



## Online workshop

# Making learning progression a reality – Learners in the spotlight

## Background note

### 1. Workshop framework

Learning takes place in all areas of life. Individuals should be able to combine and accumulate learning across institutions, sectors, even countries, and (re)-enter education, training and learning throughout their life based on their needs and circumstances. This can happen if education and training systems follow a learner-centred approach, focus on the individual, and support flexible learning pathways.

Over the past two decades, numerous European and national policy initiatives have tried to reduce barriers to lifelong and life-wide learning <sup>(1)</sup>. Often focusing on the increase of transparency <sup>(2)</sup> of programmes, qualifications and systems and the promotion of transferability <sup>(3)</sup> of learning acquired in different learning settings (formal, non-formal and informal), these initiatives are at the core of efforts to make education, training and learning systems more flexible.

Taking the turn of the century as a starting point, the Cedefop project *Transparency and transferability of learning outcomes* (2022-25) aims to offer insights into, and stimulate discussions on, the relationships and the impact of European and national policy initiatives promoting transparency and transferability of learning outcomes <sup>(4)</sup>. The main objective of the project is to shed light on the extent to which these initiatives, taken together, have contributed to developing more flexible learning systems and improving opportunities for individual learners.

The first [workshop](#) <sup>(5)</sup> in the context of the project offered a platform for discussing and exchanging views on the coherence and impact of policy initiatives at European and national levels. This second [workshop](#) aims to inform participants about the interim findings of the project, giving them an opportunity to engage and share their reflections. More specifically, it intends to discuss in depth the question of whether European and national initiatives on transparency and transferability of learning outcomes over the past 20 years have been successful in improving flexibility and permeability of education, training and learning systems. Discussions will explore whether these initiatives have worked in synergy and have successfully reduced obstacles for individuals to enter, re-enter and accumulate learning across education and training sectors, institutions and countries. The workshop

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<sup>(1)</sup> Lifelong learning refers to ‘all learning activities undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills, competences and/or qualifications for personal, social and/or professional reasons’. Life-wide learning refers to ‘all learning that takes place across the full range of life activities (personal, social or professional) and at any stage of a person's life, and can encompass either formal, non-formal or informal learning’.

<sup>(2)</sup> Cedefop (2014) defines transparency of qualifications as the degree of visibility and legibility of qualifications, their content and value in the (sectoral, regional, national or international) labour market and in education and training systems.

<sup>(3)</sup> Cedefop (2014) defines transferability as the degree to which knowledge, skills and competences can be used in a new occupational or educational environment, and/or be validated and certified.

<sup>(4)</sup> What a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process.

<sup>(5)</sup> [Making learning progression a reality – Building on lessons from European transparency tools](#), 29 September 2022.

also aims to stimulate reflection on the necessary conditions for successful cooperation in this domain and explore existing or newly emerged barriers to lifelong learning. By looking at past developments and trends, insights will be gained into relevant aspects to be considered for developing policy scenarios for the next 20 years in relation to future European policies and national developments regarding lifelong learning.

The workshop keynote speech, presentations, panel discussions and breakout sessions will discuss three main questions:

1. What European and national initiatives and developments have contributed to making a difference for individual learners and their need to access, enter, re-enter and combine learning throughout life?
2. What barriers to lifelong learning have been overcome, and which ones persist or are emerging?
3. What aspects and/or areas should receive attention in the coming years to facilitate lifelong and life-wide learning?

## 2. Project progress and contextual background

The project *Transparency and transferability of learning outcomes* applies a comprehensive (cross-sectoral and cross-national) perspective, looking at developments over the past two decades (2000-20). It consists of four themes <sup>(6)</sup>.

The key-question to be addressed by this *study*, is whether the multitude of policy initiatives promoting learning outcomes, transparency and transferability over the past two decades has contributed, in practice, to the lifelong and life-wide learning of individual citizens.

