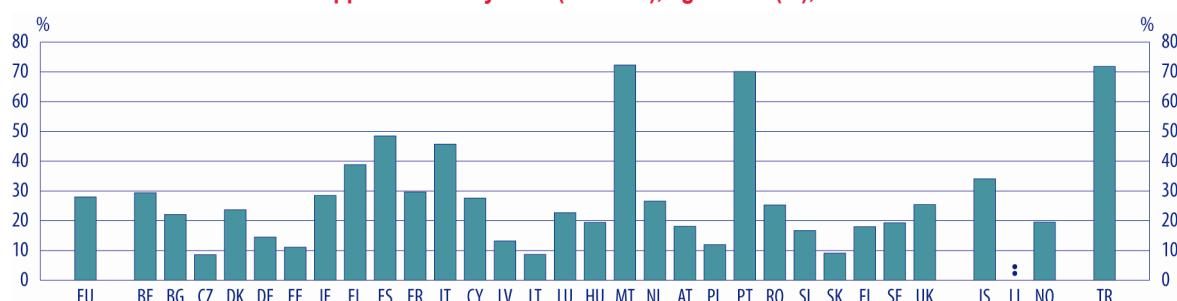
This chapter presents an array of indicators which sets the context for this study on formal learning opportunities for adults in Europe. The first section focuses on data relating to human resource development in Europe. The second section presents general data on the participation of adults in lifelong learning, while the last section of the chapter examines the data relating to formal adult education and training. The main data sources used are the EU Labour Force Survey (EU LFS) and the Adult Education Survey (AES).

1.1. Educational attainment of the European adult population

The educational attainment of the adult population is commonly used as a proxy for the knowledge and skills available in the economy. This indicator is captured through the level of formal education achieved by the adult population.

According to the EU Labour Force Survey, around 70 % of adults (25-64 years) in Europe have completed at least upper secondary education. This means that adults with low educational attainment (i.e. below upper secondary level) represent less than one-third of the European adult population. However, this figure does correspond to around 76 million adults in the EU.

Figure 1.1: Adult population in Europe with educational attainment below upper secondary level (ISCED 3), age 25-64 (%), 2009



EU		BE	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU
28.0		29.4	22.1	8.6	23.7	14.5	11.1	28.5	38.8	48.5	29.6	45.7	27.6	13.2	8.7	22.7
HU	MT	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE	UK		IS	LI	NO	TR
19.4	72.3	26.6	18.1	12.0	70.1	25.3	16.7	9.1	18.0	19.3	25.4		34.1	:	19.5	71.8

Source: Eurostat, EU Labour Force Survey (data extracted January 2011).

With regard to individual countries, significant variations can be observed across Europe: in the Czech Republic, Germany, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia, the proportion of the adult population without upper secondary education is relatively small, situated between 9 % and 15 %. In Hungary, Austria, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden and Norway, it does not exceed 20 %. On the other hand, adults without upper secondary education represent almost 50 % of the population aged 25-64 years in Spain and Italy, and around 70 % in Malta, Portugal and Turkey.

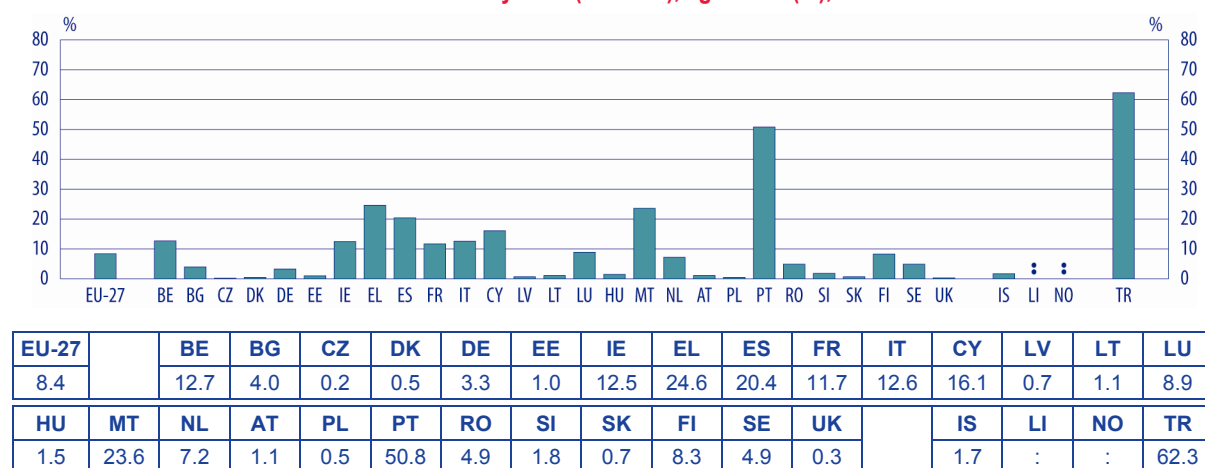
Available EU LFS data also indicate that young adults are much more likely to have at least upper secondary education than the older population: the proportion of those who have attained at least

upper secondary education is almost 20 percentage points higher in the 25-34 age group than in the 55-64 age group.

It is also important to note that the category of adults with low educational attainment also includes people who left initial education prior to the completion of lower secondary education. This very low level of attainment involves around 8 % of adults in the European Union, corresponding to around 23 million people.

In the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Austria, Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia, the United Kingdom and Iceland, the proportion of the adult population without lower secondary education does not exceed 2 %. In Bulgaria, Germany, Romania and Sweden, it is still relatively small, between 3 % and 5 %. Greece, Spain, Malta, Portugal and Turkey lie at the other end of the spectrum. In the first three of these countries, adults who have not completed lower secondary education represent between 20 % and 25 % of the adult population, while in Portugal they represent just over 50 %, and in Turkey around 62 % of those aged 25-64.

Figure 1.2: Adult population in Europe with educational attainment below lower secondary level (ISCED 2), age 25-64 (%), 2009



Source: Eurostat, EU Labour Force Survey (data extracted October 2010).

1.2. Adult participation in lifelong learning

At European level, three surveys provide data which enable adult participation in education and training to be evaluated: the EU Labour Force Survey (EU LFS), the Adult Education Survey (AES) and the Continuing Vocational Training Survey (CVTS). While the last survey focuses specifically on vocational education and training, the first two provide more general data on the participation of adults in lifelong learning.

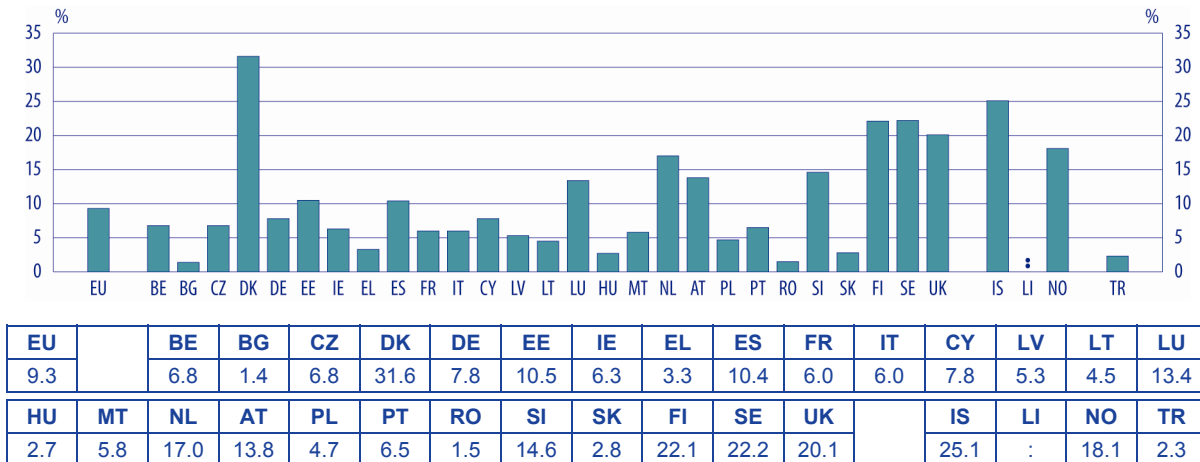
The European Labour Force Survey is a data source for the EU benchmark indicator on adult participation in lifelong learning. The benchmark is set at 15 % which is to be reached by 2020 ⁽¹⁾. According to the results of the survey, in 2009, almost 10 % of the European adult population participated in formal or non-formal education and training during the four weeks prior to the survey.

The situation at country level shows that the Nordic countries, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom have already attained the agreed European objective for 2020 while Austria and Slovenia

⁽¹⁾ Council of the European Union, 2009. Council Conclusions on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020), OJ C 119/2, 28.5.2009.

are close to the target. However, the participation of adults in education and training lags far behind the EU benchmark in Bulgaria and Romania (where less than 2 % of adults participate in education and training) and also in Greece, Hungary, Slovakia and Turkey (where the level is below 4 %).

Figure 1.3: Adult participation in education and training in the four weeks prior to the survey (EU LFS), age 25-64 (%), 2009



Source: Eurostat, EU Labour Force Survey (data extracted January 2011).

Explanatory note

This indicator includes participation in formal and non-formal education and training.

The Adult Education Survey is a new component of EU statistics on education and lifelong learning which will be conducted across the whole of Europe for the first time in 2011-2012. However, a pilot AES was carried out between 2005 and 2008 on a voluntary basis, involving 29 countries in the EU, EFTA and candidate countries ⁽²⁾. Unlike the EU Labour Force Survey, the Adult Education Survey is specifically designed to assess the participation of adults in education and training. It also provides more detailed information about the learning activities and programmes in which adults take part.

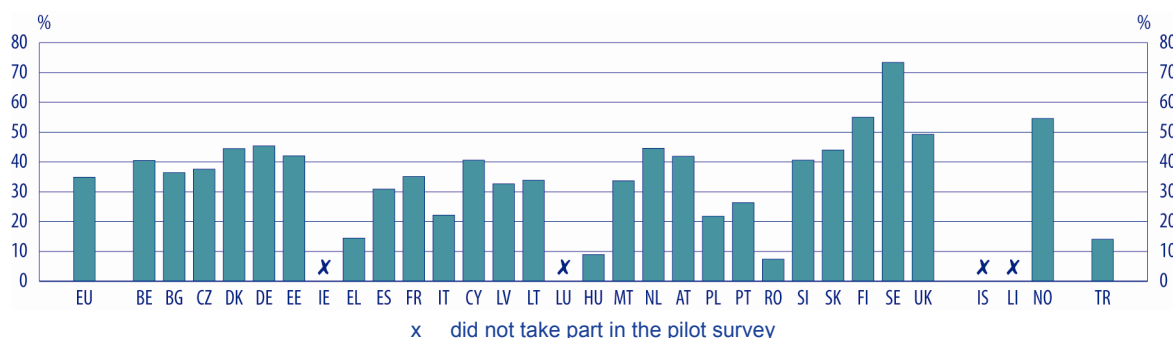
When comparing the results of the EU Labour Force Survey with the results of the Adult Education Survey, at first glance, the differences might appear rather surprising. According to the Labour Force Survey, less than 10 % of adults participate in lifelong learning, while the results of the Adult Education Survey indicate that around 35 % of the European adult population take part in formal or non-formal education and training.

However, this significant difference between the results of the two surveys is partly related to the fact, that the reference period of the EU LFS is only four weeks prior to the survey, whereas the reference period of the AES is 12 months. This means that adults who do not participate in education over the last four weeks prior to the EU LFS (and are therefore regarded as 'non-learners'), may participate in education and training over a longer period (e.g. 12 months). As pointed out by Rosenblatt (2009), the length of the reference period plays an important role especially with regard to the participation of adults in non-formal education and training, since non-formal learning activities are characterised by rather short duration and are often distributed over time.

⁽²⁾ Participating countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and United Kingdom.

According to the results of the Adult Education Survey, the countries with the highest participation rates of adults in education and training are Sweden (73 %), Finland (55 %), Norway (55 %) and the United Kingdom (49 %). All these countries also have very high participation rates in the context of the EU Labour Force Survey. In contrast, the Adult Education Survey reveals relatively low adult participation rates in Romania (7 %), Hungary (9 %), Turkey (14 %) and Greece (15 %), and these are confirmed by similar results in the EU LFS.

Figure 1.4: Adult participation in education and training in the 12 months prior to the survey (AES), age 25-64 (%), 2007



EU	BE	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	EL	ES	FR	IT	CY	LV	LT
34.9	40.5	36.4	37.6	44.5	45.4	42.1	14.5	30.9	35.1	22.2	40.6	32.7	33.9
HU	MT	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE	UK	NO	TR
9.0	33.7	44.6	41.9	21.8	26.4	7.4	40.6	44.0	55.0	73.4	49.3	54.6	14.1

Source: Eurostat, Adult Education Survey (data extracted January 2011).

Explanatory note

This indicator includes participation in formal and non-formal education and training.

Although in most countries the general participation patterns are fairly similar in both surveys (i.e. the EU LFS and AES), in some cases, the results are quite disparate. The discrepancy in results is the most pronounced in Bulgaria and Slovakia, where, according to the EU Labour Force Survey, the participation of adults in education and training remains quite low, while according to the Adult Education Survey, participation is above the EU average. These disparities between the results of the EU LFS and AES have not yet been fully clarified.

1.3. Adult participation in formal education and training

Results from the Labour Force Survey as well as from the Adult Education Survey show that the proportion of adults who participate in formal education and training (i.e. education provided in the school system, universities or other formal educational and training institutions; for more details see Chapter 2) is significantly lower than the proportion of those who participate in non-formal learning activities (i.e. organised and sustained educational activities that do not correspond exactly to the above definition of formal education; for more details see Chapter 2).

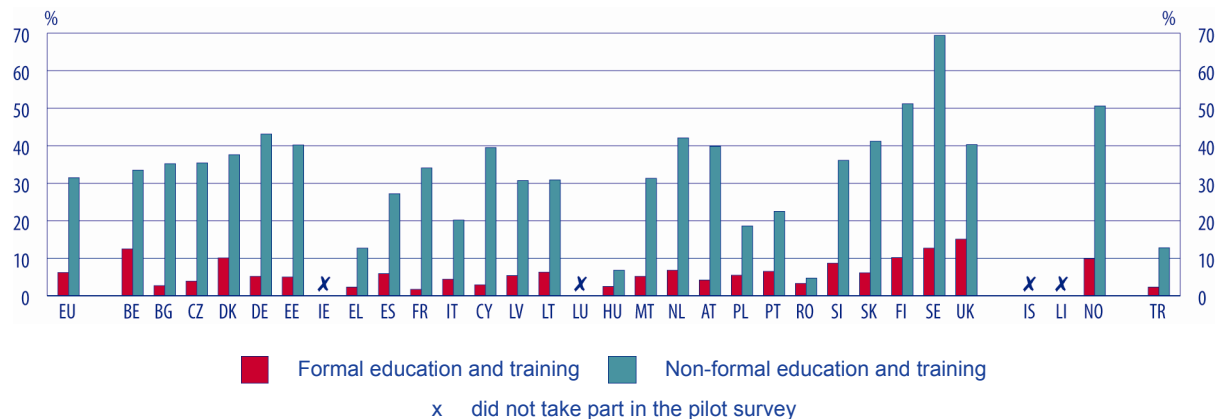
According to data from the Adult Education Survey, the average participation rate of adults in formal education or training in the EU is 6 %.

The situation in individual European countries ranges from less than 3 % in Bulgaria, Greece, France, Cyprus, Hungary and Turkey to more than 10 % in Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Sweden and the

United Kingdom. A participation rate of around 15 % in the United Kingdom represents the highest country score in Europe.

In countries where the proportion of the under-qualified adult population is relatively high (for more details see Section 1.1), the participation rates of adults in formal education or training are: 7 % in Portugal, 6 % in Spain, 5 % in Malta, 4 % in Italy, 2 % in Greece and Turkey.

Figure 1.5: Adult participation in formal and non-formal education and training in the 12 months prior to the survey (AES), age 25-64 (%), 2007



	EU	BE	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	EL	ES	FR	IT	CY	LV	LT
Formal education and training	6.2	12.5	2.7	3.9	10.1	5.2	5.0	2.3	5.9	1.7	4.4	2.9	5.4	6.3
Non-formal education and training	31.5	33.5	35.2	35.4	37.6	43.1	40.2	12.7	27.2	34.1	20.2	39.5	30.7	30.9

	HU	MT	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE	UK	NO	TR
Formal education and training	2.5	5.2	6.8	4.2	5.5	6.5	3.3	8.7	6.1	10.2	12.7	15.1	9.9	2.3
Non-formal education and training	6.8	31.3	42.1	39.8	18.6	22.5	4.7	36.1	41.2	51.2	69.4	40.3	50.6	12.8

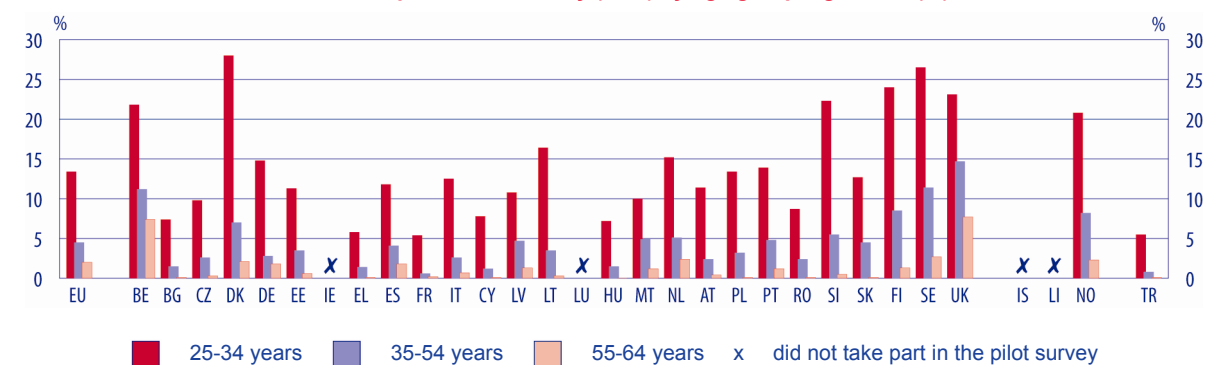
Source: Eurostat, Adult Education Survey (data extracted January 2011).

It is also interesting to note that while in the majority of countries the participation in non-formal education and training is at least five times higher than in formal learning activities, there are countries where the difference is less pronounced. This is particularly true for Belgium, Hungary, Romania and the United Kingdom.

The age structure of adult participation in formal education and training shows that young adults (25-34 years old) are more likely to participate in formal programmes than older sections of the population. On average, across the EU, 13 % of those who are aged between 25-34 years take part in formal education, while in the age groups 35-54 and 55-64 it is only 5 % and 2 % respectively.

However, when studying the situation in individual countries, some significant country differences in the participation rates among different age groups can be observed. In Finland, for example, the participation rate in the age group 25-34 is relatively high (24 %), but the participation rate for the age groups 35-54 and 55-64 is only 9 % and 1 % respectively. The situation is slightly different in countries such as the United Kingdom and Belgium. In the United Kingdom, the participation rate is 23 % for the age group 25-34 years, but it is still relatively high for the age groups 35-54 and 55-64 years: 15 % and 8 % respectively. A similar situation can be observed in Belgium (22 %, 11 % and 7 % for the three age groups respectively). As suggested by Rosenblatt (2009), the age group analysis might be seen as a means to identify the countries where formal education is restricted to childhood and young adulthood, and countries where formal education seems to be a lifelong learning option.

Figure 1.6: Adult participation in formal education and training in the 12 months prior to the survey (AES) by age group, age 25-64 (%), 2007



	EU	BE	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	EL	ES	FR	IT	CY	LV	LT
■ 25-34 years	13.4	21.8	7.4	9.8	28.0	14.8	11.3	5.8	11.8	5.4	12.5	7.8	10.8	16.4
■ 35-54 years	4.5	11.2	1.5	2.6	7.0	2.8	3.5	1.4	4.1	0.6	2.6	1.2	4.7	3.5
■ 55-64 years	2.0	7.4	0.1	0.3	2.1	1.8	0.6	0.1	1.8	0.2	0.7	0.1	1.3	0.3

	HU	MT	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE	UK	NO	TR
■ 25-34 years	7.2	10.0	15.2	11.4	13.4	13.9	8.7	22.3	12.7	24.0	26.5	23.1	20.8	5.5
■ 35-54 years	1.5	4.9	5.1	2.4	3.2	4.8	2.4	5.5	4.5	8.5	11.4	14.7	8.2	0.8
■ 55-64 years	0.0	1.2	2.4	0.4	0.1	1.2	0.1	0.5	0.1	1.3	2.7	7.7	2.3	0.1

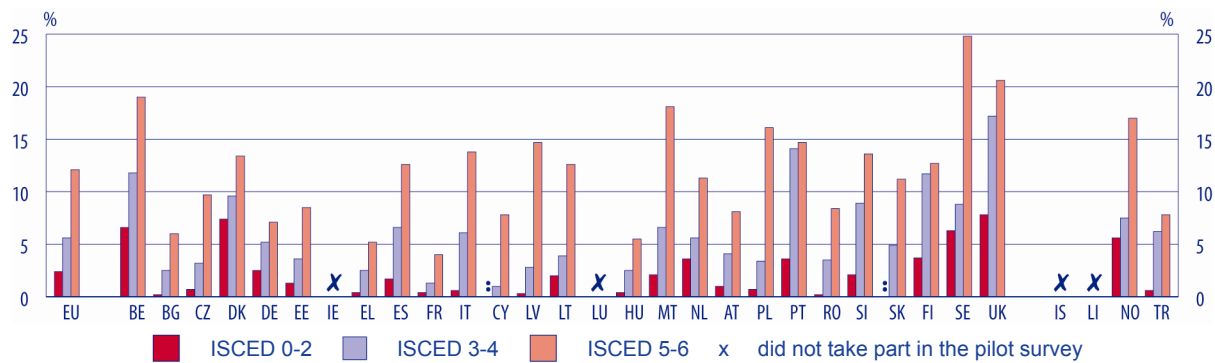
Source: Eurostat, Adult Education Survey (data extracted January 2011).

In some of the countries which have a higher participation rate of young adults (25-34 years) in formal education, the figures may be skewed by the fact that initial education and training⁽³⁾ is more prolonged in these countries than in others. Therefore, in the surveys, young adults participating in formal education might in reality be students in tertiary education who have not yet completed their initial studies, rather than adult returners who have re-joined the formal education and training system. This could be the case in the countries where the most common starting age for 1st cycle tertiary education is over the age of 20 (e.g. Denmark, Lithuania, Finland and Sweden (Eurydice, 2010)), and the countries where participation in tertiary education peaks only at the age of 22 (Finland, Sweden, Iceland and Norway (Eurydice 2007a)) or 24 (Denmark and Liechtenstein (Eurydice, 2007a)). Yet, the Adult Education Survey does not allow a distinction to be made between young adults who are still in the process of completing their formal initial education and those who have re-joined the formal education system after a certain period outside.

