



8th ASEF Regional Conference on Higher Education (ARC8)

Outlook 2030: Inclusive and Diverse Higher Education in Asia and Europe

ARC8 EG2 Inclusive and Flexible Lifelong Learning Pathways

Session 2 | Monday, 11 January 2021

Summary

Presentation by Dr Alexandra IOANNIOU, Internationalisation Unit, Executive Department, DIE - Leibniz Centre for Lifelong Learning; Secretary and Board Member, European Society for Research on the Education of Adults (ESREA)

Alexandra was asked to focus on the following questions in a 10-minute presentation to provide food for thought for the expert group:

1. What is your take, how inclusive are the national, institutional LLL policies and practices currently, what is the status quo? Do you have any numbers to show?
2. What potential risks do you foresee that could jeopardize greater inclusion in LLL in the next 10 years?
3. What opportunities, leverage points do you see to promote inclusion in LLL the next 10 years?

She started her presentation with a **master narrative on the concept of lifelong learning**. From her point of view, the concept of lifelong learning seems to be for the educational sector the equivalent of globalization for the economic sector.

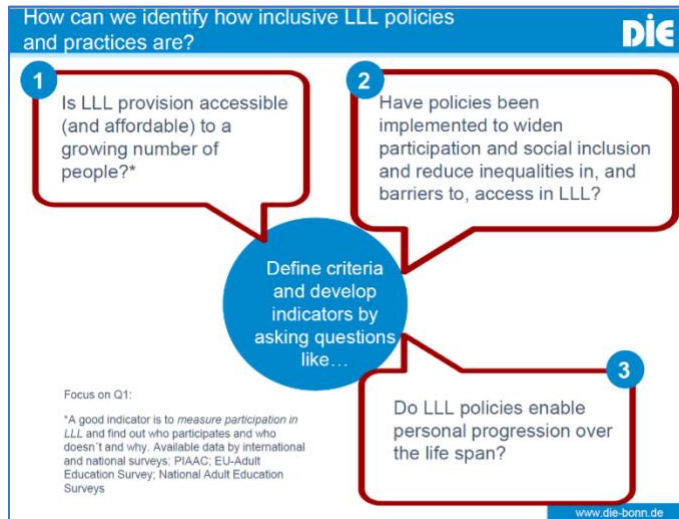
- **It blurs existing boundaries** between educational sectors, e.g., formal educational institutions, informal learning providers, etc.
- **It erodes the responsibility of the state** because not only authorities are in charge of education, but also civil society actors are very much engaged in non-formal learning, such as families and workplaces.
- **It challenges individuals in their life course**, as learning takes place not only in the first quarter of their life during formal education, but throughout the individuals' life, and learners need to take responsibility for their learning pathways and for their educational careers.
- **It creates risks and opportunities**, just like globalization.

Alexandra continued with sharing points on the **status quo on inclusion in lifelong learning**:

- LLL policies and practices vary considerably across countries. This is because they are embedded in characteristic regimes of economic and social institutions (education and training systems, labour market institutions, production systems, and welfare state arrangements).
- In case of Europe for example, the influence of inter-, supra- or transnational actors (EU, OECD, UNESCO) in this field is remarkable. Even though education policies are under the jurisdiction of individual countries, significant drivers for policy reforms evolve at the European and international level.

- Country-specific institutional arrangements have a decisive effect on how inclusive a country's LLL policies and practices are and can yield strikingly different outcomes both in terms of provision, access and participation in LLL, and also in terms of political reforms.

She recommended to take a look at the [European Parliamentary Research Service website](#) for more information on the individual country policies in the European Union.