While the first part of the project acknowledged the role of broader overall policy frameworks, strategies and processes <sup>(7)</sup> and the role of EU programmes and funds <sup>(8)</sup>, it focused on mapping and analysing the more specific and concrete policy initiatives which often stem from these broader policy frameworks, strategies and processes.

At European level, a detailed analysis of the different policy initiatives and tools introduced over the past 20 years has led to the identification of the most relevant initiatives (see 2.1.) and the conceptualisation of five overarching thematic areas (see Figure 1).

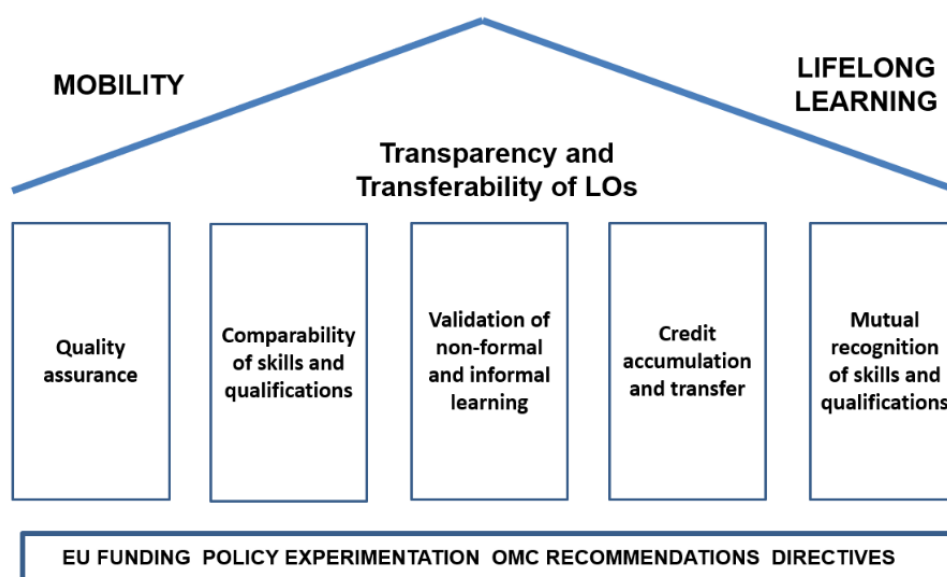
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<sup>(6)</sup> Theme 1 – European-level policies supporting transparency and transferability of learning outcomes: sustainability and impact; Theme 2 – National policies supporting transparency and transferability of learning: sustainability and impact; Theme 3 – Lifelong learning in 2000 and in 2020: what has changed for the individual citizen?; Theme 4 – Scenarios for lifelong and life-wide learning: policy options and implications.

<sup>(7)</sup> For example, Bologna Process, Copenhagen Process, Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training, European Skills Agenda.

<sup>(8)</sup> For example, Leonardo da Vinci, Socrates, Erasmus/Erasmus+, European Social Fund (ESF, ESF+).

Figure 1. *Thematic areas*



The five thematic areas can be considered as ‘pillars’ supporting transparency and transferability of learning outcomes in different but often overlapping or interlinked ways, thus promoting lifelong learning and mobility (across sectors, institutions and borders). The conceptualisation of these categories served to support the development of a coherent analysis of the many different policy tools and initiatives implemented since 2000. To this end, the main policy initiatives analysed in the context of the study were linked to one or several of these five thematic areas.

## 2.1. List of policy initiatives at European level

### Quality assurance

- (a) European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) – 2000
- (b) Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European higher education area (ESG) – 2005 and 2015
- (c) European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) – 2009 and 2020

### Credits

- (a) European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) – 1985
- (b) European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) – 2009-20

### Comparability

- (a) European qualifications framework for lifelong learning (EQF) – 2008 and 2017
- (b) Qualifications framework for the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) – 2005
- (c) Europass (diploma supplement, certificate supplement, and Europass portal) – 2004 and 2018
- (d) The multilingual classification of European Skills, Competences, and Occupations (ESCO) – 2017
- (e) Recommendation on microcredentials (MC) – 2020
- (f) Recommendation on key competence framework 2006-18