With regard to the data on adult participation in formal education according to the highest level of education attained, it can be observed that in all European countries, those with a lower educational attainment (i.e. those who have completed at most lower secondary education) have the lowest participation rates. On average, in the EU, only around 2 % of under-qualified adults participate in formal education and training, whereas the participation rate of those who have completed upper secondary education is 6 %, and for those who have completed tertiary education, 12 %.

⁽³⁾ Initial education and training is defined as 'General or vocational education and training carried out in the initial education system, usually before entering working life' (Cedefop, 2008).

Figure 1.7: Adult participation in formal education and training in the 12 months prior to the survey (AES) by highest level of education attained, age 25-64 (%), 2007



	EU	BE	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	EL	ES	FR	IT	CY	LV	LT
■	2.4	6.6	0.2	0.7	7.4	2.5	1.3	0.4	1.7	0.4	0.6	:	0.3	2.0
■	5.6	11.8	2.5	3.2	9.6	5.2	3.6	2.5	6.6	1.3	6.1	1.0	2.8	3.9
■	12.1	19.0	6.0	9.7	13.4	7.1	8.5	5.2	12.6	4.0	13.8	7.8	14.7	12.6
	HU	MT	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE	UK	NO	TR
■	0.4	2.1	3.6	1.0	0.7	3.6	0.2	2.1	:	3.7	6.3	7.8	5.6	0.6
■	2.5	6.6	5.6	4.1	3.4	14.1	3.5	8.9	4.9	11.7	8.8	17.2	7.5	6.2
■	5.5	18.1	11.3	8.1	16.1	14.7	8.4	13.6	11.2	12.7	24.8	20.6	17.0	7.8

Source: Eurostat, Adult Education Survey (data extracted January 2011).

The country level analysis shows that in certain European countries the participation of under-qualified adults in formal education is clearly above the EU average. For instance, it is almost 6 % in Norway and between 6 % and 8 % in Belgium, Denmark, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Hence, it seems that the above-mentioned countries are slightly more successful in attracting the under-qualified adult population into formal education and training programmes. Denmark has the most evenly balanced participation rates across the three attainment levels.

The Adult Education Survey also provides some interesting information relating to the characteristics of the learning activities in which adults participate. One of these characteristics is the number of hours of instruction reported by those who participated in education and training. According to available data, formal programmes are, on average, significantly longer than non-formal learning activities: the average number of instruction hours per participant in formal education is 383 hours, while it is only 71 hours for non-formal education and training.

However, quite important variations can be observed at country level. The number of hours of instruction in formal education and training is by far the greatest in Germany (905 hours), and it is also significantly above the EU average in Bulgaria (609 hours), Latvia (572 hours), Portugal (543 hours), Austria (532 hours) or Sweden (515 hours). At the same time, formal learning activities in the United Kingdom are characterised by a relatively short duration: 121 hours on average. This means that the average duration of formal learning activities in the United Kingdom is about the same as the average duration of non-formal activities in Denmark, Belgium, Spain or Hungary, where non-formal learning activities last on average between 111 and 121 hours. This could be linked to some conceptual differences which are explored in Chapter 2 (Section 2.2) of this report.

Finally, it is also interesting to note that the Adult Education Survey provides some details about the amount of money spent by adult learners who participate in formal education and training. Costs include participation and registration fees as well as study materials. According to available data, in all

European countries, formal adult education requires higher private financial investment than non-formal learning activities: those who participated in formal education spent on average EUR 603, whereas average private investment for non-formal education and training was only EUR 145.

The mean expenditure per participant for formal education and training varies from country to country. While the adults who participated in formal education in Belgium, the Czech Republic, Latvia, the Netherlands, Romania, Finland, Sweden and Turkey spent on average only up to EUR 400, learners in several other European countries reported much higher private financial investment (see Figure 1.8).

Figure 1.8: Mean expenditure per participant on formal education and training in the 12 months prior to the survey (AES), age 25-64 (EUR), 2007

EU	BE	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	EL	ES	FR	IT	CY	LV	LT
603	226	462	368	739	1 025	565	1 308	703	:	:	3 336	397	531
HU	MT	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE	UK	NO	TR
431	1 061	336	1 454	681	1 120	294	1 015	407	153	393	438	1 136	359

Source: Eurostat, Adult Education Survey (data extracted January 2011).

However, it is important to note that in the countries where the average private investment per participant is relatively high, certain types of formal programmes are covered by public funds and/or specific financial support is provided for certain target groups. More details on financing formal adult education and training will be provided in Chapter 5 of this report.

CHAPTER 2: DEFINING THE CONCEPT OF FORMAL ADULT EDUCATION AND TRAINING

'Formal adult education' is commonly understood to mean learning activities leading to diplomas and certificates equivalent to those which may be obtained in the school or higher education system. Although these learning activities are the central focus of Chapters 3 and 4 of this report, it is important to recognise that the term 'formal adult education' can include a wider range of learning activities.

The aim of this chapter is to outline the theoretical anchors around the concept of formal adult education. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section presents the main definitions of formal, non-formal and informal learning used in the field of education and training policy in Europe. The second section focuses on the concept of formal adult education within the framework of the Adult Education Survey (AES).

2.1. Definitions of formal, non-formal and informal learning

At European level, there are at present two main terminological reference works which cover formal, non-formal and informal learning: two editions of a glossary produced by Cedefop (Cedefop, 2004 and 2008) and the manual *Classification of Learning Activities* (CLA) produced by Eurostat (Eurostat, 2006). The definitions in the latter document are based on the glossary of the *International Standard Classification of Education - ISCED 1997* (UNESCO, 1997). In addition, there is also a glossary produced within the framework of the European Commission's initiative *Study on European terminology in adult education for a common understanding and monitoring of the sector* (NRDC, 2010): the definitions of formal, non-formal and informal learning used are based on the above-mentioned Cedefop glossaries.

The glossary produced by Cedefop in 2008 includes a selection of 100 terms used in the field of education and training policy in Europe. According to this glossary, formal learning is defined as:

learning that occurs in an organised and structured environment (i.e. in an education or training institution or on the job) and is explicitly designated as learning (in terms of objectives, time and resources). Formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It typically leads to validation and certification (Cedefop 2008, p. 85).

Non-formal learning is defined as:

learning which is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designed as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support). Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view (ibid. p. 93).

Informal learning is:

learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner's perspective (ibid. p. 133).

The Eurostat manual *Classification of Learning Activities* (CLA) defines formal education as:

education provided in the system of schools, colleges, universities and other formal educational institutions that normally constitutes a continuous 'ladder' of full-time education for children and young people, generally beginning at the age of five to seven and continuing up to 20 or 25 years old. In some countries, the upper parts of this 'ladder' are organised programmes of joint part-time employment and part-time participation in the regular school

and university system: such programmes have come to be known as the ‘dual system’ or equivalent terms in these countries (Eurostat 2006, p. 13).

Non-formal education is defined as:

any organised and sustained educational activities that do not correspond exactly to the above definition of formal education. Non-formal education may therefore take place both within and outside educational institutions, and cater to persons of all ages. Depending on country contexts, it may cover educational programmes to impart adult literacy, basic education for out of school children, life-skills, work-skills, and general culture. Non-formal education programmes do not necessarily follow the ‘ladder’ system, and may have a differing duration (ibid. p. 13).

Informal learning is:

intentional, but it is less organised and less structured ... and may include, for example, learning events (activities) that occur in the family, in the work place, and in the daily life of every person, on a self-directed, family-directed or socially directed basis (ibid. p. 13).

In addition, the manual introduces one supplementary term – random learning – defined as unintentional learning. Random learning is excluded from statistical observation.

The tables that follow provide a summary of the above-mentioned definitions.

Figure 2.1: The concept of formal, non-formal and informal learning according to the glossary *Terminology of European education and training policy* (Cedefop, 2008)

Formal learning	Non-formal learning	Informal learning	
provided in an organised and structured environment explicitly designed as learning typically leads to validation and certification intentional	embedded in planned activities not explicitly designed as learning intentional	not organised or structured resulting from daily activities in most cases unintentional	

Figure 2.2: The concept of formal and non-formal education, and informal and random learning according to the manual *Classification of Learning Activities (CLA)* (Eurostat, 2006)

Formal education	Non-formal education	Informal learning	Random learning
provided in the system of formal educational institutions (including the ‘dual system’) constitutes a continuous ‘ladder’ of education intentional	within and outside educational institutions organised and sustained activities does not necessarily follow the ‘ladder’ system duration may differ intentional	less organised and less structured than non-formal education intentional	unintentional excluded from statistical observation

When comparing the two sets of definitions, some conceptual differences between formal, non-formal and informal learning can be observed.

According to the Cedefop glossary (Cedefop, 2008), the concept of formal learning is relatively wide: formal learning includes activities taking place in an 'organised and structured environment' that are 'explicitly designed as learning'. Compared to this, non-formal learning is 'embedded in planned activities' but these activities are 'not explicitly designed as learning'. It means that within this concept, formal learning corresponds not only to school or to academic programmes leading to the main national qualifications (e.g. upper secondary school leaving certificate, Bachelor's degree etc.) but also to various short-term education and training activities leading to diverse types of certificates.

The definition of formal education included in the manual *Classification of Learning Activities* (Eurostat, 2006) is more restrictive. On the basis of this definition, it is possible to deduce that formal education corresponds to programmes leading to the main national school or academic qualifications, while short-term education and training courses related to diverse types of certificates, fall under the concept of non-formal education (e.g. adult literacy courses). It must, however, be underlined that apart from the main definitions quoted above, Eurostat provides further criteria to distinguish between formal and non-formal education. These criteria broaden the concept of formal education to other learning activities and they are discussed in Section 2.2 of this document.

Another difference between the two sets of definitions is related to informal learning. The Cedefop glossary defines informal learning as learning that 'is in most cases unintentional from the learner's perspective', while the Eurostat manual defines the same term as 'intentional, but [...] less organised and less structured' learning. With regard to unintentional learning, Eurostat introduces a supplementary term 'random learning' and excludes this type of learning from statistical observation.

Although the above-mentioned differences in defining formal, non-formal and informal learning might appear quite significant, they are mainly related to the fact that each of the two documents was developed for different purposes. The Eurostat manual was designed to serve as an instrument for compiling and presenting comparable statistics and indicators on learning activities (both within individual countries and across countries), while the aim of the Cedefop glossary was to identify and define the key terms essential for understanding current education and training policy in Europe.

Taking into account the existence of some conceptual differences in defining formal, non-formal and informal learning, Section 2.2 focuses on the concept of formal education within the Adult Education Survey.

2.2. Formal education within the framework of the Adult Education Survey

The Eurostat manual *Classification of Learning Activities* (Eurostat, 2006) has been designed to serve as a conceptual basis for the Adult Education Survey. Apart from the principal definitions of formal, non-formal and informal learning (see Section 2.1), the manual also provides details on the operational criteria for distinguishing between different types of learning activities.

With regard to formal education, one fundamental criterion distinguishes formal and non-formal education. This is whether the activity is designed to lead to a learning outcome that can be positioned within a National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). A National Framework of Qualifications is defined as:

the single, nationally and internationally accepted entity, through which all learning achievements may be measured and related to each other in a coherent way and which define the relationship between all education and training awards (Eurostat 2006, p. 15).

Eurostat's manual further explains that:

the NFQ could take the form of a regulatory document, which stipulates the qualifications and their relative positions in a hierarchy of learning achievements as well as the bodies that provide or deliver these qualifications (awarding bodies). [...] A National Framework of Qualifications can be a mechanism to relate learning achievements to each other, to communicate them to a wide audience and/or a regulatory device to for example set overall standards for qualifications (ibid. pp. 15-16) (1).

Based on this definition, it clearly appears that the concept of formal education within the Adult Education Survey includes not only activities leading to traditional school or tertiary education qualifications, but all learning activities leading to qualifications/certificates that can be positioned in a National Framework of Qualifications. This aspect needs to be taken into account when analysing the results of the Adult Education Survey, in particular, the participation of adults in formal education. It is important to note that a national framework of qualifications is a nationally- and not universally-defined structure, and therefore its scope can vary across countries. This can be illustrated by some concrete examples.

Basic skills courses, for example, are learning activities which comprise the fundamental skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT, and are often considered as a typical example of non-formal adult education. The Eurydice National Education System Descriptions include several examples of various basic skills programmes. Although basic skills courses might lead to the award of various certificates, these are not generally regarded as nationally-recognised qualifications. Therefore, it is valid to consider basic skills programmes as a typical example of non-formal adult education.

However, the situation in some countries might be different. For example, the interview guidelines of the National Adult Learning Survey (NALS) (2) in the United Kingdom include, among potential formal learning activities, activities leading to 'key skills or basic skills qualifications' (NatCen 2005, p. 38). This reflects the fact that in the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland), such learning activities lead to nationally-certificated qualifications accredited to the National Qualification Framework (NQF). These qualifications may have different titles, including basic skills, adult literacy, adult numeracy, key skills, functional skills and essential skills. It follows that, in accordance with the manual *Classification of Learning Activities* (Eurostat, 2006), programmes that develop basic skills in literacy and numeracy in the United Kingdom are classified as formal education, whereas it is likely that similar learning activities in many other countries would not lead to an accredited qualification and hence would be classified as non-formal education. Similarly, in the Flemish Community of Belgium, a literacy qualification can be positioned at Level 2 of the Flemish Qualification Structure.

(1) This is very similar to the concept of a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) as laid down in the Recommendation for the European Qualifications Framework. An NQF is defined as 'an instrument for the classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved, which aims to integrate and coordinate national qualifications subsystems and improve the transparency, access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and civil society.' (Council of the European Union, European Parliament, 2008. Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning. OJ C 111/1, 6.05.2008).

(2) The National Adult Learning Survey (NALS) 2005 questionnaire includes questions from the previous NALS surveys (2001 and 2002), the European Adult Education Survey and the EU Labour Force Survey. The questionnaire contains a separate part tailored to the qualifications in England and Wales, and another part tailored to Scotland. The text refers to the part tailored to England and Wales.

Sweden's AES interview guidelines also include some learning activities that might be classified differently in other countries (Löfgren and Svenning, 2009; Rosenblatt, 2009). For instance, these guidelines include, among potential formal education activities, programmes entitled 'Swedish for foreigners' whereas it is likely that in many countries language courses for speakers of other languages would be classified as non-formal education. Another area of difference in the classification of learning activities across Europe might be the programmes entitled 'labour market training via the employment service office', classified in Sweden as formal education (Löfgren and Svenning, 2009; Rosenblatt, 2009).

One of the central questions is how to look at these disparities. According to Rosenblatt (2009), the differences in the classification of learning activities can be seen from two different angles. On the one hand, they can be seen as 'a methodological source of non-perfect comparability'. On the other hand, cross-country variations in classifying learning activities may reflect real differences in the education system (Rosenblatt, 2009). In other words, similar learning activities might be in different contexts subject to different levels of recognition. Some countries might give higher recognition to certain learning activities, for example, through the inclusion of the qualifications/certificates these activities lead to, into a National Framework of Qualifications. Other countries (e.g. Sweden) might simply have more forms of formal education (Löfgren and Svenning, 2009). The national interview guidelines related to the Adult Education Survey are in this respect a very rich source of information. Unfortunately, these guidelines are, in most cases, available only at national level and in the national languages.

The National Adult Learning Survey interview guidelines of the United Kingdom (NatCen, 2005) include another element related to formal education that gives cause for further reflection. The list of potential formal learning activities includes not only activities leading to nationally-recognised qualifications, but also distinct modules related to these qualifications. In this context, it is important to recall that formal education and training programmes in the United Kingdom are characterised by a relatively short duration compared to formal programmes in other countries (for more details see Section 1.3). This could be partly explained by the existence of a modular structure of programmes. In other words, it can be supposed that in countries with a well-developed modular structure (i.e. where distinct modules relate to separate certificates that can be accumulated over a longer period), formal learning activities will have, on average, a shorter duration than in countries where the modular structure has not yet been fully implemented.

As shown in this chapter, formal adult education is a complex concept and countries may differ to some extent in the way they classify educational activities (formal or non-formal). This is not necessarily related to a misclassification of learning activities, but can reflect real differences in the education systems. Nevertheless, formal adult education comprises a range of learning activities that are commonly regarded as 'formal' in all countries. These activities include education and training programmes leading to certificates/qualifications equivalent to those that can be obtained in the school or academic system. As such, these are the central focus of Chapters 3 and 4 of the present document.

CHAPTER 3: ADULT LEARNERS AND QUALIFICATIONS UP TO UPPER SECONDARY LEVEL

In today's Europe, upper secondary education is considered to be the minimum requirement for successful entry to the labour market and continued employability. Eurostat data show that those who have completed at least upper secondary education have a significantly higher employment rate than people with only lower secondary education. In addition, jobs requiring upper secondary education are often related to higher salaries, better working conditions and more opportunities for continuing professional development than jobs specifying lower qualification levels.

One of the European Union's objectives is to keep young people in education and training until at least the end of upper secondary education. This target is stressed by the Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training – 'ET 2020' ⁽¹⁾, which includes a specific benchmark for early leaving of education and training: by 2020, the share of the population aged 18-24 with only lower secondary education or less, and no longer in education and training, should be less than 10 %. The specific focus of European policy on young people and young adults is due to the fact that under-qualified youngsters run the highest risk of long-term unemployment or unstable employment. This can have additional consequences, such as social exclusion.

While young people represent the main target of policy interventions relating to upper secondary attainment, the completion of upper secondary education can make a significant contribution to the economic and social integration of individuals at any stage of life.

This chapter focuses on programmes for mature students leading to qualifications up to upper secondary level that can be, in terms of a prospective learner's progression, regarded as equal to mainstream qualifications. The chapter is divided into two parts. The first part examines how these 'second chance' programmes are organised, while the second part focuses on how the programmes are adapted to the needs of mature students.

3.1. Organisational patterns and main models of provision

Without exception, every country in Europe provides some opportunities for people who left initial education without lower or upper secondary qualifications to upgrade their level of education at a later stage in life. However, across Europe, these 'second chance' programmes follow different organisational patterns.

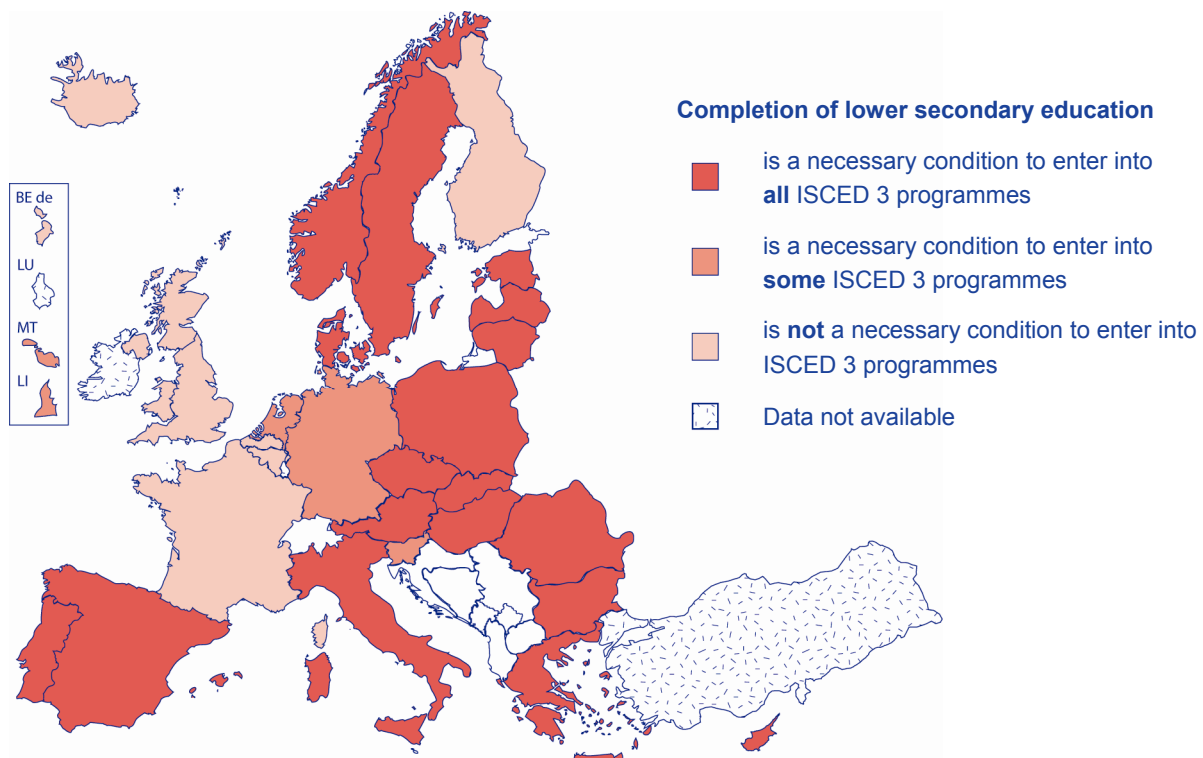
3.1.1. Programmes up to lower secondary level

At present, in all EU countries, primary and lower secondary education levels constitute the compulsory stages of education. However, around 23 million adults in Europe left school before completing lower secondary education (for more details see Figure 1.2 in Chapter 1). There are various reasons for this which include political developments over time and migratory movements. In several countries, non-completion of lower secondary education affects mainly population groups which are hard to reach such as the Roma population in Central and Eastern Europe.

⁽¹⁾ Council of the European Union, 2009. Council Conclusions on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020), OJ C 119/2, 28.5.2009.

In the majority of European countries, a certificate marks the completion of lower secondary or full-time compulsory education ⁽²⁾. While this certificate is generally not considered to be sufficient for successful entry to the labour market, it is, in many countries, a necessary condition for progression to further formal studies. This often applies not only to young people, but also to adult learners. In other words, those who have not completed lower secondary education are often unable to progress to further study at upper secondary level. As shown in Figure 3.1, this can be observed in around 20 European countries.

Figure 3.1: Completion of lower secondary education (ISCED 2) as a condition of access by adults to upper secondary education (ISCED 3), 2009/10



Source: Eurydice.