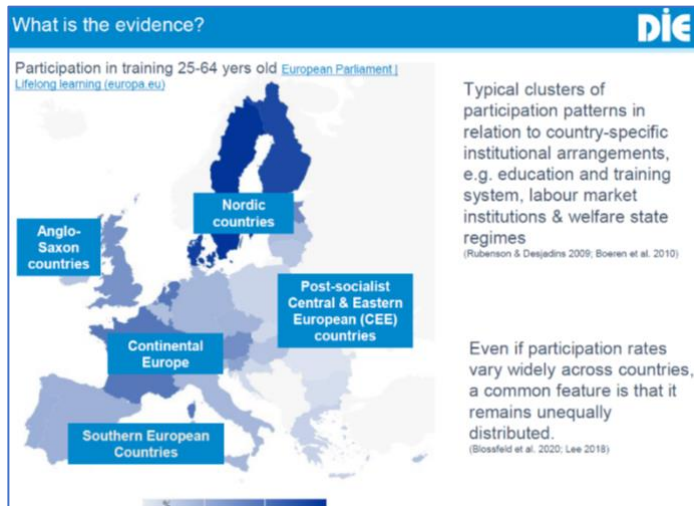


But how can we identify how inclusive LLL policies and practices really are? We need to define a criterion and develop indicators first to find answers to this question. Alexandra shared a set of questions we shall be thinking about when trying to establish such criteria and indicators:

- Is LLL provision accessible (and affordable) to a growing number of people?
- Have policies been implemented to widen participation and social inclusion and reduce inequalities in, and barriers to, access in LLL?
- Do LLL policies enable personal progression over the life span?

progression over the life span?

Alexandra proceeded with a focus on the first question, whether LLL provision is accessible to a growing number of people? “A good indicator is to measure participation and find out who participates, who doesn't and why” she explained. There



are a lot of sources measuring participation, e.g., the European Adult Education Survey. What they have found is that there are typical clusters of participation patterns in Europe, and these patterns are related to countries specific characteristics, e.g., the education and training system, how open and flexible they are, how permeable they are. In case permeability exists within the education sector, it has to do with labour market institutions like union density, full employment concepts, or they have to do with welfare state regimes such as

childcare assistance, paid education leave, etc. We see for example that Nordic countries have high participation rates and rather low inequality in participation, whereas Southern European countries have low participation patterns and also high inequality.

“We have found that even if participation rates vary widely across countries, it remains unevenly distributed. Research has established that initial educational inequalities perpetuate over the life span. This effect is often referred to as the cumulative advantage/disadvantage hypothesis (O’Rand & Henretta, 1999) or as the Matthew effect.”

Initial education attainment has the highest predictive power followed by employment status. The highly educated are more likely to participate in LLL. Participation is especially low amongst those most in need: the low educated and low-skilled, the unemployed, non-standard (temporary and/or part-time) workers, those whose jobs are at high risk of automation.

For example, workers in fully automatable jobs were found to be four times less likely to have participated in job-related training over the 12 months prior to the survey than workers in non-automatable jobs. (Nedelkoska & Quintini, 2018)

This is also related to research focusing on reasons for participation or on reasons for missing out. The focus of these studies is:

- a) on individual determinants (like motivational attitudes) or
- b) on system-level characteristics that enable participation or
- c) on the interaction between different levels (micro-, meso- and macro-level) that shape participation in adult learning (Boeren, Nicaise, & Baert, 2010)

A very common assumption is that individual educational choices are constrained by institutions: Participation in AET is the result of the interplay between individual agency and structural conditions; individual educational choices are constrained by institutions (Rubenson and Desjardins, 2009)

Another strand of literature focuses on barriers to participation: Barriers to participation can be situational, dispositional and institutional (Cross, 1981). Specific policies can help to overcome situational (related to a person's life situation at a given point in the family and working life cycle) and institutional (practices and procedures that discourage or prevent participation) barriers and enhance inclusiveness.

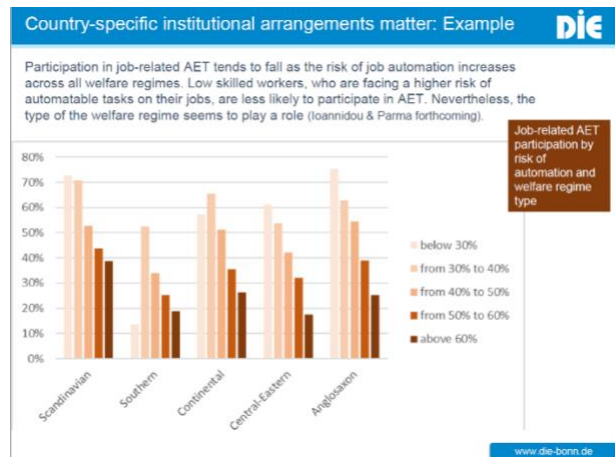
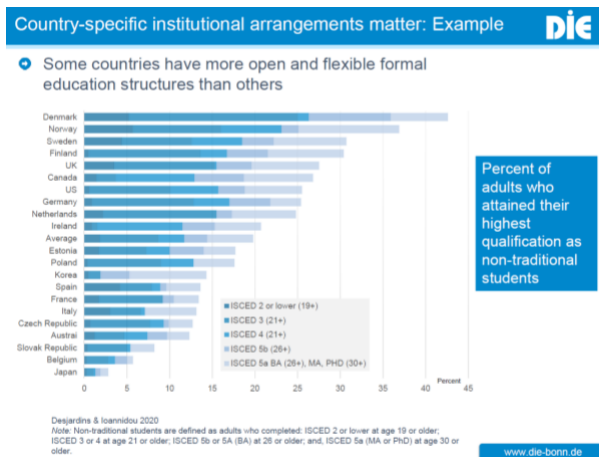
Alexandra proceeded with sharing her views on potential risks that could jeopardize greater inclusion in lifelong learning / adult education in the next decade:

- **Inequality in access to LLL opportunities:** low-skilled and low-qualified people tend to be deadlocked in a vicious circle of limited resources (due to social origins), bad jobs, and insufficient training and learning opportunities in these jobs. They cannot come out if there are not specific policies that target these disadvantaged groups.
- **The skill orientation of the economy** (high vs low skills equilibrium economies) can also perpetuate educational inequalities. Several studies demonstrate a strong link between the skill orientation of the economy and the extent and distribution of adult learning opportunities (Desjardins, 2017). E.g., Silicon Valley offers a lot of learning opportunities in areas where other regions and countries are not competitive. Countries with less developed economies and lower added value products, lifelong learning opportunities are typically scarcer.
- **Gradual withdrawal of state support** (regulatory efforts and budget allocation to ALE) even in countries with strong tradition of publicly funded ALE due to austerity policies and economic stagnation (also due to Covid-19).
- **Strong focus on skills and employability** and the dominance of economic rationality can sideline other functions of LLL (aiming to promote democratic citizenship, emancipation, active ageing etc.) and jeopardize inclusiveness.

Regarding the opportunities, that could potentially lead to greater inclusion in lifelong learning in the next decade, Alexandra shares the following points:

- **Evidence-based policy reform:** Evidence on both monetary and non-monetary (in terms of well-being, active ageing and civic engagement) outcomes of participation in LLL (Bynneret al. 2003; Schrader et al. 2020)
 - Evidence on both monetary and non-monetary (in terms of well-being, active ageing and civic engagement) outcomes of participation in LLL (Bynneret al. 2003; Schrader et al. 2020)
 - Evidence on specific institutional features that support inclusive LLL systems (financial and non-financial incentives, active labour market measures, open and flexible education and training systems, skills recognition system, programmes targeting the most vulnerable groups, childcare and family assistance) (Desjardins 2017; Desjardins and Ioannidou 2020)
- HEI implement LLL strategies and open to non-traditional students.
 - [Social Inclusion Policies in Higher Education: Evidence from the EU: JRC Technical Reports, 2019](#)
 - [European Universities' Charter on Lifelong Learning](#)
- Digitalisation as a double-edged sword
- Peer learning through international cooperation and knowledge transfer
- Interconnectedness of LLL policies to other policy areas. This where are plenty of leverage points not only in educational policies, but we also in terms of enhancing inclusiveness through labour market policies, through economic policies, and through welfare state policies.

As closing thoughts, Alexandra shared a couple of country examples:



Her presentation was followed by group discussion, and the following comments were added:

Comments on Risks by group members:

- **On “Gradual withdrawal of state support”**
 - There is a tendency of more withdrawal but at the same time there is this whole discussion about individual learning accounts and the role of corporate sector.
 - There are two conflicting directions when it comes to the role of states: on the one hand they push for more LLL to respond to changing labour market needs, but on the

other hand they withdraw resources, so eventually the amount of resources available is shrinking.

- The pressure on states and government to decrease unemployment and constantly re-skill labour force due to the changing nature of jobs is quite big, therefore governments need to ensure that finance is available.

- **On “Strong focus on skills and employability”**
 - This is the main risk, because as more and more people are getting educated and getting higher qualifications, the access and the opportunities for people who are low skilled or low educated are becoming fewer. They are having less and less opportunities because there is a strong focus on formal education.

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