Additional notes

Belgium (BE fr): There is no certificate at the end of lower secondary education (ISCED 2). In the framework of ISCED level 3, there are two mainstream certificates that build on each other: the qualification certificate (CQ) and the second-stage secondary education certificate (CESS). Adults wishing to follow a CESS programme do not necessarily need to possess the CQ.

United Kingdom (ENG/WLS/NIR): There is no certificate or qualification at the end of lower secondary education (ISCED 2). In the framework of ISCED level 3, there are two mainstream general qualifications at different levels within the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). GCSEs, typically taken at the end of compulsory education at age 16, are (if passed at a grade above a certain threshold) at Level 2 of the NQF, while A Levels, typically taken at age 18, are at Level 3. Adults wishing to follow a programme leading to an A Level qualification do not necessarily need to possess GCSEs, provided they can demonstrate that they have the knowledge and skills to follow the chosen programme.

Norway: Legislation stipulates that upper secondary education is open to those who have completed lower secondary education or its equivalent. Validation of prior learning is often used in the case of learners who lack formal certificates.

Explanatory note

Countries with a single-structure education system (e.g. Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Hungary, Slovenia, Slovakia, Finland, Sweden, Iceland, Norway and Turkey) may use other expressions to describe lower secondary education (e.g. 'the last years of basic education', 'the last years of compulsory schooling').

⁽²⁾ It is important to note that in several countries the end of lower secondary education (ISCED 2) does not coincide with the end of full-time compulsory education. In some countries, compulsory education finishes only one or two years after the end of lower secondary level (ISCED 2). In Hungary and Portugal, compulsory full-time education finishes at the age of 18, the age that often coincides with the end of upper secondary education. In the Netherlands, pupils must remain at school until they have obtained a basic qualification, or until the age of 18.

For example in Austria, the successful completion of general lower secondary education (ISCED 2) is a pre-requisite for those who wish to attend a medium-level technical or vocational college, or an academic upper secondary school. Furthermore, without a lower secondary school leaving certificate, the chance of finding an apprenticeship training place is relatively low. Similarly in Poland, without the compulsory school leaving certificate, it is virtually impossible to follow further formal studies. In the Netherlands and Slovenia, adults who have not completed lower secondary education can only enter short vocational upper secondary programmes, but they cannot be admitted to longer upper secondary general or vocational education and/or training.

There are also countries where the completion of lower secondary education is not a necessary condition for progression to upper secondary studies and qualifications. In some of these countries, lower secondary education (ISCED 2) does not lead to any certification (e.g. Belgium and the United Kingdom). In other countries, the certificate associated with the completion of lower secondary education is not needed to enter into upper secondary programmes. For example in France, the national examination taken at the end of lower secondary education (*brevet*) is not a condition of access to upper secondary education and training. In Iceland, upper secondary education is open to all candidates who have reached 16 years, and there are no further qualification requirements. In Finland, institutions delivering upper secondary education can choose up to 30 % of students within the flexible student selection system, i.e. on the basis of the validation criteria defined by the institutions. Yet, as shown further in the text, Finland ensures and delivers formal programmes for adults covering the lower secondary curriculum.

In several countries, mature students without lower secondary education can obtain a lower secondary school leaving certificate (or a similar qualification/certificate opening access to further formal studies) upon successful completion of an education programme lasting between one and three years. Such programmes exist in countries such as the Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. In some cases, these programmes can also include a vocational component (e.g. in Latvia, Hungary and Slovakia).

In the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Norway), mature students can choose to follow separate subjects or a set of subjects leading to the completion of basic education (corresponding to ISCED 1 and 2).

In **Denmark**, general adult education (AVU) consists of subject courses that can be completed by an examination corresponding to the leaving examinations of the *Folkeskole* (single structure compulsory school). It is also possible to complete a general examination with a certificate in 5 subjects: Danish, mathematics, English, natural science, and either French, German, history or social science. This qualifies a person for entering a higher preparatory programme or higher preparatory single-subject courses in a relevant field of study (ISCED 3).

In **Finland**, basic education for adults is course-based. People can study individual subjects (e.g. languages) as so called 'subject students' or they can prepare for examinations in several subjects, qualifying for progression to general upper secondary education.

In Portugal and Spain – countries where the overall educational attainment of the adult population is relatively low (for more details see Section 1.1) – programmes for adults up to lower secondary level are divided into several sub-stages leading to separate certificates/qualifications. Through this approach, mature students with various levels of knowledge and skills can be integrated into the education and training process.

In **Spain**, education and training for adults up to lower secondary level (corresponding to 10 years of schooling, ISCED 1 and 2) consists of six stages. It is targeted at people over the age of 18 who have not completed compulsory

education. Knowledge and skills corresponding to primary education (first 6 years of schooling, ISCED 1) are delivered under programmes generally divided into two levels (although some Autonomous Communities have a three-level structure): literacy and numeracy (first level) and consolidation of basic skills (second level). Lower secondary education for adults (ISCED 2) is divided into three areas: communication, social studies, and science and technology. Each area is organized into modules (*módulos*). The successful completion of all modules in all areas corresponds to the completion of lower secondary education.

In **Portugal**, adult education corresponding to primary and lower secondary levels is provided through various schemes, in particular the EFA (*Educação e Formação de Adultos*) courses, which are open to everyone over the age of 18. Learning outcomes related to the first nine years of schooling (ISCED 1 and 2) are divided into courses at three separate levels, leading to certificates corresponding to four, six and nine years of schooling. The courses consist of four standard areas: language and communication, mathematics for life, ICT, and citizenship and employability. Their content is developed taking into account the specific needs of adults. Courses at the third level include a vocational component and lead not only to a third cycle basic education certificate but also to a vocational certificate at levels 1 and 2. The EFA courses can be combined with the recognition, validation and certification of competences acquired in non-formal and informal contexts.

Overall, it is rather difficult to evaluate the extent to which public authorities across Europe ensure the provision of primary and lower secondary education for adult learners. In some countries, legislation expressly refers to basic, primary or lower secondary education for adults, designates bodies responsible for its provision and, in some cases, specifies the extent of the provision that should be made.

In **Poland**, the School Education Act (1991) states that the education system must ensure that all adults have the opportunity to complete general education. The provision of this type of education is the responsibility of local authorities/communes.

In **Sweden**, every municipality is requested to provide basic education (corresponding to ISCED 1 and 2) for those adults who have not obtained a school leaving certificate from compulsory education. Basic adult municipal education covers the knowledge and skills equivalent to the level acquired in compulsory school. It leads to a leaving certificate when a student has achieved at least a pass grade in the four core subjects: Swedish or Swedish as a second language, English, mathematics and social science.

In **Norway**, primary and lower secondary education for adults is organised by municipalities. They are responsible for the evaluation of needs and the planning of provision. Primary and lower secondary education are offered as special courses open to anyone who has reached the age of 16 and needs this kind of education. Lower secondary courses cover mainly the last three grades of compulsory education and lead to examinations in different subjects.

Several countries report that they make relatively extensive provision for courses leading to a lower secondary school leaving certificate. For example in Spain, in 2008/09, around 140 000 people were registered in lower secondary education for adults in face-to-face or distance education. In Poland, lower secondary education for adults is provided by approximately 148 institutions (14 464 participants are reported for the school year 2009/10). In Greece, there are 57 second chance schools (SDE) providing primary and lower secondary education and around 60 detached departments of these schools (17 946 participants between 2005 and 2008). In Hungary, nearly 50 establishments provide lower secondary courses for mature students.

In some countries, publicly-funded lower secondary education for mature students is organised mainly on an *ad hoc* basis, depending on local needs and available financial resources. This is reported from countries such as the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Romania. In the Czech Republic for instance, during the school year 2008/09, only 368 adult returners participated in programmes aimed at the completion of lower secondary education. At the same time, it is important to note that the school

drop-out rate in the Czech Republic is very low and adults without lower secondary education represent only 0.2 % of the adult population aged 25-64; these are largely adults in population groups which are hard to reach.

Finally, it should be noted that there are also countries, where courses or qualifications for adults covering the learning outcomes traditionally associated with ISCED levels 1 and 2 are not expressed in terms of their equivalence to basic, primary or lower secondary education and/or certificates. This applies in particular to several countries, where the completion of lower secondary education is not a necessary condition for progression towards upper secondary studies and qualifications. For example:

In **Belgium**, in the **Flemish Community**, the adult education system does not provide any opportunities for learners to obtain a certificate of lower secondary education. However, there are basic skills courses in subjects such as Dutch, mathematics, languages, ICT and social studies which are provided by the 13 centres for basic adult education that are funded by the Flemish Government. Successful completion of these courses results in a certificate awarded for each learning area, but a general certificate of lower secondary education is not given. In addition, a level 2 literacy qualification is integrated within the Flemish Qualification Structure. In the **German-speaking Community**, there are no programmes for adult learners covering the complete range of knowledge and skills related to primary and lower secondary education. However, some institutes for adult education provide courses covering the different curriculum areas associated with lower secondary education. These courses are non-formal and do not lead to any qualifications but a certificate of completion is awarded.

In the **United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland)**, adults who lack the literacy, numeracy, language and ICT skills needed for life and work, can take basic skills qualifications. These qualifications are accredited at three different levels within the 9-level National Qualifications Framework (NQF): Entry Level (subdivided into Entry 1, 2 and 3), Level 1 and Level 2. There is no direct mapping of Entry Level sub-levels onto National Curriculum levels – the scale used to measure attainment in primary (ISCED 1) and lower secondary education (ISCED 2, known as Key Stage 3). However, both the National Curriculum levels and the NQF span a similarly broad range of attainment, providing progression from the most elementary achievements to levels more traditionally associated with general and vocational qualifications.

In **Iceland**, those who need to improve their basic skills of literacy and numeracy can follow non-formal and non-qualifying courses offered by local municipalities and nine lifelong learning centres.

3.1.2. Programmes at upper secondary level

As pointed out in the introduction to this chapter, the completion of upper secondary education is commonly seen as the minimum requirement for entering the labour market and for sustainable employability.

In the Eurydice National Education System Descriptions, several countries explicitly refer to 'upper secondary programmes for adults'. These programmes are characterised by their flexibility and are most often provided as part-time or evening courses. Participants must usually comply with various admission requirements, including qualification requirements (e.g. school leaving certificate from lower secondary education) and age requirements. With regard to the age criteria, prospective participants must often be at least 17-18 years old. For example in Austria, to study at the schools for working adults, learners must be at least 17 years of age. Similarly, upper secondary education for adults in Denmark, Spain, Poland and Liechtenstein is generally open for those who have reached at least the age of 18. Yet, in Spain and Poland, in some specific cases, younger people can also be admitted to these programmes. Learners who would like to engage in upper secondary education for adults in Sweden and Norway must be at least 20 and 21 years old respectively.

Several European countries (e.g. Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Malta, Romania, Slovakia, the United Kingdom and Iceland) do not report any programmes that would explicitly fall under the category of 'upper secondary education for adults'. However, in these countries, upper secondary education (general or vocational) leading to mainstream upper secondary qualifications, can also be delivered under various flexible arrangements adapted to the needs of mature students. For instance, the Education Acts in the Czech Republic and Slovakia stipulate that apart from daytime full-time courses, upper secondary education can also be organised as evening, extramural, distance or combined studies. In other words, although the above-mentioned legislation does not explicitly refer to 'adult learners', it enables education institutions to provide upper secondary programmes under various flexible arrangements. These programmes are open to all learners who are over compulsory school age and meet the qualification requirements.

In some countries, there are also programmes specifically designed for adults returning to study in order to qualify for entry to higher education (see Section 4.3 for information about these).

As with lower secondary education, it is difficult to evaluate the extent to which public authorities in different European countries make provision for upper secondary education for mature students. In many countries, such provision depends on several factors, namely the number of interested learners, the long-term policy objectives of countries/regions and the capacity of schools. In only a few countries are public authorities given an explicit responsibility to provide sufficient upper secondary education places for adult returners and, in particular, for those who have not already obtained a qualification at this level.

In **Sweden**, municipalities are obliged by law to provide upper secondary education for adults and they are requested to ensure that provision meets the demand and needs. If the number of applicants exceeds the available places for a course, priority must be given to those with limited previous education and according to certain criteria specified in the ordinance on education. In addition, each municipality should provide information about the availability of upper secondary adult education and encourage adults aged 20 and over to participate.

In **Norway**, since 2000, there has been a legal entitlement for adults who have not obtained an upper secondary qualification to be admitted to a course. The responsibility for provision of upper secondary education for adults is assigned to county educational authorities. Each county receives financial support as a part of national funding. The general regulations covering upper secondary education and the individual subject curricula also apply to adult education at this level. In addition, specific regulations on upper secondary education for adults stipulate that provision must be flexible and adapted to the individual needs of mature students.

Furthermore, according to national statistical data, it would appear that public authorities in some countries make extensive provision for upper secondary education for mature students. For example in Poland, during the school year 2009/10 there were 7 104 flexible general upper secondary sections with 183 835 adult students and 2 458 flexible specialised, vocational and technical upper secondary sections with 42 350 adult students. In Spain, in 2008/09, there were 1 241 general upper secondary education groups (evening courses) and 318 intermediate-level vocational training programmes for adults, in both public and private education institutions. In Italy, there are currently around 900 evening courses at upper secondary schools. The study pathways with the highest levels of participation are provided by technical and vocational institutes.

Finally, it must also be noted that the public authorities in Portugal have declared that the completion of upper secondary level (12 years of schooling) is one of their key policy priorities. This is being achieved through the expansion and diversification of relevant vocational training opportunities, the validation of prior learning and the provision of flexible courses for adults. Within the publicly funded 'New Opportunities Initiative', it was expected that one million adults would obtain an upper secondary

qualification between 2005 and 2010. At the end of 2010, the results were as follows: 1 602 136 people enrolled in the initiative (which correspond to around 30 % of the active population) and 435 055 achieved a certificate or qualification.

3.1.3. Frameworks covering various educational levels and types of education

While the two previous sections presented lower and upper education for adults as quite separate provision, it is important to note that some countries have developed a common framework which embraces 'second chance' programmes for mature students at various educational levels. Such a framework can consist of general education (e.g. general adult education in Denmark) or can include general as well as vocational provision (e.g. EFA courses in Portugal). It can also include formal provision (at various levels) as well as non-formal courses (e.g. Education for Social Advancement in the French Community of Belgium).

In **Belgium**, in the **French Community**, Education for Social Advancement (*enseignement de promotion sociale*) is aimed at people over the age of 16 who would like to improve their educational level or career prospects. Programmes delivered under this framework can lead to formal qualifications corresponding to those delivered in mainstream initial education and training, or to certificates specific to Education for Social Advancement (e.g. upon the completion of ICT courses, foreign language courses, language preparation for immigrants, etc.). Social advancement programmes are provided under various institutional arrangements. A similar system exists in the **Flemish Community**.

Courses provided in **Denmark** under the framework of general adult education are open to people over the age of 18 and they consist of three levels: preparatory adult education (FVU), general adult education (AVU) and higher preparatory single subject courses (HF). Preparatory adult education is non-formal and includes short courses in the Danish language, reading, writing and mathematics at primary and lower secondary levels. General adult education consists of single subject courses that can be completed by taking an examination corresponding to the leaving examinations of the *Folkeskole*. Higher preparatory single subject courses for adults correspond to the level of general upper secondary education.

The Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) in **Ireland** is a scheme aimed at tackling the low levels of educational attainment among the adult population. It provides flexible part-time education and training options and focuses on adult returners with qualifications lower than upper secondary level. Courses provided under this scheme can be formal or non-formal, and can, for instance, include subjects in the Junior and Leaving Certificate (ISCED 3), basic skills courses and a wide array of modules and programmes which are certified by the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC).

In the **Netherlands**, adult general secondary education (VAVO) consists of part-time lower and upper secondary programmes aimed at mature students who left uninterrupted initial education and training without a mainstream qualification. Programmes delivered in the framework of VAVO cover pre-vocational secondary education (VMBO, ISCED 2), senior general secondary education (ISCED 2 and 3) and pre-university education (ISCED 2 and 3).

The EFA courses in **Portugal** target people over the age of 18 who have not attained the level of upper secondary education. The aim of the EFA courses is to raise the qualification level of the adult population by offering education and training programmes combined with the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Courses can lead to a general education certificate at four levels (covering primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education, and corresponding to 4th, 6th, 9th and 12th school grades) as well as to vocational qualifications at three different levels. The EFA courses are linked to the levels of the National Qualifications Framework.

3.1.4. Institutional arrangements

Formal education and training programmes for adult returners are delivered under various institutional arrangements. Some countries deliver these programmes in the same establishments as those providing primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education to young people, while in other countries, provision is ensured largely by educational institutions dedicated to those who are no longer subject to full-time compulsory education. A combination of both types of institutional arrangements can be observed in a number of European countries. The aim of this section is to provide a mapping of this complex field and highlight some of the institutional arrangements in place to provide formal education and training for adult returners. Figure 3.2, which covers the main providers of upper secondary education for adult learners, illustrates the heterogeneity of existing institutional arrangements.

In countries such as Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Romania and Slovakia, the institutions providing primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education for young people are virtually the only providers of formal education and training up to upper secondary level for mature learners. Programmes for mature students mostly take the form of part-time, evening, external or distance courses and are delivered by teachers and trainers working in the initial education and training system.

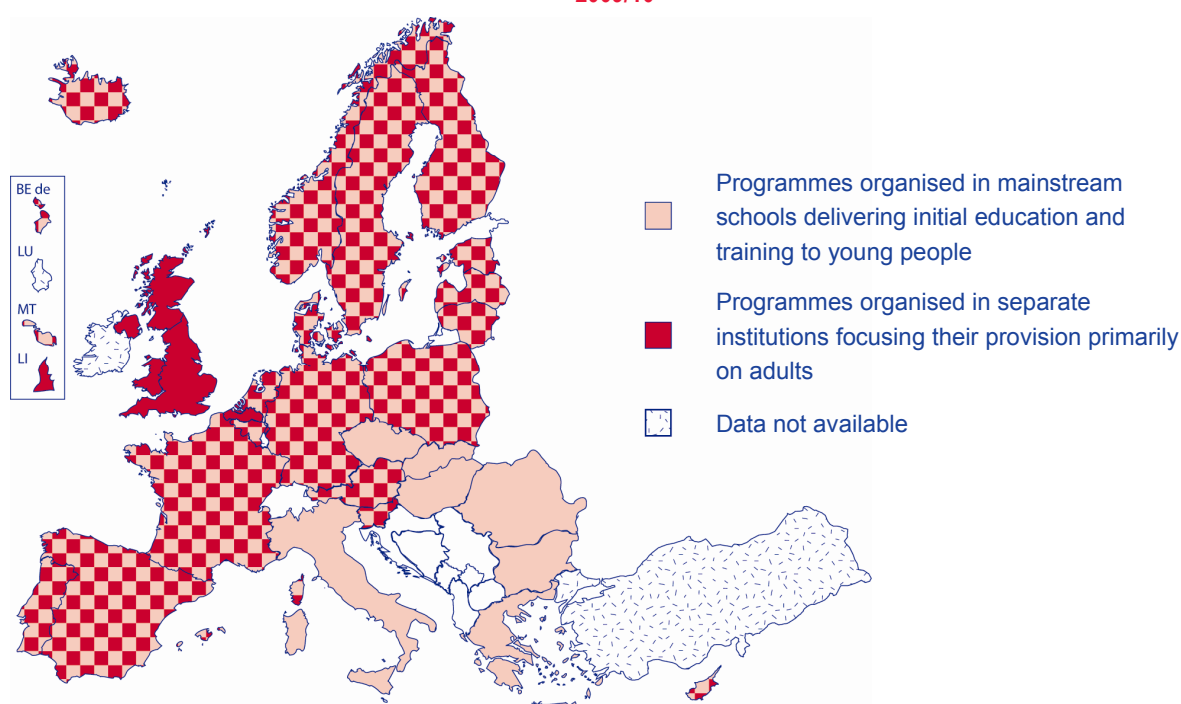
Similarly, in Italy, the establishments providing education and training for young people are also major providers of formal education and training programmes for mature students. However, in the near future, schools in Italy will operate as autonomous local institutional networks in order to provide education and training for mature learners.

In **Italy**, the existing institutional infrastructure for formal adult education and training currently includes around 500 Permanent Territorial Centres (CTPs) situated in state compulsory schools and around 900 evening courses at upper secondary schools. Under the new framework, the provision at lower and upper secondary levels will be merged and the local networks – Provincial Centres for Adult Education (CPIAs) – will be created. The centres will have their own staff as well as teaching and administrative autonomy.

In some countries, formal education and training programmes for mature students are most often provided in institutions that are separate from those delivering initial education and training to young people. Such institutional arrangements apply to adult secondary and higher vocational education in the Flemish Community of Belgium.

In the **Flemish Community of Belgium**, there are 111 centres for adult education (*Centra voor Volwassenenonderwijs* – CVO) where adults can follow a wide range of courses in secondary adult education and/or in higher vocational education. These centres focus their provision on adult participants and are entirely separate from the compulsory school system. 28 of these CVOs are authorised to offer courses of general education at secondary level (second chance education).

Figure 3.2: Institutional arrangements for the provision of upper secondary education for adults, 2009/10



Source: Eurydice.

Additional note

United Kingdom: Neither of the two categories fully applies to colleges in the further education sector. Although these colleges are major providers of formal education and training programmes for adult returners, they also cater for learners from age 16 (and sometime, in partnership with schools, for 14 to 16-year-olds). They cannot therefore be regarded as focusing primarily on adults. There are also other types of provider.

Explanatory note

Upper secondary programmes for adults organised in mainstreams schools in most cases take the form of part-time or evening courses.

Similarly, in the United Kingdom, colleges in the further education sector may provide formal education programmes aimed at adult returners. However, here, this would not be the prime focus of the institution but, rather, one aspect of a very broad role which also encompasses education and training for people over compulsory school age (16+).

In the **United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland)**, colleges in the further education (FE) sector provide full- or part-time education and training largely for students over compulsory school-leaving age (16 years), including adult learners. Traditionally, further education colleges offered technical and vocational courses, but many have since broadened their role to offer more general education programmes, including basic skills, GCSEs and GCE A levels for adults, access to higher education courses and in some cases higher education programmes, particularly short-cycle vocational programmes such as foundation degrees. Colleges also provide vocational and work-related courses for 14- to 16-year-olds in partnership with schools, and are now also major providers of full-time courses for 16 to 19-year-olds leading to general education qualifications such as GCSEs and GCE A levels. However, further education colleges are not the only providers of formal education for adults. In England and Wales (not all areas), there are also adult and community learning centres. These focus on non-formal provision but may also provide formal programmes for adult returners. Such centres are provided by local authorities and are further distinguished from colleges in the further education sector by their governance and funding arrangements. Other providers include private or voluntary sector training organisations in receipt of public funding.

Formal programmes at colleges in **Scotland** can lead to various formal qualifications such as the Scottish Qualifications Certificate, the National Certificate, Higher National Certificate, Higher National Diploma and Scottish Vocational Qualifications. The majority of the student population at the colleges are adults over the age of 25.

In the majority of European countries, formal education and training for adults can be delivered by both mainstream educational institutions providing initial education and training for young people and institutions focusing on mature learners. Such a combination of institutional arrangements exists, for instance, in Estonia, Spain, France, Cyprus, Lithuania, Latvia, the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal, Slovenia, Finland and Norway. However, not all programmes are necessarily delivered in all institutions.

In **Spain**, basic education (ISCED 1 and 2) and the baccalaureate (general upper secondary, ISCED 3) for adults may be taught either in schools that also provide education for young people or in special schools for adults. The intermediate vocational training programmes (ISCED 3) can also be provided in both types of institutions as well as in specific vocational training schools.

In **France**, public lower and upper secondary schools are grouped together on the basis of the geographical proximity, pooling their resources in order to provide education and training programmes for adult learners. Each group forms a GRETA network (i.e. group of establishments). At present, there are almost 300 GRETAs, providing education and training at around 6 500 sites. GRETAs can also provide education and training outside their own sites, for instance, in businesses or prisons. The provision made by each GRETA depends on the needs expressed by local authorities or the business sector. With respect to formal mainstream qualifications, the provision ranges from upper secondary to short tertiary vocational programmes and qualifications. Teachers and trainers are mainly professionals working within the initial education and training system but each network also has its own staff responsible for the planning, organisation and overall coordination of learning activities. Formal vocational qualifications such as BEP or CAP (both ISCED 3) are also delivered by the National Association for Adult Vocational Training (AFPA). AFPA has 22 regional divisions and consists of 274 training/validation sites and 207 guidance sites. While GRETAs operate under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, AFPA falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour and focuses its provision on job seekers and others vulnerable to exclusion from the labour market.

In **Cyprus**, adults can follow upper secondary education at upper secondary schools for adults (*esperina gymnasia*) as well as in the Evening Technical School of Nicosia, which has a four-year course and provides a certificate equivalent to the certificate of upper secondary education (*apolytirion*).

In **Lithuania**, formal general adult education is provided in 17 centres for adult education and 13 adult general education schools. In addition, 33 general education schools for young people have special classes for adult education. Adult general education schools and schools with classes for adults deliver adult primary, lower secondary and upper secondary school curricula.

In **Latvia**, adults can follow secondary education either in evening classes of mainstream general education schools or in specific schools, known as evening or shift schools, which provide second chance education for all age groups.

In the **Netherlands**, mature students can follow vocational upper secondary education either in secondary vocational education schools or in 43 regional training centres (ROCs), which offer a complete range of adult and vocational education programmes, including formal education and training.

In **Austria**, formal education and training programmes for adults can be delivered by schools for working adults, operating mainly in school premises that deliver secondary technical and vocational education to young people, or by other institutions such as *Volkshochschulen*, *Berufsförderungsinstitute* as well as by some NGOs. The three latter providers mainly deliver second chance programmes, in particular basic skills education, preparatory courses for the lower secondary school leaving certificate (ISCED 2) and courses preparing for the special matriculation examination (*Berufsreifeprüfung*).

In **Portugal**, the EFA (*Educação e Formação de Adultos*) courses can be organised by public, private or cooperative education establishments, vocational training centres belonging to the Institute for Employment and Vocational Training (IEFP) and other accredited bodies. There is also a network of around 500 New Opportunities Centres, where people over 18 years of age who have at least three years' professional experience can have their prior learning validated, undertake education and training courses, or receive guidance services. The New Opportunities Centres are promoted by mainstream schools, vocational training centres, companies, municipalities, local and regional development agencies and other bodies.

In **Slovenia**, programmes for adults leading to an upper secondary qualification can be organised in mainstream schools delivering initial education to young people as well as in separate institutions focusing their provision primarily on adults (folk high schools, education units within enterprises or Chambers).

In **Finland**, basic education and general upper secondary courses can be delivered in adult education units linked to institutions providing education for young people as well as in separate upper secondary schools for adults in approximately 40 municipalities. In addition, basic and upper secondary education can also be organised by some folk high schools, 'summer universities' ⁽³⁾ and 'summer upper secondary schools' ⁽⁴⁾.

In **Norway**, primary and lower secondary adult education courses can be taken at local primary and lower secondary schools as well as at municipal adult education centres. Upper secondary education for adults can be delivered by traditional upper secondary schools or county-based adult education centres. In addition, some study associations, distance education institutions and labour market authorities offer units of study which are recognised components of the secondary education programme.

Differences in institutional arrangements can sometimes be observed between general education and vocationally-oriented programmes. This can be illustrated by examples from the German-speaking Community of Belgium, Denmark, Germany and Estonia.

In the **German-speaking Community of Belgium**, general formal education and training for adults is organised by five institutes for adult education (*Institut für Schulische Weiterbildung*). In 2007/08 most institutes for adult education have been merged with schools providing secondary education for young people. However, there are also providers of vocational training, retraining and some formal education for adults working in special centres, which are different from and unrelated to traditional school institutions.

In **Denmark**, general education for adults up to upper secondary level is mainly provided by separate self-governing educational establishments (adult education centres – VUC), while vocationally-oriented upper secondary programmes are mainly offered by institutions providing corresponding programmes for young people.

In **Germany**, general education for adults is provided by separate institutions focusing their provision on adult learners, whereas vocationally-oriented upper secondary programmes for adults are offered by private bodies supported by the Federal Agency for Labour and, to a lesser degree, by institutions providing corresponding programmes for young people.

In **Estonia**, adults can acquire basic education and general upper secondary education either in the 16 upper secondary schools established specifically for adults (*täiskasvanute gümnaasium*) or in the 18 adult departments created in general education schools. Vocational upper secondary education can be followed in mainstream vocational schools.

⁽³⁾ Summer universities offer short-term non-degree courses in various areas. There are around 20 summer universities in Finland and courses are held in 132 localities.

⁽⁴⁾ Summer secondary/high schools are intensive and non-formal alternatives to mainstream education. During summer 2010, there were 16 summer secondary/high schools in Finland.

It is also important to note that institutions providing formal programmes for mature students count in many countries among the most important providers of non-formal education and training. In some countries, it is not only formal and non-formal education that is provided under the same roof, but also a wider range of services relating to education, such as guidance services or services of validation of non-formal and informal learning. For example, the provision made by the GRETA networks in France can include formal programmes, non-formal courses, validation of non-formal and informal learning, tailor-made courses for industry, as well as guidance services for learners.

Finally, although this mapping did not deal in particular with the role of employers and enterprises in providing formal education and training programmes, it should be noted that apart from apprenticeship schemes, alternating periods in an educational institution and at the workplace, formal programmes can sometimes be provided exclusively by employers. For instance, in the United Kingdom, programmes leading to nationally-recognised qualifications, especially vocational qualifications such as National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), can be delivered in the workplace, by workplace learning providers or directly by employers. Many such programmes are either fully-funded by government or part-funded by government, with the remainder being funded by the employer. Similarly in Germany, people over the age of 18 are not obliged to go to a vocational education institution during their vocational training.

3.2. Adapting formal education and training to the needs of adult learners

The effective adaptation of formal education and training programmes to the needs of mature students can play an important role in removing barriers to their participation. There are various ways in which this can be achieved. For example, the flexibility of programmes can be improved through modularisation or alternative modes of delivery, such as evening classes, distance learning or e-learning. Mature students can also be offered various tailor-made services, including guidance services or validation of the learning outcomes achieved in non-formal and informal learning contexts.

This section provides a mapping of various initiatives related to the modularisation of formal programmes, the validation of prior learning (with a view to obtaining a formal qualification), and distance and e-learning. It also outlines how the education of teachers and trainers is adapted to the needs of mature students.

3.2.1. Modularisation of programmes and increasing the flexibility of learning pathways

Modularisation as a method of designing education and training programmes contributes to the individualisation and differentiation of learning pathways. Programmes divided into several distinct modules or building blocks allow learners to accumulate different components at their own pace and complete qualifications progressively. Modularisation can also facilitate the process of validation of prior non-formal and informal learning, as it allows validation to be applied to distinct building blocks of an entire qualification.

Modularisation of formal programmes for mature students has been or is being implemented in a number of European countries. A systematic approach to modularisation can, for instance, be observed in Spain (adult general and vocational secondary education), Italy (courses within Permanent Territorial Centres at lower secondary level and evening courses at upper secondary schools), Cyprus (afternoon and evening classes of the technical schools), Lithuania (all levels of education, including basic and secondary education for adults), Austria (courses for working adults at

medium-level technical and vocational schools and secondary technical and vocational colleges), Slovenia (general and vocational secondary education), Iceland (adult education programmes at upper secondary level) and Liechtenstein (programmes at vocational secondary schools). For example:

In **Spain**, a modular system has been implemented within adult secondary education. Content is organised into three knowledge areas (communication, social studies, and science and technology) with a modular structure. The number and organisation of modules vary in the different Autonomous Communities. Access to these modules is flexible and students can enter the module which corresponds best to their previous learning achievements and their needs. To be admitted to the first module, learners must prove that they have completed the 6th year of primary education or an equivalent level, or have passed level two of initial adult education. Another way to access any level of secondary education for adults is to demonstrate appropriate knowledge through an initial assessment. Vocational training (intermediate and advanced) is also organised in modules. Adults may choose to enrol only in modules that form part of a vocational training programme.

In **Iceland**, upper secondary adult education programmes are structured by modules in a unit/credit system. This means that the educational content of each subject is divided into a number of defined course units, which last for one semester. Each completed course unit is worth a certain number of credits (one credit usually corresponds to learning time equivalent to one lesson a week during one semester).

Belgium (all three Communities) is an example of a country that is currently completing the progressive implementation of a modular structure within adult education and training, including formal programmes. Further examples of the progressive implementation of a modular or unit-based structure are Portugal and the United Kingdom. Portugal has undertaken a comprehensive reform of its qualification system, while the United Kingdom is moving towards a new qualification framework based on a unit/credit system.

In the **Flemish Community of Belgium**, the modularisation of adult basic education started in 2000. Since 2007, all programmes organised by the centres for adult basic education (CBEs) follow the new modular structure. In addition, in 2007, the Flemish government published a number of decisions concerning the modular structure within upper secondary adult education. It is envisaged that the existing linear upper secondary courses will be gradually phased out by 2012 as, by that time, all courses must be offered in a modular form. An interim evaluation of this measure has shown that 98.7 % of upper secondary adult education courses are already organised in a modular structure.

The **French Community of Belgium** started to implement a modular structure for the programmes for social advancement in 1991. Both modular and linear structures coexisted for several years, but today, all new programmes must be offered in a modular structure, which consists of one or more units; each unit consisting of a course or a set of courses.

In the **German-speaking Community of Belgium**, courses offered by the five institutes for adult education (*Schulische Weiterbildung*) are being gradually replaced by education and training modules consisting of one or several units.

In **Portugal**, the modularisation of programmes has been taking place alongside a comprehensive reform of vocational education that began in 2007. The reforms include the creation of a National Qualification System which incorporates the National Catalogue of Qualifications (developed and continuously updated by 16 sectoral councils) and the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The framework has eight levels and encompasses all qualifications currently awarded in the Portuguese education and training systems. The National Catalogue of Qualifications contains standards for around 250 non-tertiary qualifications that are based on a modular structure. Different modules can be completed either by participation in an education or training programme or by validation of prior non-formal and informal learning.

In the **United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland)**, the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) established a single framework of nine levels (Entry Level and Levels 1-8) for both general and vocational qualifications.

However, qualifications at the same level in terms of difficulty can still be very different in terms of content and duration. The Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) is a new framework, which uses the same system of levels as the NQF, but differs in that every qualification is made up of units, each of which has a credit value. Qualifications in the QCF come in one of three sizes – Award, Certificate and Diploma, defined according to the number of credits assigned to each unit/qualification. By the end of 2010, most vocational qualifications had moved into the QCF. A decision about moving general educational qualifications – principally the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and the General Certificate of Education at Advanced Level (A Levels) – into the QCF from the NQF has not yet been made.

One of the characteristics of the modular system is that individual modules or building blocks can often be recognised as standalone qualifications and immediately used in the labour market. For instance in Norway, a large number of labour market courses delivered under the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion correspond to modules from the curriculum for upper secondary education. In the Czech Republic, each upper secondary vocational qualification consists of several building blocks known as partial qualifications. Partial qualifications are delivered only in the system of continuing education and correspond to the knowledge and skills needed to perform an occupational activity. These qualifications can be obtained either through formal education or by the validation of non-formal and informal learning. They can be used to enter the labour market directly or can be accumulated progressively, with a view to achieving a full upper secondary vocational qualification.

There are also other organisational patterns similar to modularisation which allow the progressive accumulation of learning achievements. For example, in some countries, lower or upper secondary education subjects can be studied and certified separately.

In **Denmark**, general adult education is organised as single subject courses. The learner receives a formal certificate after completion of each individual subject, and courses can be completed by leaving examinations, corresponding to general lower and upper secondary education.

In the **United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland)**, there is no single school leaving certificate or diploma at age 16 or 18. Students take qualifications (GCSEs and A Levels) in a range of separate subjects, which are certificated separately. These qualifications are also available to adult learners, who can study for them at further education colleges or through distance learning, or (in many areas of England and Wales) through adult and community learning centres. In this way it is possible for adults to gradually add to the qualifications obtained at school without repeating subjects already completed successfully.

Finally, countries such as the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary and Slovakia have put in place shortened upper secondary programmes (or 'bridging programmes') which allow learners to build on the qualifications they have already acquired without having to repeat studies similar to the ones already undertaken. These bridging programmes are targeted at people who have taken a short vocational upper secondary programme (ISCED 3C) and would like to gain an upper secondary qualification which would allow them to access higher education (ISCED 3A), or at those who have already obtained an upper secondary general qualification, but would like to pursue a vocational qualification at the same level.

In **Hungary**, those who followed a vocational upper secondary programme and do not hold a matriculation examination allowing access to higher education (*érettségi vizsga*), may enrol in shortened courses to prepare for this examination. The courses include only the subjects that were not included in the upper secondary vocational curriculum. At the same time, those who have obtained a matriculation examination in general education, but who lack vocational qualification, can follow a shortened vocational programme consisting of technical and vocational subjects only.

3.2.2. Recognition and validation of prior non-formal and informal learning

Recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning is one of the five priority areas of the Action Plan on Adult Learning (European Commission, 2007). Overall, almost all European countries are currently developing a system of validation of non-formal and informal learning or expanding their already existing system. This goes hand in hand with the moves towards National Qualification Frameworks based on the learning outcomes. However, most countries face difficulties in challenging the supremacy of formal education delivered in traditional school settings, which is often seen as the only valid way to achieve the knowledge, skills and competences necessary to acquire the principal national qualifications such as the upper secondary school leaving certificate. Despite these barriers, many countries have already, at least to some extent, implemented procedures that include some elements of validation of non-formal and informal learning in relation to formal mainstream qualifications.

The process of recognition and validation of prior non-formal and informal learning is sometimes carried out at the entry to formal education or training programmes. This type of recognition procedure can allow adult learners to enter into programmes even if they do not meet the traditional qualification requirements for admission.

In **Finland**, legislation allows students to apply for upper secondary programmes even if they do not meet the standard entry requirements (i.e. a lower secondary school leaving certificate). In these cases, admission takes place on the basis of a validation of non-formal and informal learning. Overall, the upper secondary schools with a vocational orientation accept a greater number of candidates without standard entry qualifications than upper secondary schools with a general (academic) orientation.

Initial assessment of prospective learners which takes into account all previous achievements can also be used in order to ensure appropriate placement of candidates in education and training programmes.

In **Denmark**, adult vocational education (GVU) leading to qualifications equivalent to those delivered to young people in the system of initial education and training takes its starting point as the individual assessment of a participant's previous experiences and qualifications. This initial assessment, known as 'competence assessment', is designed to determine the level of each participant. It takes into account prior formal, non-formal and informal learning. On the basis of the assessment, an individual education plan is prepared for each participant. The plan identifies the gaps in the participant's learning which must be addressed before taking the final test and examination. At the same time, a 'statement of competence' is prepared which denotes which elements of the vocational education and training curriculum the participant already masters.

In **Spain**, within the framework of primary and secondary education for adults, the current regulations call for initial learner assessment to provide each learner with guidance and a placement. The conditions for initial assessment are established by each Autonomous Community; in some, the regulations specify that the assessment can take into consideration the learning outcomes achieved through non-formal and informal learning.

In some countries (e.g. Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Spain, Latvia, Austria, Poland, Finland and Norway), learners are allowed to take examinations for formal qualifications without prior participation in an education or training programme. Direct access to examinations is available for individual subjects (or units and modules) or entire programmes.

In the **French Community of Belgium**, mainstream qualifications can be achieved either through participating in education and training programmes, or through examinations organised by the Boards of Examiners of the French Community (*Jurys de la Communauté française*). These bodies award a large number of certificates at secondary and

tertiary education levels which have the same legal value as those awarded by schools. This system represents an alternative way to obtain a formal certification. The examinations target mainly self-learners and those who cannot follow traditional formal education. A similar system exists in the **Flemish Community of Belgium**.

In the **Czech Republic**, the 2004 Education Act created the opportunity for people to take upper secondary examinations in all individual subjects (or other discrete parts of programmes) without prior school attendance. It is also possible to take different parts of the upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary school leaving examination (*maturitní zkouška, závěrečná zkouška* or *absolutorium*). In addition, the 2006 Act on Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results introduced a new type of formal qualification entitled 'partial qualifications' which are only delivered in the continuing education system and can be obtained either through participating in organised education or by the validation of prior learning.

In **Denmark**, general adult education consists of single subject courses at three separate levels. Learners who have not taken courses of study can sit for examinations in different subjects as independent students.

In **Estonia**, students can complete basic or upper secondary education through external exams and they have a right to receive guidance while preparing for the exams.

In **Spain**, the 2006 Education Act stipulates that education authorities may organise qualifying examinations aimed at learners over the age of 18 who do not hold a lower secondary school leaving certificate (*Graduado en Educación Secundaria Obligatoria*). The act also states that educational authorities should periodically organise final examinations leading to the upper secondary school leaving certificate (*Bachiller*) for people who are aged 20 or over. The same applies to vocational education and training: learners who have reached the age of 18 can be admitted directly to the final examination for the upper secondary *Técnico* certificate, and those who have reached the age of 20 for the *Técnico Superior* qualification. Furthermore, since 2009, people with relevant professional experience can participate in the competence assessment related to different units of the National Catalogue of Professional Qualifications. Units that are successfully achieved count towards the completion of full vocational qualifications.

In **Latvia**, according to the Vocational Education Law, in 2011, it became possible to achieve mainstream professional qualifications by passing an examination without prior participation in the respective education/training programme.

In **Austria**, people who work in a position similar to that of an apprentice in a specified trade are allowed to take an apprenticeship certification examination (*Lehrabschlussprüfung*) and thereby acquire a formal vocational qualification.

In **Poland**, people over 18, who are neither students of full-time or part-time programmes, can take 'extramural exams' leading directly to the completion of primary or secondary education.

In **Finland**, the Act on Matriculation Examination allows school principals to admit people to the final upper secondary matriculation examination even though they have not attended the course.

In **Norway**, mature students may take lower and upper secondary level examinations in different subjects as external candidates, without attending the courses.

In addition to the examples given above, Austria has put in place a special matriculation examination for mature students (*Berufsreifepfung*) which includes some recognition of prior learning. In particular, learners may be exempted from specific elements upon proof of relevant competences.

In **Austria**, the special matriculation examination for employed mature students (*Berufsreifepfung*) comprises examinations in German, mathematics, modern foreign language and a specialised work-related subject in the candidate's occupational field. The diploma awarded upon successful completion of this examination has the same value as an ordinary matriculation examination (*Reifepfung*) taken at higher-level secondary schools, as it entitles its holders to take up studies at Austrian universities and other higher education institutions; it also leads to the same grading in civil service salary schemes. Access to the special matriculation examination is open to those who have previously completed an apprenticeship programme, medium-level technical and vocational schooling, attended a school for nurses or paramedical school, master craftsman class or passed a qualifying exam (*Befähigungsprüfung*).

In several countries, the knowledge, skills and competences required by formal qualifications can be recognised and validated through various assessment methods which differ from traditional school-based examinations. Such assessment approaches include the portfolio method, demonstration, simulation or observation. The first approach is quite widespread in France and Portugal, while other approaches are illustrated by the competence-based qualifications in Finland.

In **France**, all vocational qualifications can be obtained through a specific validation process known as VAE (*Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience*). This process was established in 2002 by the Social Modernisation Law and it enables mature learners to validate learning acquired in various contexts (e.g. professional activity, charity work, social, political and cultural activities) with a view to obtaining a formal qualification. The minimum period of experience required for access to the VAE process is three years. Validation of learning outcomes related to mainstream upper secondary qualifications comprises several stages and mainly uses the portfolio method. The applicant's portfolio of evidence is evaluated on the basis of the requirements of the specific diploma being sought. The validation procedure can lead to the direct award of a full qualification, or a partial award which specifies the elements the candidate needs to complete in order to achieve the full qualification. If the candidate does not demonstrate any relevant learning outcomes, the procedure does not lead to any certification.

Under the New Opportunities Initiative, **Portugal** has developed a systematic approach to the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning (known as the RVCC process). The process of recognition can lead to basic level qualifications (corresponding to six or nine years of schooling), secondary level qualifications (corresponding to 12 years of schooling) or vocational qualifications. The recognition process is carried out according to the Key Competency Standards for each qualification. To enter into the process, candidates must be at least 18 years old and have a minimum of three years' professional experience. Candidates who meet the entry requirements usually prepare a competence portfolio in which they demonstrate their knowledge, skills and abilities. Each portfolio is evaluated by a jury. The recognition process can lead to a complete or partial award of a qualification. In the latter case, the recognition and validation of prior learning can be completed by an education or training programme (e.g. an EFA course or modular vocational training). The whole process is underpinned by guidance services.

In **Finland**, the validation of prior learning is mainly available for competence-based qualifications. There are three levels of competence-based qualifications: upper secondary vocational qualifications, further vocational qualifications and specialist vocational qualifications. The upper secondary competence-based qualifications correspond to those taken in vocational education and training intended for young people. In order to obtain an upper secondary vocational qualification, students must demonstrate the knowledge and skills required for a given occupation. Adult learners may demonstrate their vocational skills in competence tests regardless of how and where they have acquired the skills (i.e. candidates can take their exams after or during formal training, or without any formal training at all). The qualification guidelines determine the vocational skills to be demonstrated in order to acquire the qualification certificate. They also define the elements constituting the qualification and the methods of demonstrating the vocational skills (e.g. skill demonstrations, observation, interviews, questionnaires, portfolio work and/or project work).

The assessment methods such as portfolios, demonstrations, simulations or observations are often used in the validation procedures for vocational qualifications that exist only in the system of continuing education and training (e.g. partial qualifications in the Czech Republic). These methods of assessment are also used in some countries as an instrument for guidance and counselling. This is the case in the United Kingdom (Scotland), where the portfolio method is commonly used as a guidance tool, helping learners to assess their own educational development and make appropriate choices for further education or training. The assessment process therefore does not lead to the award of a formal qualification or certificate, the outcome is rather the provision of advice to the applicant on further study options.

Overall, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning appears primarily as a process used in relation to vocational education and training, rather than to general education or academically-oriented qualifications. For instance, the Flemish Community of Belgium reports that in a proposal for the procedure of recognition of prior learning (*eerder verworven kwalificaties* – EVK) a clear distinction is made between academic and vocational qualifications. According to the proposal:

academic qualifications are qualifications which people can only obtain through the educational system and which give them access to further education, a profession and/or allow them to function socially. Professional qualifications are a set of competences a person uses within a certain profession or social context to achieve the results expected from that profession or from that social role. These competences could be acquired through education but also through training outside of the educational system (EACEA/Eurydice, 2010).

3.2.3. Open and distance learning

One of the greatest challenges for mature students, who would like to return to formal education and training, is to reconcile their learning commitments with other responsibilities, such as family and work obligations. For this reason, many adult returners look for programmes where the constraints on study (in terms of time, place, pace or method of study) are minimised. Evening and part-time courses respond partly to these requirements. In addition, there are also other modes of delivery such as open learning, distance education and training, and e-learning that are particularly suited to the needs of adult returners.

In the majority of European countries, the provision of open and distance learning up to upper secondary level is mainly ensured through local initiatives (e.g. *ad hoc* projects at the institutional level) or activities of private providers. National-level measures and initiatives in this field are quite rare.

In the French Community of Belgium, Spain and France, there are public organisations under the ministries of education that ensure the provision of open and distance learning for learners of all ages, i.e. young people as well as adult returners. These organisations provide either formal education programmes exclusively (in Spain) or formal as well as non-formal courses (in the French Community of Belgium and France).

The distance learning provision in the **French Community of Belgium** was established in 1965 with two main objectives. Firstly, to prepare learners for the examinations organised by the Boards of Examiners of the French Community (*Jurys de la Communauté française*) leading to formal qualifications at lower or upper secondary levels. Secondly, to prepare applicants for the civil service recruitment and promotion examinations organised by the public authorities for personnel at different levels of the civil service. While these original objectives have been retained, the scope of distance learning provision has progressively expanded. A similar distance learning provision used to be provided in the **Flemish Community of Belgium**, but it was phased out at the end of 2010. However, the existing courses are still available on an open educational portal and the Flemish Government has been encouraging open and distance learning by various other means (e.g. by financial support for courses with a minimum of 25 % of distance learning and by financing projects that target the development of courses with a substantial proportion of distance learning).

In **Spain**, formal distance learning is managed by the Spanish Ministry of Education through the Centre for Innovation and Development of Distance Education (*Centro para la Innovación y Desarrollo de la Educación a Distancia* – CIDEAD). The Centre covers various formal programmes and qualifications (from primary to upper secondary levels) as well as a teacher training programme in the field of distance learning. In addition, some Autonomous Communities have established special centers for adult distance education that also cover various formal programmes and qualifications (from primary to upper secondary levels).

The National Centre for Distance Education (*Centre national d'enseignement à distance* – CNED) in **France**, created in 1986, is a public organisation under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. CNED provides education and training from childhood to adulthood, formal as well as non-formal programmes. With regard to formal education, CNED offers qualifications from upper secondary to tertiary education levels. In addition, it also offers non-formal courses for various targets, such as job seekers, employees and large organisations (e.g. the army, French National Railways and major corporations).

Other examples of policy actions in the area of open and distance learning exist in Denmark, which has established a legal framework to improve the provision of open and distance learning, and in the United Kingdom where the Government has supported the development of a number of specific distance learning initiatives.

In **Denmark**, open learning is regulated by the Act on Open Education. The aim of the Act is to ensure that an adequate provision of vocationally-oriented education is available all over the country. Open education is provided by various institutions under the aegis of the Ministry of Education and approved to offer vocationally-oriented programmes at upper secondary or tertiary education level.

In the **United Kingdom**, *learnirect* is a network of online learning and information services, developed with a remit from Government to provide flexible courses, delivered through the use of new technologies, for post-16 learners, and particularly those with few or no skills or qualifications who are unlikely to participate in traditional forms of learning. In **England** and **Wales**, *learnirect* is delivered through a network of more than 750 online learning centres and its provision includes non-formal as well as qualifying programmes. In **Northern Ireland**, *learnirect* works in cooperation with the further education sector to support the advancement of learning in further education using *learnirect* products and services. In **Scotland**, *learnirect* is part of Skills Development Scotland, the organisation offering courses at a variety of venues, some of which are on-line courses. Open and distance learning opportunities in the United Kingdom are also available from a range of other providers. These providers can be accredited by the Open and Distance Learning Quality Council, on the basis of their administrative and tutorial methods and teaching materials. The Council was originally set up at the request of Government, but it is now an independent body.

3.2.4. Teachers and trainers

There are also other ways to adapt formal mainstream programmes to the needs of mature students. One of the key factors in ensuring that education programmes are tailored to the needs of mature students is the skills of the teachers and trainers involved.

In the majority of European countries, teachers and trainers delivering formal programmes to mature students must comply with the same qualification requirements as those delivering primary, lower secondary or upper secondary programmes to pupils in the system of initial education and training. However, in most countries, initial teacher training programmes do not include any elements relating to teaching methods and approaches targeting adult learners. Only a very few exceptions can be found across Europe. For example in Norway, teaching methodology focusing on adult learners is included in ordinary initial teacher education. In Slovenia, all upper secondary teachers must hold a Master's degree in a specific subject area (with the exception of some vocational areas, where such education is not offered), which commonly includes a module focusing on theoretical knowledge for teaching young people as well as adult learners. If this module is not included in initial teacher education, teachers must complete a supplementary course in the relevant field in order to get permanent employment.

In the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland), there is a distinction between the school sector and the post-16 or further education sector. The education and training of teachers who are intending to follow a career in the further education sector includes activities aiming to equip future

post-16 teachers with the competences needed to teach young people as well as adult returners. The legal requirements for teaching in the school sector (education up to the age of 16, and 16 to 19 where this takes place in schools) are different. This applies even though the programmes taught in schools and in further education institutions may sometimes be the same.

To conclude, it must be stressed that while in the majority of European countries teaching methods designed for adult learners are not included in initial education of future primary, lower secondary or upper secondary teachers, teachers in most countries can further develop their skills in teaching adults through the system of continuing professional development (CPD).

CHAPTER 4: MATURE STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Lifelong learning has been an integral part of the Bologna process agenda and its importance has been underlined in all the communiqués ⁽¹⁾ that followed the Bologna Declaration (1999). Most recently, it has gained a specific place in the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué (2009) which stressed the importance of implementing lifelong learning policies in the higher education sector.

The Action Plan on Adult Learning *It is always a good time to learn* (European Commission, 2007) includes a direct reference to the participation of adults in higher education. Within the framework of its 'one step up' objective, according to which adults should be provided with opportunities to achieve a qualification at least one level higher than before, the Action Plan calls for measures to widen opportunities for adult learners to embark on higher education studies.

This chapter maps the various policy initiatives to promote the widening of access to the higher education sector in order to attract non-traditional learners, including adult returners. The first section provides a general overview of the policies, strategies and measures to encourage the participation of mature students in higher education. The sections that follow analyse the specific actions that make a major contribution to widening access, including the provision of non-traditional access routes to higher education, alternative ways to progress within higher education and flexible modes of delivering higher education programmes.

4.1. Policies, strategies and measures to encourage the participation of mature students in higher education

Mature students (or adult learners/adult returners) represent a category of higher education students that is quite difficult to define. At European level, there is no commonly accepted definition of a 'mature student' in higher education that would identify this category in terms of age. In fact, most students who undertake higher education studies have already reached the legal age of adulthood. In many ways adult returners are indistinguishable from younger students in that all students can study full-time, part-time, or take part in distance, e-learning or open learning programmes.

However, the common perception is that mature students are students who are older than the typical higher education student ⁽²⁾ and have re-joined formal education after a certain period outside the system. They are often likely to be found in programmes delivered under various flexible arrangements such as part-time, open, e-learning or distance learning courses.

At country level, the category of mature students is sometimes defined more precisely, particularly in countries which have introduced specific policies or strategies to attract mature students into higher education, or countries which include this category of students in their national statistics.

The available research indicates (Higher Education Academy EvidenceNet, 2010) that mature students are not a homogenous group. In fact, they are linked only by their decision to participate in higher education at a later stage of life and they often differ considerably with respect to their demographic characteristics such as age, employment status, social class etc. Some countries have introduced policy measures that take account of this diversity. For example, Ireland and the United

⁽¹⁾ Prague 2001, Berlin 2003, Bergen 2005, London 2007, Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve 2009.

⁽²⁾ For more details on the typical ages of higher education students across Europe, see the system overview tables in the Eurydice publication *Focus on Higher Education in Europe 2010* (Eurydice, 2010).

Kingdom (Scotland) have taken specific measures to tackle the under-representation of unemployed mature students in higher education. In Southern Europe, Spain has developed a policy of alternative access to higher education directed at three different age groups of mature students: learners who are over 25, 40 and 45 years old.

At present, Estonia and Ireland appear to be the countries with the most concrete policy objectives for the participation of adults in higher education:

In **Estonia**, the Higher Education Strategy 2006-2015 and its implementation plan for 2008-2010 have set the objective to raise the share of 30-year-old or older students in the first and second cycle studies to 25 % by the year 2015 (it was 22.0 % in 2007 and 23.0 % in 2009).

In **Ireland**, mature students in higher education are understood to be students aged 23 and above. In 2008, the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013 set a target to increase the proportion of full-time mature students in higher education from 13 %, in 2006, to 20 % by 2013. It also set targets for the increased participation by mature learners in full- and part-time higher education (from 18 % in 2006 to 27 % by 2013). In addition, the core objectives of the plan include the promotion of the lifelong learning agenda in Ireland through the development of broader routes of entry to higher education, a significant expansion of part-time/flexible courses (from 7 % in 2006 to 17 % by 2013), in tandem with financial measures to address the student support implications of lifelong learning.

In the majority of other European countries, higher education policy or strategies, or lifelong learning strategies, refer to the participation of mature students in higher education in rather general terms, highlighting that the higher education sector should promote formal and non-formal learning opportunities for adults.

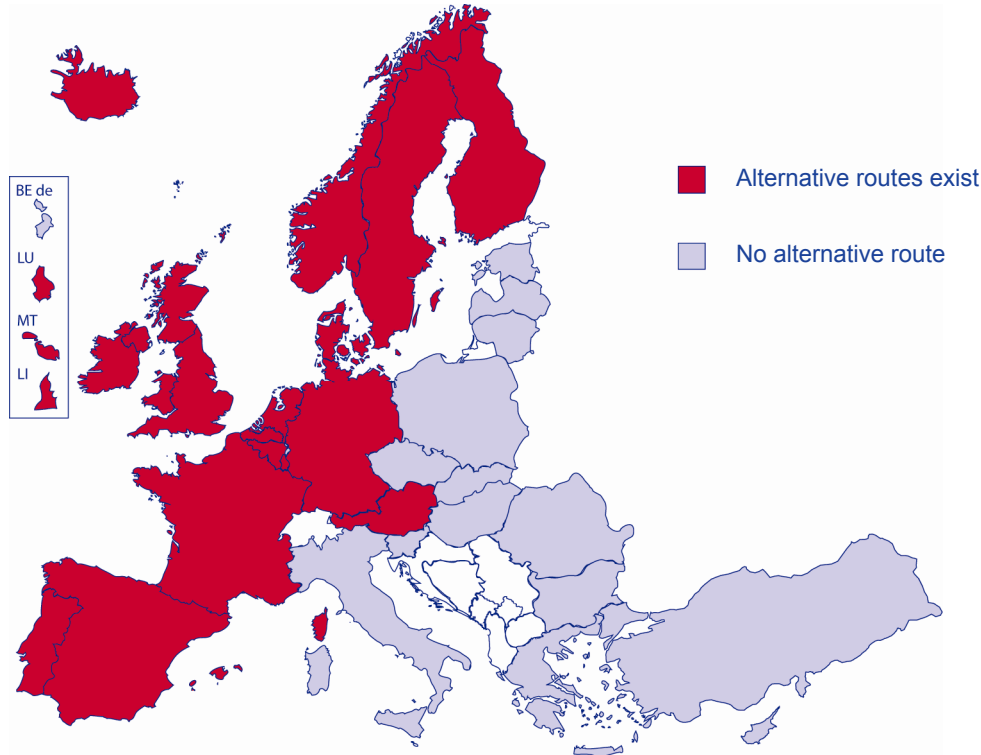
Despite the fact that explicit policy objectives for the participation of mature students in higher education are quite rare, many countries have put in place various measures that are well adapted to the needs of mature students.

For instance, in several European countries, the traditional general or vocational upper secondary school leaving certificate is not the only way to enter higher education (see Figure 4.1). This means that candidates who do not possess a standard mainstream qualification allowing access to higher education can use at least one alternative route to embark on studies at this level. The alternative options most commonly include admission based on the validation of prior learning (see Section 4.2.2) or on the basis of specific preparatory programmes for higher education studies (see Section 4.3).

In addition, in some countries, students can have their prior non-formal and informal learning accredited towards their higher education studies and therefore be exempted from some units of study. However, it is not yet common practice in Europe for the outcomes from non-formal and informal learning to be recognised as the equivalent of a full higher education qualification (for more details see Section 4.2.3).

Finally, mature students often face difficulties in undertaking traditional full-time studies. Therefore, policy measures which encourage alternative modes of delivering higher education programmes play a vital role in widening participation among adult returners in formal higher education programmes (for more details see Section 4.4).

Figure 4.1: Alternative routes to higher education for non-traditional candidates, 2009/10



Source: Eurydice.

Additional note

Cyprus: All higher education candidates must hold the upper secondary school leaving certificate, but a certain number of students over the age of 30 can be accepted by public universities under special arrangements (e.g. they are permitted lower marks in entrance exams). In addition, extra admission points (according to age) are awarded to candidates at the Open University of Cyprus during the application process.

Explanatory note

Alternative routes exist: At least one alternative access route to higher education exists (i.e. the upper secondary general or vocational school leaving certificate is not a necessary condition to enter into higher education).

No alternative route: the upper secondary general or vocational school leaving certificate is a necessary condition to enter into higher education.

4.2. Recognition and validation of prior non-formal and informal learning

Higher education is often seen as the most challenging sector when it comes to the implementation of procedures for the recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning. As this process requires the acknowledgment that non-formal courses, work experience and life experiences may be equivalent to the learning outcomes from years of formal education, and may therefore qualify a learner to enter higher education, to progress further in their studies or be awarded a full higher education degree, it is not surprising that opinions are often quite divided on this matter. Nevertheless, the objectives agreed within the framework of the Bologna process are putting growing pressure on the higher education sector to adapt its culture and practices.

4.2.1. Legislative frameworks and the validation of non-formal and informal learning in the higher education sector

Legislative frameworks across Europe address the recognition and validation of prior non-formal and informal learning in the field of higher education in various ways. Legislation may be directive, explicitly requiring institutions to adopt the process; it may be enabling, allowing institutions to make provision if they so wish, or it may not refer to it at all (see Figure 4.2).

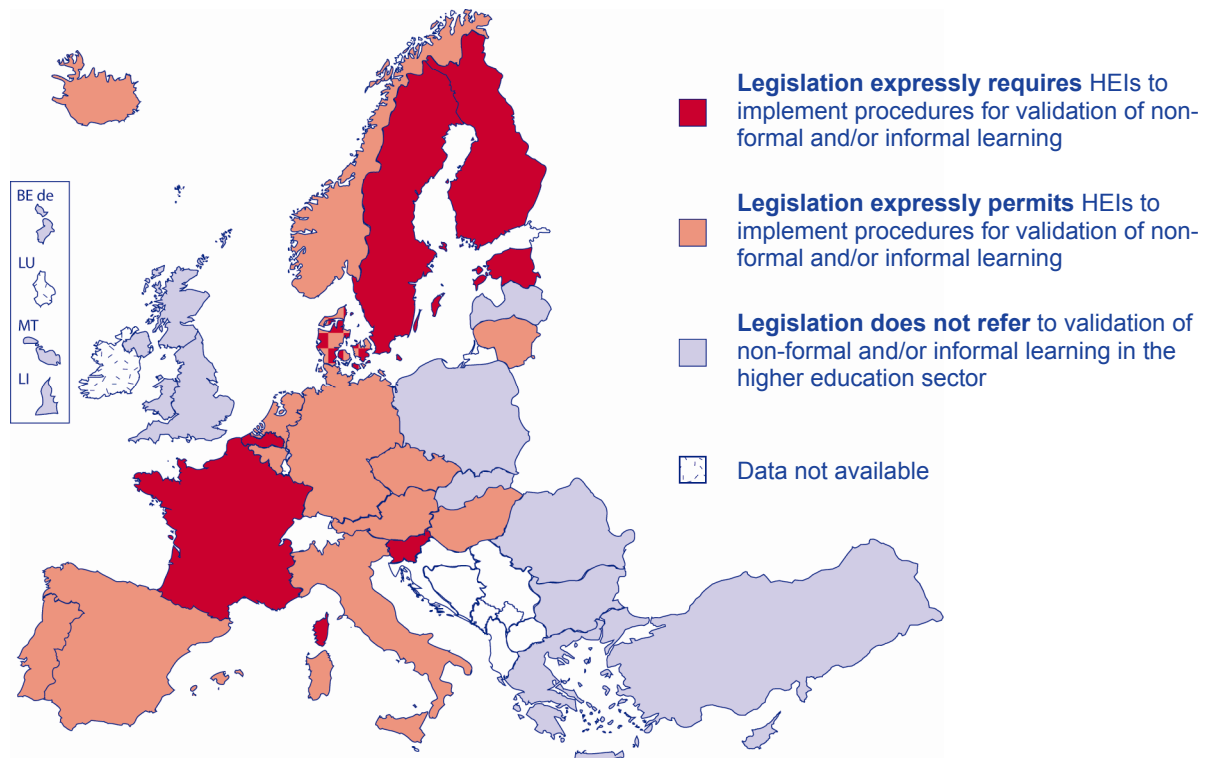
In a few cases, legislation explicitly requires higher education institutions, to implement procedures for the recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning, all be it in different ways and to a different extent. For instance in Sweden, according to the Higher Education Ordinance (2003), all higher education institutions are obliged to assess, on request, the prior non-formal and informal learning of applicants who lack the necessary formal qualifications. In France, legislation creates a legal right for individuals to have their prior experiential learning recognised and validated in the institution of their choice. In the Flemish Community of Belgium, in accordance with legislation, a specific higher education body (The Council for Disputes about Decisions on Study Progress) has been established to evaluate students' appeals against decisions taken by higher education institutions in various areas, including the area of recognition of prior learning.

Higher education legislation in Estonia and Slovenia also includes some specific requirements for the validation of prior learning by higher education institutions. However, in these two countries, the validation of non-formal and informal learning cannot replace the mainstream upper secondary qualifications necessary to enter higher education (for more details see Figure 4.1) but can only be used for progression within higher education studies. Estonian legislation stipulates that the council of each higher educational institution must establish conditions and procedures for the validation of students' prior learning and professional experience. Institutions are required to inform students about validation procedures and guarantee their uniformity. Legislation in Slovenia is less explicit with regard to the implementation of validation procedures, but it stipulates that higher education study programmes can only be accredited if they define the criteria for the recognition of knowledge, skills and competences gained before enrolment in the study programme. The Criteria for the Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes (2004, revised 2010) specify that it is possible to take into account the knowledge, skills and competences gained through formal, non-formal as well as informal learning.

In the French Community of Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany, Spain, Italy, Lithuania, Hungary, the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal, Iceland and Norway, legislation explicitly allows higher education institutions to implement procedures for the recognition of prior non-formal and/or informal learning and institutions can decide independently whether they will implement such procedures to the extent

that they are allowed. Consequently, countries classified in this group differ widely in the degree to which validation procedures have been implemented. While in some countries, the validation of prior non-formal and/or informal learning is already a common practice in the majority of higher education institutions, in other places this option is still rarely used in practice. It is also important to note that the way in which legislation refers to the validation of non-formal and informal learning varies from one country to another as does the extent to which prior non-formal and informal learning can be taken into account by higher education institutions (for more details, see Sections 4.2.2 and 4.2.3).

Figure 4.2: Legislative frameworks for the validation of prior non-formal and informal learning in the higher education sector, 2009/10



Source: Eurydice.

Additional note

Denmark: Responsibility for higher education is divided between the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, and the Ministry of Culture. For the programmes under the Ministry of Education, the legislation requires higher education institutions to recognise prior non-formal and informal learning in the admissions process. For the programmes under the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, and the Ministry of Culture, institutions are allowed (but not obliged) to implement such procedures as part of the admissions process.

There are also countries, where legislation does not specifically refer to the validation of prior non-formal and informal learning in the field of higher education (Bulgaria, Greece, Cyprus, Latvia, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, the United Kingdom, Liechtenstein and Turkey). Yet, in some of them, the recognition and validation of prior non-formal and informal learning is a common practice. For instance, in the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland), there is a long tradition of recognising prior learning in the higher education sector, despite the fact there is no legislation regulating such procedures. This is closely related to the fact that universities are autonomous institutions, responsible for the quality of the qualifications they award and the conditions on which they are awarded. Similarly in Poland, the recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning is not legally regulated at national level, but prior non-formal learning is often recognized by higher education institutions and counted towards the completion of higher education degrees and qualifications.

Decisions on this matter are taken by the institutions themselves. Apart from the above-mentioned cases, countries classified in this group have only very limited experiences with the validation of non-formal and informal learning in the field of higher education. In most of them, the concept of validation of prior non-formal and experiential learning is only emerging and has not yet reached the higher education sector.

Alongside legal frameworks, it is also important to note that national authorities in some countries (e.g. Ireland and the United Kingdom) have issued specific guidelines to support higher education institutions in the implementation of procedures for the recognition and accreditation of prior learning.

The recognition of prior learning in the context of higher education can have two different purposes: firstly, to allow students to gain admission to a higher education institution and, secondly, to allow students to demonstrate that they have met, partially or completely, the requirements of a higher education programme. In the majority of countries where the accreditation of prior learning in the context of higher education exists, the accreditation procedure may be used for both purposes. However, there are countries where it is only used either for the purpose of admission (e.g. Portugal) or for progression within higher education studies (e.g. the Czech Republic, Estonia, Italy, Poland and Slovenia).

4.2.2. Access to higher education based on the recognition and validation of prior learning

Candidates who would like to gain admission to higher education on the basis of their prior learning must usually comply with various criteria; these often relate to age or to the duration of prior professional experience. Other requirements may also be specified, for example, in Germany, the accreditation of prior learning is only open to those holding specific vocational qualifications.

The accreditation of prior learning for admission to higher education can be based on a range of accreditation methods and approaches. In some cases, admission is granted on the basis of evidence submitted by learners in their application and/or on the basis of an interview. In other instances, non-traditional higher education candidates are required to pass a specifically designed test or examination to verify that they have the necessary skills to embark on higher education studies.

In the **Flemish Community of Belgium**, regulations allow higher education institutions to grant access to bachelor's programmes on the basis of a candidate's overall knowledge and skills which are assessed by the board of the institution. Prior non-formal and informal learning can also be taken into account for access to doctoral programmes for those who do not hold a master's degree.

In **Germany**, in 2009, the *Länder* established a standard procedure under which master craftsmen, technicians and those with vocational qualifications in a commercial or financial area are eligible to enter higher education if they have at least three years' experience in their professional field.

In **Spain**, each year, universities reserve a certain number of places to be allocated to higher education candidates who fit into specific categories. These categories include three groups of mature students: students older than 25, 40 and 45 years. Candidates aged over 25 who comply with traditional entry requirements may be admitted to higher education programmes on successful completion of a special university entrance examination. This examination consists of a general part (including three tests) and a specific part to assess the skills, abilities and aptitude for the studies chosen. People over the age of 40 who do not possess a qualification which permits access to higher education can have their prior professional experience accredited if it is linked to the courses they want to take. Universities define the accreditation criteria and the professional experience required for different study programmes. The admissions procedure always includes a personal interview. Those aged 45 and over who do not possess a qualification which

permits access to higher education, and who do not have a relevant professional experience, may be admitted to higher education on successful completion of a general test and personal interview.

In **Portugal**, students over 23 years of age with no formal qualifications, together with students who have the appropriate post-secondary qualifications, may gain admission to higher education via specific examinations that prove their ability to undertake the course in question. These examinations are set by individual higher education institutions.

In **Sweden**, since 2003, all higher education institutions have been obliged to assess, on request, the prior and experiential learning of applicants who lack the formal qualifications. In 2006, around 5 800 applicants asked to have their non-formal and informal learning accredited and almost 2 000 applicants were considered to meet the admission requirements for the programme or course they applied for. Due to competition with other students, only around 1 000 non-traditional applicants were subsequently admitted to higher education.

In the **United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland)**, although 'A' levels are the most common form of entry qualification for higher education, a wide range of other qualifications is acceptable for entry, and many institutions also welcome applications from mature candidates who have had appropriate experience but may lack formal qualifications. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) has published a code of practice, which states that a range of evidence may be considered in judging the potential of a prospective student to succeed on a particular programme. This evidence might include abilities, aptitudes, skills, qualifications, other prior learning and experiences, including that achieved in the workplace.

In **Iceland**, according to the Higher Education Institution Act (2006), higher education institutions can admit students without the required formal qualifications but who possess the necessary knowledge and maturity. It is up to individual higher education institutions to decide on these matters.

In **Norway**, applicants aged 23 and over with 5 years of documented education, training and/or work experience, can satisfy higher education admission requirements by successfully completing the prescribed level in six subjects (Norwegian, English, History, Social Studies, Mathematics and Natural Science). In addition, since 2001, higher education institutions have had the right to admit students over the age of 25 without sufficient formal entrance qualifications. The relevant institution decides if the applicant is qualified for the chosen study programme on the basis of their prior non-formal and informal learning.

Approaches to the accreditation of prior learning for admission to higher education can vary between different types of higher education institutions within the same country. For instance in Finland, a slightly different policy applies to alternative admission procedures in universities and polytechnics. Similarly in Belgium (French Community), there is a difference between alternative access to universities, *hautes écoles* and art schools. In this context, it can be noted that, in several countries, art schools and arts programmes are very flexible with respect to their entry qualifications. This applies not only to countries where the accreditation of prior learning for access to higher education is standard practice (e.g. the French and Flemish Communities of Belgium, Denmark and Germany), but also to countries where the accreditation of prior learning does not generally allow access to higher education (e.g. the Czech Republic and Slovenia). Yet, it is important to note that in the Czech Republic, students who have not completed upper secondary education cannot be awarded an academic degree.

In countries where a central admissions system for higher education exists (e.g. Denmark and Ireland), non-traditional learners are often advised to contact the higher education institution of their choice directly, so that their non-formal learning and work experience can be evaluated and taken into account.

In **Denmark**, the available higher education places are divided into two quota systems. Places in the first quota are distributed to applicants with upper secondary school leaving certificates on the basis of their grade point average. These candidates apply for admission through a Coordinated Enrolment System (KOT). Places in the second quota (10 % of all places in the universities) are given to applicants on the basis of individual assessment by the institution. Among these, applicants with no upper secondary qualification can be admitted if the institution considers that the applicant has competences similar to those required by an upper secondary exam.

In **Ireland**, the majority of institutions have developed quotas of reserved places for mature students. Generally, higher education institutions require a mature student to apply, in the first instance, through the Central Applications Office. However, applicants are also advised to contact the higher education institution directly to establish if there are any additional admission requirements. In most instances, credit is given for prior work experience, particularly if it has some relevance to the intended course of study.

Finally, it can be noted that the implementation of National Qualifications Frameworks will probably have a significant impact on developments in the field of validation of prior learning for admission to higher education. This is because NQFs are intended to clarify the content of different national qualifications. Consequently, these frameworks may allow certain 'non-traditional' qualifications/certificates to be better understood and potentially accepted by higher education institutions as an alternative to traditional upper secondary school leaving qualifications. In Ireland for instance, since the launch of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), there has been an increase in the number of students with further education awards (i.e. non-traditional higher education entry qualifications) progressing to higher education. Candidates with further education awards represented approximately 10 % of entrants in 2007.

4.2.3. Progression in higher education based on the recognition and validation of prior learning

Prior learning can be validated not only with a view to entering into higher education, but also with a view to fulfilling some of the requirements of a study programme. Students can be exempted from certain parts of their study programme if they can provide evidence that they already possess the relevant knowledge, skills and competences. This occurs in several European countries. For example:

In the **Flemish Community of Belgium**, the Law on Flexible Learning Paths (2004) stipulates that students may be granted exemptions from higher education courses on the basis of previously acquired qualifications and/or validation of prior learning.

In **Spain**, universities are free to recognise the prior learning of students and reduce the number of courses candidates must complete to obtain a higher education degree.

In **Poland**, the recognition of prior learning is not legally regulated at national level, but it can be used for progression in higher education. The most common scenario is the recognition and validation of foreign language skills acquired and certified outside the formal system (e.g. in foreign language schools). The senates of several higher education institutions have passed internal resolutions that specify the non-formal certificates which may be recognised and validated.

In the **United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland)**, each institution is responsible for the quality and standards of its qualifications. It follows that each institution is responsible for decisions on accrediting prior learning which may be counted towards the completion of a programme of study and its associated award(s) or qualification(s).

In some cases (e.g. the French Community of Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany, Italy and Hungary), regulations specify the extent to which the accreditation of prior learning can contribute to the fulfilment of programme requirements.

In the **French Community of Belgium**, students in *hautes écoles* who can provide evidence for three years of relevant professional experience can benefit from exemptions based on the validation of their prior learning. The exemptions cannot exceed 20 % of the total programme. Similar opportunities are provided by universities. In this case, students have to prove at least five years of relevant professional or personal experience. Experiential learning can be recognised and validated as an equivalent of up to 60 credits per academic year. The decision is taken by evaluation committees and is based on evidence submitted by learners.

In the **Czech Republic**, on the basis of the 2001 Amendment of the Higher Education Act, higher education institutions may recognise up to 60 % of the credits needed to complete a degree programme on the basis of successfully completed lifelong learning higher education courses (i.e. non-formal courses taking place in higher education institutions). However, this type of recognition is still quite rare.

In **Germany**, since 2002, it has been possible to accredit the knowledge and skills acquired outside the higher education sector towards higher education studies. Such accreditation can be applied to up to 50 % of a higher education study programme. The recognition procedure can be carried out via individual case reviews, general accreditation for entire groups of applicants, or placement testing. While there is still a lack of nationally established procedures, several model trials have been carried out.

In **Italy**, higher education institutions are not allowed to recognise more than 60 credits at Bachelor's level and 40 credits at Master's level.

In **Hungary**, the Act on Higher Education (2005) gives higher education institutions the right to recognise not only prior formal learning but also work experience. According to the Act, work experience can be accredited by a maximum of 30 credits. This type of recognition is still rarely used in practice.

In the Flemish Community of Belgium and in France, the accreditation of prior learning may lead directly to the award of a higher education qualification, without a learner having to follow any programme of study.

In the **Flemish Community of Belgium**, a Bachelor's or Master's degree may be obtained if the institution deems, based on the previously acquired qualifications and/or prior learning, that the person in question has acquired the necessary competences.

In **France**, the validation of prior learning (*Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience* – VAE) can lead to a partial or complete award of a qualification, including higher education degrees. It is open to any candidate who can provide evidence of at least three years' relevant experience. Such experience may include paid or unpaid work, as well as voluntary activities. In 2007, 2 154 higher education qualifications were awarded exclusively on the basis of the validation of prior non-formal and informal learning and additional 2 046 candidates had some part of their higher education studies accredited from prior learning (Ministry of Education, 2009).

4.3. Preparatory programmes for non-traditional higher education candidates

Non-traditional learners, including mature students, often need additional support in gaining the skills necessary for higher level study before they enter higher education. Several countries (e.g. Ireland, France, the United Kingdom and Iceland) have developed specific programmes to help these prospective students. These programmes are primarily directed at learners who followed a short, upper secondary vocational path (i.e. a programme not opening access to higher education) or who left upper secondary education before completing it. In general, there are no qualification requirements to enter these programmes, but there might be specific admission requirements such as age, or length of time out of formal education (e.g. in France, applicants must be at least 20 years old and must have been out of the school system for at least two years). The duration of these preparatory programmes is usually one academic year and they lead, upon successful completion, to a certificate/qualification permitting access to higher education studies.

In **Ireland**, a number of colleges offer pre-entry 'access'/'foundation' courses to prepare mature learners for entry to tertiary education.

In **France**, in order to enrol at university, students must normally have successfully passed the examination *baccalauréat*. However, there is also an alternative option to the *baccalauréat* – the 'DAEU' (*Diplôme d'Accès aux Études Universitaires*). The DAEU is a national higher education diploma delivered by specially accredited universities. It is designed for students who are at least 20 years old, who do not hold a *baccalauréat* and have been out of the school system for at least two years. The diploma is granted after a year's study and the successful completion of a written and oral exam, which evaluates a candidate's acquired knowledge and general cultural awareness, as well as whether he or she has the necessary organisational abilities and skills to undertake higher education studies. The DAEU confers the same rights as the *baccalauréat*. There are two different DAEU diplomas: DAEU A and DAEU B. The first aims to prepare students for higher education studies in fields such as French, arts, humanities and social sciences, languages, communication, law, economic sciences, administration and management. The second one prepares candidates for studies in sciences, technology, physical education, medicine, dentistry, pharmacy and the paramedical sector.

In the **United Kingdom**, there is a range of programmes preparing non-traditional higher education candidates for higher education studies. In **England, Wales** and **Northern Ireland**, adults can take an alternative fast-track route designed to meet the needs of those returning to study after some time and who may lack formal qualifications. 'Access to Higher Education' diplomas are provided by further education colleges and designed with the support of higher education institutions. Programmes focus on a named discipline area (e.g. the 'Access to HE Diploma (Nursing)' or 'Access to HE Diploma (Law)'), and combine subject specific content with elements designed to support adult learners, such as key skills in information technologies, numeracy and communication, and study skills. Teaching methods include individual tutorial support. A typical programme takes a year of full-time study but many are also available on a part-time basis. Similarly in **Scotland**, a range of specially designed courses prepares adults without necessary qualifications both for higher education in general as well as for particular courses. Such 'access courses' include a range of SQA ⁽³⁾ units and courses, successful completion of which can lead to a SQA award. Many access courses carry a guarantee of a place in higher education on successful completion. One of these access programmes is the Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP). Since the launch of SWAP in 1988, more than 25 000 adults have taken the SWAP route to embark on higher education studies.

In **Iceland**, non-traditional candidates may enter higher education after having completed a preliminary study programme organised for individuals who do not meet the standard admission requirements.

⁽³⁾ The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) is the national accreditation and awarding body in Scotland. For more details see http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/CCC_FirstPage.jsp

4.4. Alternative modes of study in higher education

As pointed out in Chapter 3 (Section 3.2.3), the lack of flexible programmes may represent a barrier to the participation of mature students in formal education and training. This applies to all educational levels, including higher education. Therefore, policies which seek to increase the participation of mature students in formal higher education programmes should take flexible study arrangements into consideration.

4.4.1. Understanding the terminology

Alternative modes of study in higher education are most often described as 'part-time studies', 'external/extramural studies' or 'distance learning'. While at first glance the meaning of these terms may appear quite clear and straightforward, it is important to note that some of them are understood in different ways in different countries. For example, the term 'part-time studies' has diverse connotations and interpretations.

In the majority of countries, steering documents relating to higher education do not include any explicit reference to 'part-time studies', and the general understanding of this term often varies from one country to another. A few countries use other terms such as 'extramural studies' (Bulgaria), 'external studies' (Slovakia) or programmes in *horaires décalés* (French Community of Belgium).

In countries where steering documents refer explicitly to 'part-time studies', the term may be defined in different ways. In some countries, the main criterion used to distinguish between full-time and part-time students is the workload expressed in the number of ECTS credits that each category of students is expected to obtain within a single academic year. Part-time students are defined as students who obtain less than 60 ECTS credits per academic year and are therefore expected to study for a longer period than full-time students. This definition is reported, for instance, by Ireland and Latvia. In other contexts, the definition of part-time studies does not make any reference to the workload of students (i.e. part-time and full-time students are generally expected to obtain the same number of ECTS credits per academic year), but is based on the number of contact hours. For example in Hungary, the Act on Higher Education states that part-time programmes should have a minimum of 30 % and a maximum of 50 % of the contact hours of a full-time course.

Similar differences in the interpretation of the term 'part-time' studies have been identified in the report *Social and Economic Conditions of Student Life in Europe* (Eurostudent, 2008). The latter differentiates between four types of 'part-time' students:

- Students enrolled in distance education (i.e. students usually work and spend only part of their time on higher education studies);
- Students enrolled in evening and weekend courses at higher education institutions. These courses are offered by higher education institutions in addition to courses for full-time students;
- Students enrolled in traditional full-time programmes, but with an official part-time status (i.e. the time until graduation is expected to take longer than for full-time students);
- Students enrolled as full-time students, but who actually spend only part of their time on study-related activities.

These examples illustrate that cross-country comparisons of flexible modes of study in higher education should be carried out with caution, taking into account different national interpretations and

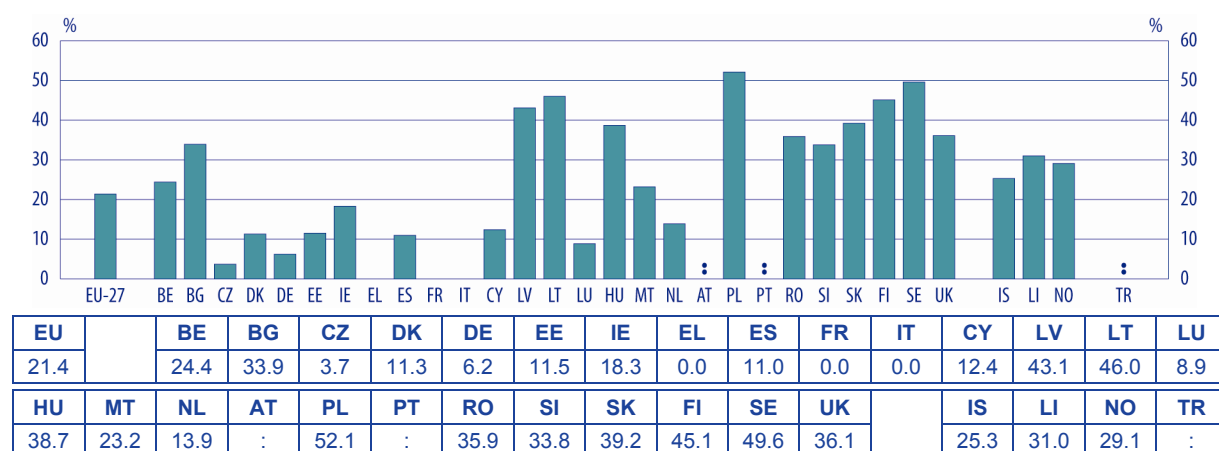
understanding of certain terms. This is particularly important when analysing the funding systems of flexible higher education programmes. In addition, it is also important to note that there may be other organisational patterns adapted to the needs of mature students that are not covered by the terminology highlighted in this section.

4.4.2. Participation in part-time higher education

For the purpose of international statistical comparisons, an individual is considered to be a part-time student if he/she is taking an educational programme that requires less than 75 % of a full-time study load (UNESCO/OECD/Eurostat, 2010). According to this definition, international statistics show that around 21 % of higher education students in Europe study part-time.

When looking at the rates in individual countries, distinct patterns emerge. At the top end of the scale, in Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Finland and Sweden, part-time students represent more than 40 % of the total student population. In the main body of countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Ireland, Spain, Cyprus, Malta, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, the United Kingdom, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) they represent between 10 % and 40 % of higher education students. At the lower end of the scale (the Czech Republic, Germany and Luxembourg), part-time students make up less than 10 % of the total student population. Finally, there are also a few countries (Greece, France and Italy) where the proportion of part-time students is nil or negligible.

Figure 4.3: Percentage of part-time students in higher education (ISCED 5 and 6), 2008



Source: Eurydice calculations based on Eurostat, UOE (data extracted December 2010).

Additional note

Czech Republic and Malta: Data for 2007.

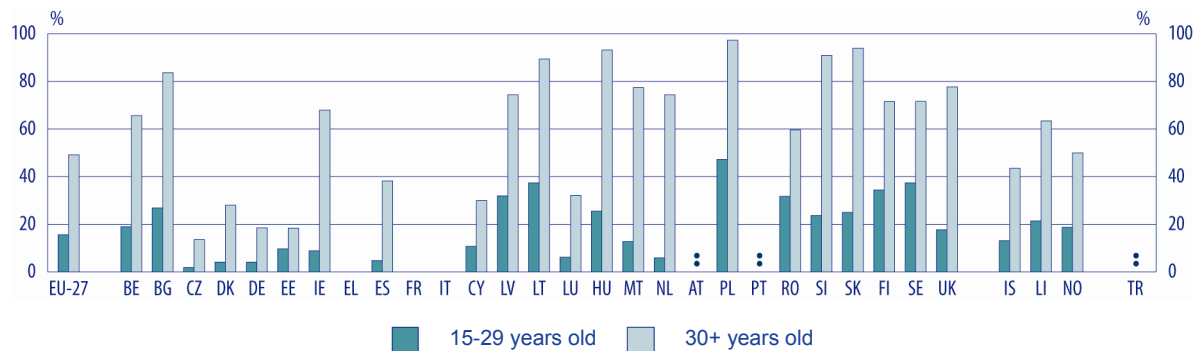
Explanatory note

The definition of a full-time and part-time student depends on which measure is being used for student study load. Ideally, the study load should be measured in terms of the academic value or progress, but it can also be measured in terms of the time/resource commitment or time in classroom. The national data available to countries tends to dictate which of these methods countries use to categorise students as full-time or part-time (UNESCO/OECD/Eurostat, 2010).

It appears from the data that age is a significant factor in the decision by students to pursue their studies on a part-time basis. On average, in EU countries, around 49 % of higher education students aged 30 and over follow study part-time, compared with only 16 % of students who are younger than 30. This can be explained by the fact that mature students often need to reconcile their studies with their work life and/or family responsibilities.

In the majority of European countries, the proportion of part-time students is at least three times higher in the older age group (30+) than among younger students. However, in Estonia, Poland, Romania, Finland and Sweden, this figure is only double. Therefore, in these countries, the age factor seems to have less influence on the participation rate in part-time higher education studies than in other European countries. It can also be noted that in Hungary, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia, more than 90 % of students aged 30 and over take part-time studies.

Figure 4.4: Distribution of part-time students by age (ISCED 5 and 6), 2008



	EU	BE	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU
15-29 years old	15.6	19.0	26.9	1.9	4.1	4.1	9.7	8.9	0.0	4.8	0.0	0.0	10.8	31.9	37.4	6.2
30+ years old	49.2	65.6	83.6	13.5	28.0	18.5	18.4	67.9	0.0	38.2	0.0	0.0	30.0	74.4	89.4	32.1
	HU	MT	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE	UK	IS	LI	NO	TR
15-29 years old	25.5	12.7	5.9	:	47.2	:	31.7	23.7	25.0	34.4	37.4	17.7	13.1	21.4	18.7	:
30+ years old	93.2	77.4	74.4	:	97.3	:	59.6	90.9	93.9	71.5	71.6	77.7	43.5	63.4	50.0	:

Source: Eurydice calculations based on Eurostat, UOE (data extracted December 2010).

Additional note

Czech Republic and Malta: Data for 2007.

4.4.3. National-level initiatives to encourage alternative modes of study in higher education

In the majority of countries, higher education institutions are free to decide whether they offer higher education programmes and courses under flexible arrangements (e.g. part-time studies). Consequently, the availability of alternative modes of study often varies from one institution to another. Nevertheless, there is evidence of some national-level initiatives to improve the availability of flexible modes of study.

While in most European countries higher education institutions decide for themselves the extent to which they offer alternative modes of study, in some countries, higher education programmes are routinely organised in a flexible way, offering students enough freedom to set their own annual workload and decide how to spread it out. For example:

In the **Flemish Community of Belgium**, since the introduction of the Law on Flexible Learning Paths (2004), higher education institutions have been required to offer their programmes under three main types of learning arrangements: the degree contract, the credit contract and the exam contract. Under the degree contract, students may choose how much study they undertake: 60 credits per academic year (full-time programme) or less than 54 credits per academic year (part-time programme). Other programme options are also available including a personalised study programme.

Under the credit contract, students enrol for a number of credits with a view to obtaining a credit certificate for one or several programme units. Under the exam contract, students only enrol for the examinations, with a view to obtaining a degree or a credit certificate for one or more programme units.

In **Finland**, students in universities are generally free to choose between a range of study options to make up their degree and to decide their own pace of study. (However, it must be noted that slightly less freedom is available in polytechnics and in programmes related to some regulated professions).

Norway has introduced a specific tool (the Individual Education Plan) to support the personalisation of higher education studies. Since 2003, all students who register in a higher education programme have had to fill in an 'Individual Education Plan' which asks them to indicate whether they plan to study full- or part-time, and how many ECTS credits they intend to take each semester/year. The Individual Education Plan is used as a tool to follow up on student progress, since many higher education institutions routinely organise individual reviews with students who fall far behind the goals stated in their plan.

In addition, some national-level pilot projects testing new approaches to flexible higher education provision can be seen in Europe:

In the **United Kingdom (England)**, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has recently funded eight higher education institutions to pilot flexible learning pathways, aiming to attract students from non-traditional and under-represented backgrounds by using flexible methods of delivery. These include accelerated programmes, work-based programmes, accelerated part-time programmes and programmes delivered by distance, e-learning or 'blended' learning (involving some distance learning and some learning on campus). The programmes are mainly in vocational subject areas. In the academic year 2008/09, there were approximately 850 students following flexible programmes as part of this initiative.

Alternative modes of delivering higher education programmes usually include the provision of open and distance learning and technology supported learning. In some countries (e.g. Germany, Greece, Spain, Cyprus, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom), there are higher education institutions specifically set up to deliver degree programmes under open and distance arrangements.

In 1974, **Germany** established a comprehensive university for distance studies – the *Fernuniversität*. This higher education institution offers a range of degree courses as well as supplementary and follow-up courses. During the winter semester 2008/09, the *Fernuniversität* counted more than 55 000 students; most of them were part-time. The headquarters of the university are in Hagen, but it also has a network of distance learning centres in various towns in Germany, as well as in Austria, Switzerland and central and eastern European countries.

In **Greece**, since 1992, the Hellenic Open University – an independent and self-governing higher education institution – has been delivering graduate and postgraduate distance education and training programmes. One of the goals of the Hellenic Open University is to promote scientific research and to develop technology and methodology in the field of distance learning. In particular, the institution ensures access to higher education studies, irrespective of the candidates' age. The Hellenic Open University has its registered offices in Patras and branches in various cities around the country.

In **Spain**, the Open University (*Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia* – UNED) was created in the early 70's and currently has more than 160 000 students. This higher education institution, the largest in the country, offers 26 higher education programmes and over five hundred continuing professional development courses.

In 2002, **Cyprus** established a public university specifically dedicated to open and distance learning. The Open University of Cyprus provides both undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes. It accepted its first 162 students in September 2006 and the total number of students increased in the academic year 2008/09 to 584.

The **Netherlands** founded a state institution for distance learning in 1984 – the Open University of the Netherlands (OUNL). The tasks of the OUNL, as stated in the Higher Education and Research Act (WHW), are to provide initial

courses at university level in the form of distance education and to contribute to innovation in higher education. By dispensing with formal admission requirements and offering considerable flexibility as regards place, duration and pace of study, the OUNL makes higher education accessible to a wide range of people. The university has 12 study centres and 2 support centres in the Netherlands, and 6 study centres in Flanders, which provide information, guidance and advice for students in relation to their studies.

In the **United Kingdom**, the Open University (OU) is a major provider of distance learning. Like other universities, the Open University is an autonomous institution able to award its own degrees. It was granted its Royal Charter in 1969 and the first students were admitted in 1971. The Open University is now the UK's largest university in terms of student numbers, with over 175 000 students, most of whom are studying part-time. The Open University's style of teaching is called 'supported open learning', meaning that students receive support from a tutor and the student services staff at regional centres, as well as from centralised services such as the library. Some courses include residential or day schools, held at various times and locations.

In this context, it should be noted that in Norway, the Ministry of Education mandated one of its agencies (the Norway Open Universities) to stimulate Norwegian higher education institutions to develop and offer flexible programmes and courses based on ICT, and to coordinate activities within the field of lifelong and flexible ICT-supported or multimedia learning in higher education.

Finally, several countries have financial policies that are particularly adapted to the needs of higher education students who cannot study under traditional full-time arrangements. This topic is outlined in Chapter 5 of the present document.

CHAPTER 5: FINANCING FORMAL ADULT EDUCATION AND SUPPORT FOR LEARNERS

Financial constraints may represent strong barriers to the participation of mature students in formal education and training. This is particularly true in the case of people on low-income, those excluded from the labour market or those vulnerable to such exclusion. This chapter provides information on how formal adult education and training is financed and outlines the various types of support intended to facilitate the participation of mature students in formal education and training programmes.

5.1. Sources of funding for formal adult education

There are three main possible sources of funding for formal education and training for mature students: public funding, fees paid by learners and funding from employers.

5.1.1. Funding from public sources

To some extent, public authorities in all European countries provide funding for formal adult education and training. Public funding is made available either as a result of education policy decisions, or under employment/labour market policies. In the latter case, formal learning activities eligible for financial support mainly include vocational education and training programmes, and the main targets are the unemployed and others vulnerable to exclusion from the labour market. Funding from the European Social Fund (ESF) is often used to complement national financial resources.

Public authorities use various mechanisms to finance formal adult education and training. For programmes up to upper secondary level, funding is usually transferred from central government to local administrations which, in turn, fund the providers. Finance from the central budget may also be combined with various local sources. For example in Sweden, municipal adult education (including basic and upper secondary adult education) is funded from the municipal budget, which is made up of state grants and local tax revenues. Providers of formal education for mature students may also be directly funded by central government. This is the dominant model in the higher education sector, where institutions most often receive funding directly from the state budget. In some cases (e.g. the Flemish Community of Belgium), the top-level authorities responsible for education and training provide direct subsidies not only to higher education, but also to formal adult education at lower levels. Public authorities can also provide direct financial support for individuals. Here, the focus is usually on those who would not take part in education and training in the absence of such support (for more details on financial support for individuals see Section 5.2).

The level of public funding allocated to local administrations or education providers to enable mature students to complete compulsory or upper secondary level education is often calculated as a percentage of the costs of a full-time pupil in initial education at the same level. For example:

In **Finland**, the criteria for funding general upper secondary education for adults are in line with those of general upper secondary schools. However, the unit cost for adult education is 60 % of the municipal unit cost for upper secondary schools.

Similar funding formulas are often applied to formal education and training delivered under various flexible arrangements such as part-time courses, distance learning or e-learning.

In the **Czech Republic**, the funding of upper secondary programmes delivered under various flexible arrangements is based on a certain percentage of the average cost per pupil in full-time education for the particular field of study. The regional authority decides the actual percentage of the full-time quota. In the vast majority of regions, funding is calculated as follows: 5 % of the full-time quota for e-learning programmes, 15 % for distance learning and 40 % for part-time/evening courses or combined study.

Some countries allocate additional funding based on social criteria to institutions providing adult education and training programmes, including formal programmes. For instance, in the French Community of Belgium, under Education for Social Advancement (*enseignement de promotion sociale*), schools can be allocated extra funding depending on the proportion of learners who are unemployed or are earning the minimum wage. Schools may use the extra funding to recruit additional teachers to reduce class sizes or to improve their equipment.

At the level of higher education, funding is often based on the number of ECTS units taken by students. In some countries, the funding formulas make a distinction between full-time students and those studying under various flexible arrangements. In Hungary, for example, the funds available in higher education for part-time/evening students are half of the full-time student quota support and one-fifth for distance learning programmes. In Denmark, where two parallel higher education systems exist, the funding arrangement is distinctive: the traditional higher education system is fully funded by the state, whereas the system developed specifically for mature students is partly funded by the state and partly by student tuition fees.

5.1.2. Tuition fees paid by learners

Mature students who want to engage in formal education are often expected to contribute towards the cost of their tuition. This is particularly true for those who are not at risk of social exclusion. However, aside from this general trend, a number of variations can be observed across Europe.

In the majority of countries, 'second chance' programmes for the completion of basic or lower secondary education are provided free of charge. This is because adults who have not completed these levels of education often belong to the most vulnerable groups in society and, consequently, are the object of numerous policy interventions. In some countries, however, adult learners might be expected to contribute financially towards basic or lower secondary programmes, but this usually only applies to adults who are not considered to be at risk of social or labour market exclusion.

Completing upper secondary education at public education and training institutions, including through alternative modes of study (e.g. part-time courses) is, in some countries, free of charge for individuals, regardless of age (e.g. the Czech Republic, Estonia, Spain, Sweden and Norway). Other countries generally expect mature students to contribute towards their upper secondary tuition and/or examinations, provided they do not belong to any category of disadvantaged learner. However, in several countries, student contributions for courses leading to the completion of upper secondary education are relatively modest (e.g. Belgium and Finland) and are often regulated by legislation or fixed by public authorities.

In **Belgium**, in the **French Community**, students over the age of 18 contribute towards the costs of second chance education by paying an enrolment fee calculated on the basis of the length and level of the programme they have chosen. Some categories of adult learners (such people with disabilities or job-seekers) are exempt from such

contributions. In the **German-speaking Community**, mature students must pay a registration fee to enrol in an institute for adult education (*Schulische Weiterbildung*). The amount to be paid depends on the type and length of the programme and on the learner's status. Student contributions have increased since September 2010 due to the financial crisis. Currently, the maximum registration fee applicable to formal education programmes is EUR 200. In the **Flemish Community**, secondary adult education is organised by subsidised private or public institutions – the centres for adult education (*Centra voor Volwassenonderwijs* – CVOs). Those who take general education courses are exempt from registration fees. However, for diploma-oriented vocational courses, participants must pay a registration fee of 1 euro per teaching period. Since 2008/09, registration fees have been capped at EUR 400 per course and per academic year, or at EUR 1 200 for a period of four academic years. The most vulnerable groups are eligible for various reductions.

In **Hungary**, students over the age of 18 in part-time adult education must pay a contribution of between 20-40 % of the cost of the course from grade 11. They must also pay an extra tuition fee in grade 11 and above if repeating the year for the third time (or successive times) because they did not meet the study requirements. However, the fee cannot be higher than the cost of the course and may be reduced depending on the performance of the student.

In **Finland**, there are generally no fees for initial qualifications, even for adults. Reasonable fees can be charged for further and specialist vocational qualifications (i.e. nationally recognised vocational qualifications that build on upper secondary vocational education). In the case of general upper secondary education, adult learners who take individual courses without enrolling in an entire upper secondary programme leading to the Matriculation Examination have to pay course fees of approximately EUR 30-50. For those who do enrol in an entire programme, the tuition fees are waived, and only the cost of the Matriculation Examination (whose amount varies between EUR 118 and 184) has to be covered by students.

In the **United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland)**, students over the age of 19 may be charged fees. In England, there is an expectation that approximately 50 % of the notional cost of a course will be met by tuition fees. However, under the Education and Skills Act 2008, there is an entitlement – a guarantee of a course place and free tuition – for adults who have yet to achieve qualifications. There are some restrictions. For learners aged 19 to 25, the entitlement applies to those who have not yet achieved a 'full' Level 2 or 'full' Level 3 of the National Qualifications Framework/Qualifications and Credit Framework (NQF/QCF). For learners over 25, full fee remission applies to those who have not yet achieved a 'full' Level 2. The entitlement for Level 2 programmes is for vocational programmes only. The entitlement for basic skills programmes applies to learners of any age. These funding arrangements are expected to change. The Government announced in its November 2010 Skills Strategy for England that, although provision for learners with very low levels of skills will continue to be fully funded, provision for many learners over the age of 24 and studying at Level 2 and above will not; instead, government-backed loans will be provided through a 'Lifelong Learning Account'. In Wales, further education colleges set their own fee policies and there are no immediate plans to vary this arrangement. In Northern Ireland, too, colleges establish their own policies for fees, although there is currently a project under way to consider the circumstances under which learners, employers and government should be expected to pay for learning. Any new arrangements will not be introduced until the 2012/13 academic year at the earliest.

In the **United Kingdom (Scotland)**, full-time students in further education do not have to pay fees as long as certain residency conditions are met. Only part-time students are potentially liable to pay fees. However, students on a low family income or on certain state benefits are entitled to have their fees waived.

In several countries, different groups of disadvantaged mature students (e.g. low-income individuals, unemployed, asylum-seekers, etc.) are eligible for full or partial exemption from registration/tuition fees for upper secondary education. There are various arrangements between public authorities and providers to compensate for any fees not paid by those exempted from contributions. For example, in the Flemish Community of Belgium, the government refunds any registration fees lost by the centres for adult education due to the full or partial exemption from registration fees for some course participants.

In the higher education sector, there is usually no overt difference between the fees paid by young people who enter higher education directly after upper secondary schooling, and the fees paid by mature students who embark on higher education studies later in life. However, significant cross-country differences can be observed between fees for traditional full-time studies and fees for programmes delivered under various alternative modes (e.g. part-time courses), which are particularly suited to the needs of mature students.

In some countries (e.g. Belgium, the Czech Republic and Austria), full-time and part-time studies receive equal treatment and students who study part-time are not required to pay higher fees than students following traditional full-time programmes.

In countries where full-time and part-time studies are on an equal financial footing, students must often be wary about how long they take to complete their studies, since the financial support from public sources may only be available for the standard duration of the full-time programme in the relevant field. However, in some countries, students' individual circumstances, such as their work or family commitments, may be taken into account.

In **Austria**, students who are given the same rights as Austrian nationals do not have to pay higher education fees as long as they complete their courses within the set period for the full-time curriculum, plus two semesters. After that, students have to pay EUR 363 per semester. However, students may be exempt from paying the fees, as long as they can provide evidence that they are also in employment, suffering from an illness or disability, or looking after their children and therefore not able to study full-time.

In another group of countries, part-time higher education students are usually expected to make higher financial contributions than full-time students (e.g. Slovakia, Estonia, Hungary, Malta, Poland and Slovenia). For example:

In **Estonia**, students are usually charged fees for studying part-time in higher education, although there are some exceptions such as teacher education programmes.

In **Hungary**, most students in part-time programmes and in distance learning have to contribute to the cost of their tuition since very few state-funded places are available for them in different fields of study.

In **Slovakia**, all students have to pay some fees for the administration of the entrance examination, registration, etc. Additional fees are paid by students who have been admitted to an external/part-time study programme, students who overrun the standard study period and those who concurrently study two or more programmes.

In countries where part-time students are likely to pay tuition fees, these fees may or may not be subject to regulation. For example in Slovakia, higher education institutions are allowed to charge tuition fees to part-time students, but the maximum amount of such fees is regulated by decrees from the Ministry of Education. However, in the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland), tuition fees for part-time higher education programmes are unregulated and are set by the institution.

5.1.3. Funding from employers

Employers have a vested interest in developing their human resources and ensuring that employees have the necessary knowledge and skills to help the company succeed. In all European countries, employers contribute significant financial resources to adult education and training. However, this contribution is usually directed at non-formal learning activities such as job-related courses and seminars, ICT courses, languages, etc.

In many countries, employers have only very limited legal obligations for the continuing education and training of their employees. Therefore, any contribution employers make to the formal education and training of an employee is usually down to company policy, industry/business sector initiatives or agreements between the employer and the employee. However, in the majority of countries, if the employer has requested the employee to undertake a specific education or training programme, the employer must usually meet the costs.

In some countries, companies must make mandatory contributions to collective funds for the continuing education and training of adults. The funds collected through these contributions are often used to finance not only non-formal education and training activities, but also formal programmes. For example:

In **Spain**, regulations oblige companies to finance the formal and non-formal vocational training of workers and the unemployed. Funds from companies are combined with aid from the European Social Fund and from the State Employment Public Service (*Servicio Público de Empleo Estatal – SPEE*). The Ministry of Labour and Immigration allocates these funds annually to different management and training initiatives. The amount of funding received by companies for training depends on their previous year's contribution and on their size.

In **France**, legislation requires private companies to contribute to the costs of continuing education and training. The amount of the contribution varies depending on the type of company and the number of employees. Companies may meet their obligations by paying all or part of their mandatory contribution to the organisations accredited for the collection of employer contributions (*Organisme Paritaire Collecteur Agréé – OPCA*). The funds are used to finance various continuing education and training schemes, including the 'individual training right' or the 'individual training leave'. Activities may be formal or non-formal.

5.2. Financial support for learners and study leave

There are various schemes to facilitate the return of mature students to formal education and training. These schemes can take the form of direct or indirect financial support or they can provide adults with the opportunity to take time out for study. In addition, the majority of European countries have established specific support schemes directed at the unemployed. The following sections provide a mapping of the various types of support available for those who embark on formal education later in life.

5.2.1. Direct financial support

Direct financial support is provided to adult learners through a variety of financial assistance schemes such as study allowances, grants, scholarships, subsidies, training vouchers, etc. Financial support can also take the form of bank loans, which, in contrast to the schemes mentioned above, must be repaid. Adult learners may also be entitled to a reimbursement of their tuition fees upon completion of their course.

Some countries provide financial assistance in the form of education/study allowances, which can vary in size depending on circumstance such as family status or working history of the beneficiary. For example:

In **Austria**, students attending a school for working adults who leave or interrupt work in order to study for the school-leaving examination are entitled to a special study allowance for up to six months. Married students whose spouse does not have an income are entitled to an additional monthly sum of EUR 335. If the learner pays statutory child support, the special study allowance increases by EUR 127 per month for each child.

In **Finland**, an adult education allowance is available to employees and self-employed persons who wish to go on study leave for at least two months. The allowance can be granted to an applicant who has a working history of at least 8 years (or of at least five years by 31 July 2010), and has been employed with the same employer for at least one year. To qualify for the allowance, the applicant must participate in studies leading to a degree, or in further vocational training organized by a Finnish educational institution under public supervision. The duration of the allowance is determined on the basis of the applicant's working history and ranges from 2 to 18 months. Since the 1 August 2010, the amount of the allowance has been equal to the amount of the earnings-related unemployment allowance, without increases. For example, on the basis of a salary of EUR 1 600, a student will receive an education allowance of EUR 998.

Grants are another means of providing direct financial assistance. Grants can be available for general education as well as for vocationally-oriented programmes. The availability of grants for adults is usually subject to age or social circumstances.

In **Denmark**, the Danish state grant system for adults (VEU) is directed at those engaged in adult vocational training (AMU). The VEU funding is awarded as compensation for lost wages or work opportunities.

In **Germany**, under the Federal Training Assistance Act, grants may be provided to adults seeking to obtain school-leaving qualifications or career advancement training in, for example, *Abendschulen* or *Kollegs*. However, training that started after the student reached the age of 30 may only be supported in exceptional cases.

In **Spain**, different types of grants are available to students in non-compulsory and higher education, including adult learners. Enrolment grants are available to all students in all Autonomous Communities. Mobility grants are specifically intended for students undertaking a programme outside their own Autonomous Community. Other grants provide support for students of technical subjects to develop their final project. During the academic year 2009/10, grants compensating the absence of income for university students and assistance for unemployed university graduates were introduced. These grants are intended to cover the costs of enrolment in a Master's programme in a public university. Their purpose is to upgrade the education levels of the recipients and to help university graduates who have become unemployed to re-enter the labour market.

In the **Netherlands**, part-time students who study in the theoretical learning pathway (VMBO-t), senior general secondary education (HAVO), pre-university secondary education (VWO) or adult general secondary education (VAVO) are eligible for financial support. This support is based on the type and extent of education undertaken, the type of institution, nationality and student income.

In **Sweden**, students in municipal adult education (i.e. education including formal programmes at compulsory and upper secondary level) may apply for study support. It consists of a grant and a loan. The grant is usually a little more than 30 % of the total support. Under specific conditions, about 75 % of the study support can consist of a grant. Students over the age of 25 can obtain a higher grant for studies at compulsory or upper secondary school level. In 2010, the total amount (grant and loan) was SEK 2035 (approximately EUR 230) per study week. For students with children there is also a possibility of receiving an extra grant. In 2010, this grant was set between SEK 508-996 (approximately EUR 60-110) per 4 weeks depending on the number of children.

In the **United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland)**, young adults (aged 19 or over) who are studying full-time for a first qualification at level 2 or 3 of the National Qualifications Framework/Qualifications and Credit Framework can apply for an Adult Learning Grant. This is a means-tested allowance of up to £ 30 (approximately EUR 36) per week intended to help meet the additional costs of learning, including books, equipment and travel costs, incurred as a result of attending a course. In Wales, the Assembly Learning Grant for Further Education (ALG FE) provides means tested support, in three termly payments of up to £500 (approximately EUR 600) per term, for full-time or part-time designated further education study of at least 275 hours' duration. In addition, hardship funds (known as 'Discretionary Support Funds' in England, 'Financial Contingency Funds' in Wales, and 'Access Funds' in Northern Ireland) are distributed by the further education funding bodies through individual colleges to the most disadvantaged and socially

excluded students, helping them to complete a course should they get into financial hardship. From the broad criteria set out in guidance from the funding bodies, colleges set their own criteria for awarding hardship funds and for the amounts payable to eligible students. These funds may be claimed alongside other financial assistance.

Similarly, **Scotland** makes available Discretionary Funds to students in financial difficulties in order for them to access and/or continue in Further or Higher Education. Students do not have to repay these funds and they are paid in addition to any other forms of student support. For students in Further Education, the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council (SFC) issues separate guidance on the payment of the FE Discretionary and FE Childcare Funds. It is up to the colleges to decide who will receive help from the funds and to what extent. Students can receive assistance from the Discretionary Funds several times throughout the academic year, but the overall payments must not exceed £3 500 (approximately EUR 4 170). However, there is no maximum payment limit for assistance from the FE Childcare Funds.

In **Liechtenstein**, the government provides financial support in the form of scholarships and interest-free loans. This financial assistance applies equally to learners in both initial education and adult second chance education. However, the entitlement to financial support depends on income and assets, and education must be self-funded if the student has sufficient personal financial means. The scholarship office determines the extent of reasonable support for the applicant based on fiscal data.

Direct financial support is also paid to adult learners via training vouchers, which are used in some countries to cover part of the cost of tuition fees.

In **Belgium**, in the **Flemish Community** and in the **Brussels-Capital Region**, employees may purchase up to EUR 250 worth of training vouchers per calendar year. They can use these vouchers to pay for training programmes organised by education and training providers which are recognised by the public service for labour and employment (VDAB), such as centres for adult education (CVOs). The employee only needs to pay half of the cost of the training vouchers.

In addition, adult learners may be entitled to receive financial support to cover or reimburse expenses incurred during education and training. These include transportation costs, accommodation expenses in those cases where the training programmes require relocation, as well as the cost of study materials.

Spain has introduced financial assistance for travel expenses, residential costs and learning materials for learners in upper secondary and tertiary education. Young people as well as adult learners can apply for this financial assistance. To be eligible, students must meet the academic and financial requirements set out annually. This assistance is intended to benefit students with a certain level of academic achievement whose family income is not sufficient to meet the expenses related to the education programme for which they have enrolled. Candidates who already hold a qualification, which would allow them to access a professional activity, are not eligible.

In the **United Kingdom (Wales)**, the Assembly Learning Grant (ALG) was introduced in 2002. It is available to full- and part-time further education and higher education students (19 years of age and over) from low-income families, and is intended to help cover the cost of books, equipment, travel and childcare. Eligible courses are further education courses that involve at least 275 hours of study and lead to a nationally recognised qualification. Grants of up to £1 500 (approximately EUR 1 790) are payable with supplementary elements for mature students (over 25) and those with childcare costs.

Mature students can also benefit from state-guaranteed bank loans, which must be repaid after the completion of studies. However, it is important to note that in the field of higher education, the opportunity to apply for study loans is often limited to students up to a certain age (e.g. 40 years in Hungary) and available only for full-time students (e.g. in Estonia and Finland).

In the **United Kingdom**, banks offer Professional and Career Development Loans, on which the Government pays the interest while students are studying or training, and for up to a month after they have completed their course. These loans are intended for courses that lead to employment or enhance job skills but which do not attract other forms of financial support. Students may borrow up to 80 % of their course fees (100 % if they have been unemployed for three months before applying), plus the full cost of books and other course materials. Students on full-time courses may also borrow money to help with their living expenses. The loan can cover up to two years of learning (up to three years if the course includes work experience) and can be between £300 (approximately EUR 350) and £10 000 (approximately EUR 11 900).

In **Norway**, adult learners may receive loans and grants from the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund (*Lånekassen*) for upper secondary education, studies at vocational colleges and higher education institutions. There is an upper age limit of 65 years but no other age-specific rules. The maximum loan for the academic year 2009/10 was set at NOK 87 600 (approximately EUR 12 000). Up to 40 % of the loan may be converted to grants if all exams are passed, if the student lives away from parents and if the additional income per year is not above a set limit.

Finally, in some cases, financial assistance can take the form of a refund of tuition fees for enrolment in formal adult education programmes. The refund is often conditional on the successful completion of the education or training programme.

In the **Flemish Community of Belgium**, once they have completed their training programme, course participants taking a diploma-oriented programme may reclaim tuition fees, either in part or in full.

In **Austria**, the province of Upper Austria has introduced a system named *Bildungskonto*. Under this scheme, the administrative office of the government of Upper Austria refunds 50 % of individual course fees to people participating in further education, up to a maximum amount of EUR 830 ('general' *Bildungskonto*). People over 40 years of age and unskilled persons may have up to 80 % of their course fees refunded. The 'special' *Bildungskonto* allows participants to submit a request for financial support amounting to 50 % of their personal costs up to a maximum of EUR 1 660 if they produce a certificate confirming successful completion. Preparatory courses for officially recognised exams (e.g. *Berufsreifeprüfung*, apprenticeship certification exams, foremen's exams, etc.) are among the most frequently subsidised educational activities. Different schemes to refund tuition fees also exist in all other provinces of Austria.

5.2.2. Tax incentives

In some countries, adult learners are entitled to claim a tax deduction when filing their tax returns for costs incurred for further education and vocational training, including programmes leading to formal qualifications. For example:

In **Estonia**, the Income Tax Act entitles a person to deduct expenses incurred during a period of taxation for his/her own training or for that of a person under 26 years of age.

In **Lithuania**, in accordance with the amendments to the Law on Personal Income Tax (2008), expenses incurred during the tax period by a resident of Lithuania for vocational education and training or studies (the completion of which results in attaining a formal qualification) may be deducted from his/her income earned. Where payment for vocational education and training or studies is made with borrowed funds (by taking out a loan from a credit institution), the part of the loan refunded during the tax period may be deducted from income. In special cases, when the student is unable to make use of this right, it can be extended to one of the members of his/her family.

Costs of examinations taken to obtain qualifications may also be exempt from taxation.

In the **Czech Republic**, the Act on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results (2006) allows a taxpayer with an income from employment to deduct costs relating to examinations leading to partial qualifications from

the tax base, up to a maximum of CZK 10 000 (approximately EUR 420). Taxpayers with disabilities are entitled to higher exemptions.

As well as learners, employers can also benefit from tax deductions on the costs incurred in providing education and training services to their employees.

In the **Netherlands**, a tax relief scheme has been established to ensure that employees with no or low qualifications have a better chance of obtaining a basic qualification (a HAVO, VWO or MBO level 2 certificate). Under this scheme, employers are eligible for a reduction of their tax and social insurance contributions to offset the extra costs of training and supervising unqualified employees who take a basic qualification.

5.2.3. Study leave

Study leave is an additional scheme to support adults who want to embark on formal education and training while gainfully employed. Unlike non-formal education and training (such as work-related training to develop specific skills), which is generally conducted over a limited period of time, formal education normally requires engagement over a longer duration. Allowing employees to invest a portion of their work time to attend formal general or vocational programmes is therefore an important way to support them in the acquisition of higher qualifications. In several countries, adult learners benefit from specific provisions for study leave.

One of the basic differences in the provision of study leave amongst EU countries is the categories of employees who are covered. The right to take or request study leave is often determined by the sector in which employees work or the size of the organisation.

In **Italy**, paid leave is only provided for within the collective agreements of a few industry sectors in order to allow employees to obtain the lower secondary school certificate or, more rarely, an upper secondary qualification.

In **Cyprus**, only public sector employees are entitled by law to leave their job for a definite period of time in order to gain a qualification. A few areas in the private sector provide for study leave in their collective agreements.

In the **United Kingdom (England, Wales and Scotland)** at present, only those who work in organisations with 250 or more employees have the statutory right to request time off for study or training; this is known as 'time to train'. This right will be extended from 6 April 2011 to cover employees in organisations of all sizes.

In **Iceland**, adults generally do not have a legal right to leave for studying at compulsory, upper secondary or higher education levels, with the exception of primary and secondary school teachers who are entitled to paid study leave of up to one year once in their career. Study leave may also be available to employees and civil servants depending on employment contracts.

The length of study leave varies significantly across Europe. For example:

In **Belgium**, the length of leave depends on the type of programme the employee has enrolled in, and should be between 32 and 120 hours per year.

In **Estonia**, the Adult Education Act makes a distinction between different types of education and allows a maximum of 30 days per year for participation in formal education and training programmes. It also provides for 15 additional days for the completion of studies and graduation.

In **Austria**, employers and employees may agree on a period of study leave lasting between three and twelve months.

Finland allows employees to take time off work for educational purposes for a total of two years within a period of five. However, the employer is entitled to postpone the study leave if the start time chosen by the employee would seriously disadvantage the employer's business.

In **Norway**, employees who have been working for more than three years and with the same company for more than two years, have the legal right to full-time or part-time study leave of up to three years to participate in a formal education programme.

Some systems allow employees to retain a salary during their study leave. However, the salary is not necessarily paid by the employer. For example in France, employees on study leave benefit from a total or partial payment of their salary which is paid from the 'individual training' leave (Fongecif) fund. In Belgium, the Federal Ministry of Employment reimburses the salary paid by the employer.

In a few instances, the period during which employees in education are entitled to receive their salary is limited, and does not necessarily coincide with the duration of the study leave. For example in Estonia, employees enrolled in formal education receive the average salary only for 20 days, irrespective of the length of the leave they have been accorded.

National legislation often determines the specific requirements that applicants must meet in order to qualify for paid study leave. For example, Belgium allows for paid leave only for courses matching certain characteristics as laid down in legislation. In other countries, employees are entitled to apply for study leave only after they have been employed full-time with the same employer for a certain period (e.g. one year in Finland, 26 weeks in the United Kingdom).

Some countries do not require the chosen field of continuing education to have a direct link with employees' work activities. This is the case in Belgium, France and the United Kingdom, where the programme followed by the employee on study leave does not necessarily have to be directly related to the activities of the company, or with the activity actually performed by the employee. Nevertheless, in the French Community of Belgium, there is a tendency to exclude courses, which do not lead to the acquisition of any vocational skills and/or have no work-related objective (e.g. decorative arts, photography, etc.).

5.2.4. Specific support for unemployed learners

In the majority of European countries, there are specific schemes for the unemployed, intended to facilitate their reintegration into the labour market through upgrading their qualification level. In most cases, the unemployed can take advantage of such schemes provided they register as job seekers with the relevant labour authorities. The most common type of support for job seekers who sign up for formal education or training programmes is partial or total exemption from tuition fees. For example:

In **Belgium**, in the **French Community**, job seekers are exempt from paying tuition fees for education provided within the framework of the Education for Social Advancement scheme (*enseignement de promotion sociale*). In the **German-speaking Community**, registered job applicants or people in receipt of certain state benefits (e.g. unemployment benefits or job-seekers' allowances) pay reduced tuition fees at the institutes for adult education (*Schulische Weiterbildung*). The **Flemish Community** provides for full exemption of tuition fees to several target groups including job seekers who are in receipt of a job-seeker's allowance or unemployment benefits, and who register for a pathway-to-work programme recognised by the public labour and employment service (VDAB).

In **Ireland**, since September 2009, around 1 800 unemployed people have been supported on part-time undergraduate or postgraduate higher education programmes and courses.

In **Latvia**, since 2009, unemployed people who want to achieve a new qualification are eligible for educational vouchers that can be used to cover vocational education, re-qualification or vocational further education programmes (i.e. formal as well as non-formal programmes). In addition, in 2010, 690 unemployed persons with obsolete or incomplete higher education qualifications were supported in obtaining a new professional higher education qualification or to finish a

previously uncompleted degree. The tuition funding of up to 1 000 lats (approximately EUR 1 400) and a monthly stipend during the period of study has also been provided. However, this programme will not continue in 2011.

In the **United Kingdom (Scotland)**, in 1998/99, the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council introduced the Higher Education Part-time Fee Waiver Scheme to assist low-income or unemployed part-time higher education students. In the academic year 2010/11, a budget of £3.7 million (approximately EUR 4.4 million) was allocated to this scheme.

In **Iceland**, the individual job-seeking programme for the unemployed includes education and training free of charge. The financing of this programme is provided for in the state budget through its Job Education Fund, and by the income from the Unemployment Insurance Fund.

In addition, several countries provide special subsidies for unemployed adults who enrol in education and training, including formal programmes. These subsidies may take the form of reimbursement of travel costs incurred during training, accommodation allowances in cases when the training involves an overnight stay, meals, learning materials such as textbooks, and day-nursery or childcare for learners with children.

In **Belgium**, a job seeker registered with the FOREM (the Walloon public service for employment and training) or with *Bruxelles-Formation*, signs a vocational training contract which entitles him/her to various benefits. These include retaining unemployment benefits or social integration payments, reimbursement of travel costs, a training indemnity of € 1 per hour of training followed (under certain conditions), assistance with day nursery or childminding costs and insurance cover. In the **Flemish Community**, the public service for labour and employment (VDAB) provides a number of allowances for job-seeking course participants, including a travel allowance, an accommodation allowance if overnight accommodation is required for the course undertaken, and a childcare allowance for course participants with small children.

In **Bulgaria**, persons who are actively looking for a job are entitled to vocational training and a scholarship for training that leads to the acquisition of a vocational qualification.

In **Spain**, unemployed people who participate in vocational training activities can receive assistance for transportation, meals and accommodation, as well as support to care for children under 6 years of age or dependents.

In **Slovenia**, the unemployed who enrol in formal educational programmes at upper secondary and tertiary levels are entitled to receiving cost-of-living benefits (€ 6 per day), a supplement for travel expenses, study materials and study aids as required by the programme. However, the total amount cannot exceed 20 % of the minimum wage. Students also have their compulsory health insurance costs paid for. In addition, unemployed learners enrolled in upper secondary and tertiary courses longer than 100 hours are entitled to receive activity grants ranging from EUR 100 to 300, depending on the length of the programme.

Depending on the national context, unemployed people who participate in education and training either keep their unemployment benefits or these benefits are replaced by other financial support schemes. In Ireland, for instance, unemployed people participating in education and training programmes either keep their social welfare payment or a participant allowance is paid in lieu. Participants also retain their secondary benefits (such as subsidies for fuel, rent or medical expenses) and can be eligible for a range of additional allowances designed to cover the costs of attending education and training programmes, such as meals and travel. It is also interesting to note that in Finland, job seekers who, on their own initiative, choose to take training outside the programmes offered by the Employment and Economic Development Office can retain their unemployment benefits as long as they meet certain conditions.

CONCLUSION

This report has explored how European countries are addressing the important task of providing the adult population with opportunities to move 'one step up' and achieve a qualification at least one level higher than they held before. While opportunities for moving from lower towards higher qualification levels were the focus of the report, it is important to underline that lifelong learning cannot be seen as only a vertical process where all learners are seeking to obtain higher qualifications. Sometimes the process can be horizontal, in that learners often need to gain a different qualification at the same level of the qualification structure or, indeed, take a lower qualification, especially if they are changing career or widening their skills. All these pathways are valid choices on the road to lifelong learning and many of the programmes, measures and policy actions discussed in this report could provide the support adults need to move in any of these learning directions.

For the purpose of cross-country comparability, the document has not covered the whole range of formal qualifications that exist in different European countries. As the report shows, formal education is a complex field and its scope can vary from one country to another. Therefore, the report has concentrated on only a part of the formal education and training sector, that is, on the mainstream qualifications traditionally associated with the initial education and training system. The aim has been to examine how individuals might achieve these qualifications at a later stage in life.

This conclusion highlights selected topics discussed in the report and indicates some possible policy directions that could improve opportunities for adults to upgrade their level of educational attainment.

European countries face very different challenges in raising the educational attainment of the adult population

Statistical data relating to human resource development in terms of education and training shows that in 2009 the European Union counted around 76 million adults who had not reached the level of upper secondary education – the level considered a minimum requirement not only for successful labour market entry but also for continued employability. This group included around 23 million adults who had not completed any formal education beyond the level of primary education. Yet, there are very different patterns of adult educational attainment in European countries. While in several countries, a relatively small proportion of the adult population has not completed lower or upper secondary education, some countries show a very different profile characterised by a significant proportion of adults with low educational attainment. This indicates that European countries face very different challenges in providing compensatory formal lifelong learning opportunities.

The non-completion of lower secondary education can represent a significant barrier to adults joining programmes leading to upper secondary level qualifications

Statistical data indicates that those who lack formal qualifications are less likely to take part in formal education than those who have completed at least upper secondary education. This could be partly related to structural barriers in the systems of formal education. The analysis reveals that, in many European countries, adults who have not completed basic or lower secondary education have only very limited opportunities to progress through the formal education and training system towards higher qualification levels, in particular towards upper secondary qualifications. In this context, the report has identified two examples of good practice. In certain countries, legislation ensures that under-qualified

adults have access to basic or lower secondary education. This is achieved by requiring local authorities to secure sufficient educational provision leading to lower secondary level qualifications to meet demand. Elsewhere, countries have established flexible admissions procedures and do not have any formal qualification requirements for entry to upper secondary education.

Many countries provide adult returners with opportunities to achieve formal qualifications through various flexible learning options

The mapping exercise has shown that formal qualifications up to upper secondary level can often be achieved in various flexible ways. Firstly, some countries provide formal education and training programmes in a modular or unit-based structure, which allows students to trace their own learning path and progressively accumulate different qualification components. Other organisational patterns similar to modularisation can also be observed across Europe. Secondly, the participation in formal education and training programmes is not always a necessary condition to achieve formal qualifications. In several European countries, students who are no longer subject to compulsory education can take partial or final examinations leading to formal certificates and qualifications without prior participation in education and training programmes. This allows adult returners to prepare for examinations at their own pace and/or valorise the learning outcomes achieved in other than formal contexts. In the case of vocational qualifications, traditional school-based examinations are sometimes replaced by other evaluation approaches such as portfolios, observation, demonstration, etc. Finally, a few countries appear as important investors in open and distance learning. These are generally countries that have established organisations under the ministry of education to ensure the provision of open and distance learning for people of all ages, including adult returners.

Higher education systems vary significantly in their receptiveness towards adult returners

The results of the analysis indicate that clear policy objectives regarding the participation of mature students in higher education have so far been defined only in a few European countries. Nevertheless, many countries have put in place various measures that are well suited to the needs of non-traditional higher education candidates and students, including adult returners. For example, in several countries the traditional general or vocational upper secondary school leaving certificate is not the only way to enter higher education. The alternative access routes most commonly include admission based on validation of prior non-formal and informal learning or on specific preparatory programmes for non-traditional HE candidates. In addition, in several countries, students can validate their prior non-formal and informal learning with a view to progressing in their formal higher education studies. This creates an opportunity for mature students to valorise a wide range of their learning experiences and outcomes, including work-related learning. Finally, some countries have put in place policy actions and measures to meet the needs of students who cannot follow traditional full-time higher education studies, which is often the case with adult returners.

The majority of European countries have introduced financial measures to support the participation of the most vulnerable groups in formal education and training

The report has shown that the public authorities in most countries provide financial support for compensatory formal education and training aimed at the most vulnerable groups, in particular under-qualified adults and those at risk of social exclusion. For instance, basic or lower secondary 'second chance' programmes are in most countries free of charge for participants who have not yet completed these levels. The same often applies to upper secondary programmes and qualifications. However, it is difficult to evaluate the extent to which public authorities across Europe ensure that under-qualified

adults have sufficient access to appropriate learning provision. In the field of higher education, countries differ widely in how they finance the flexible learning programmes (e.g. part-time studies), that are particularly suited to the needs of adult returners. While some countries fund traditional full-time programmes and flexible learning programmes on an equal footing, in other countries, a different funding method applies to each mode of study. This means that flexible study options often require a more significant private financial investment than traditional full-time programmes. In addition, countries differ widely with respect to the direct or indirect financial support for which adult returners might be eligible when they engage in formal education and training. Nevertheless, everywhere in Europe, direct or indirect financial support for learners is concentrated on the unemployed and those vulnerable to exclusion from the labour market.

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To conclude, it is important to note that although the certificates and diplomas related to different qualifications often remain valid for the duration of a person's working life, the knowledge, skills and competences needed in the labour market and in society at large are evolving rapidly. Therefore formal certificates and qualifications, once achieved, are often no longer enough to ensure continued employability throughout one's working life. In other words, the completion of a formal qualification should now be seen as a step on the lifelong learning ladder rather than an end in itself.

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GLOSSARY

Country codes

EU-27	European Union
BE	Belgium
BE fr	Belgium – French Community
BE de	Belgium – German-speaking Community
BE nl	Belgium – Flemish Community
BG	Bulgaria
CZ	Czech Republic
DK	Denmark
DE	Germany
EE	Estonia
IE	Ireland
EL	Greece
ES	Spain
FR	France
IT	Italy
CY	Cyprus
LV	Latvia
LT	Lithuania
LU	Luxembourg
HU	Hungary
MT	Malta
NL	Netherlands

AT	Austria
PL	Poland
PT	Portugal
RO	Romania
SI	Slovenia
SK	Slovakia
FI	Finland
SE	Sweden
UK	United Kingdom
UK-ENG	England
UK-WLS	Wales
UK-NIR	Northern Ireland
UK-SCT	Scotland
EFTA/EEA countries	The three countries of the European Free Trade Association which are members of the European Economic Area
IS	Iceland
LI	Liechtenstein
NO	Norway
Candidate country	
TR	Turkey

Statistical code

: Data not available

I. Classifications

International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED 1997)

The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) is an instrument suitable for compiling statistics on education internationally. It covers two cross-classification variables: levels and fields of education with the complementary dimensions of general/vocational/pre-vocational orientation and educational/labour market destination. The current version, ISCED 97 ⁽¹⁾ distinguishes seven levels of education. Empirically, ISCED assumes that several criteria exist which can help allocate education programmes to levels of education. Depending on the level and type of education concerned, there is a need to establish a hierarchical ranking system between main and subsidiary criteria (typical entrance qualification, minimum entrance requirement, minimum age, staff qualification, etc.).

ISCED 0: Pre-primary education

Pre-primary education is defined as the initial stage of organised instruction. It is school- or centre-based and is designed for children aged at least 3 years.

ISCED 1: Primary education

This level begins between 5 and 7 years of age, is compulsory in all countries and generally lasts from four to six years.

ISCED 2: Lower secondary education

It continues the basic programmes of the primary level, although teaching is typically more subject-focused. Usually, the end of this level coincides with the end of compulsory education.

ISCED 3: Upper secondary education

This level generally begins at the end of compulsory education. The entrance age is typically 15 or 16 years. Entrance qualifications (end of compulsory education) and other minimum entry requirements are usually needed. Instruction is often more subject-oriented than at ISCED level 2. The typical duration of ISCED level 3 varies from two to five years.

ISCED 4: Post-secondary non-tertiary education

These programmes straddle the boundary between upper secondary and tertiary education. They serve to broaden the knowledge of ISCED level 3 graduates. Typical examples are programmes designed to prepare pupils for studies at level 5 or programmes designed to prepare pupils for direct labour market entry.

ISCED 5: Tertiary education (first stage)

Entry to these programmes normally requires the successful completion of ISCED level 3 or 4. This level includes tertiary programmes with academic orientation (type A) which are largely theoretically based and tertiary programmes with occupation orientation (type B) which are typically shorter than type A programmes and geared for entry into the labour market.

ISCED 6: Tertiary education (second stage)

This level is reserved for tertiary studies that lead to an advanced research qualification (Ph.D. or doctorate).

⁽¹⁾ http://www.uis.unesco.org/ev.php?ID=3813_201&ID2=DO_TOPIC

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