## Validation

- (a) Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) – 2012

## Recognition

- (a) Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) on recognition of academic qualifications – 1997
- (b) Directive on professional qualifications 2005/36/EC and 2013/55/EC (PQD) – 2005 and 2013
- (c) Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad – 2018

The list of identified initiatives at European level is not exhaustive; further initiatives and developments, not considered in the study, might be relevant to the thematic areas and to transparency and transferability of learning outcomes. Nevertheless, the initiatives listed were regarded as the most important ones, considering the 20-year time frame and their influence on national developments.

The project also focuses on analysing developments at national level, giving specific attention to eight countries <sup>(9)</sup>. Over the past two decades, many different national policy initiatives have been implemented across EU countries in the five thematic areas considered, reflecting increasing attention in addressing issues related to the transparency and transferability of learning outcomes, the ultimate objective being the promotion of flexible learner-centred lifelong and life-wide learning pathways. Although a general converging process was observed across all EU Member States towards the promotion of transparency and transferability of learning outcomes, national timing and patterns of reforms are often non-linear and reflect the national specificities of institutional and socioeconomic contexts.

## 2.2. Relationships and synergies between policy initiatives

The first part of the study <sup>(10)</sup> analyses the identified initiatives at European level and provides insights into the relationships and synergies between policies in the same thematic area, as well as between those from different thematic areas. Overall, there is a good connection among policy initiatives, especially regarding their aims and objectives. In most cases, there is also alignment among the concepts used in these initiatives, pointing to an overall coherent European policy framework. Developing policy initiatives that are coherent and connect well with the broader policy ecosystem is not always easy; and ensuring synergies in further development and implementation of initiatives appears even more complex. Sustainable cooperation among stakeholders responsible seems to be essential to promote and maintain effective synergies.

In most cases, the study shows strong links between initiatives from different thematic areas, but these are often related to a specific education and training sector. However, there are initiatives, such as the [European qualifications framework \(EQF\)](#) and [validation of non-formal and informal learning](#), which are not associated to a specific sector and are often perceived as linked to different thematic areas, promoting platforms for cross-sectoral cooperation and permeability between education and training sectors.

The project also examines the relationships between national initiatives, as well as the interplay between developments at both EU and national levels. For the latter, the analysis shows that for many

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<sup>(9)</sup> The countries selected are Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Ireland, Netherlands, Poland and Romania.

<sup>(10)</sup> Interim findings, including thematic areas, were discussed in a [first workshop](#) on 29 September 2022 and at the 15th Cedefop Brussels Seminar organised with the Spanish Presidency '[Empowering individuals for better mobility, transparency and recognition of qualifications](#)' which took place on 28 November 2023. The final report will be published in 2024.

European countries, European-level policy acted as a driver and provided a reference framework for enhancing the transparency of systems and qualifications and the transferability of learning outcomes; at the same time, other countries were pioneers/promoters of change, influencing and inspiring EU policy-making and initiatives.

### 2.3. Combined impact of policy initiatives

The study intends to shed light on the impact of European and national policy initiatives in terms of institutional and system changes and the difference they make to individuals. Collecting evidence on the impact of policies is methodologically complex and can be conceptualised in different ways, depending on whether a European or national perspective is adopted. There is hardly ever a linear path towards changes, and strong cause-effect relationships cannot be established for various reasons. The initiatives explored are not the only factor influencing changes; they interact with one another, and their impact cannot be isolated. Instead of focusing on contributions and impact of single policy initiatives, the study takes a comprehensive view and looks for the overall contributions of policies in these areas. The aim is to clarify whether the multiplicity of policies, reforms and initiatives adopted at European and national levels have led to more open, flexible and individually oriented education, training and learning arrangements with benefits for individuals. The study seeks to provide insights into this by focusing on the national level and gathering evidence on the main changes and combined impact of policy initiatives introduced over the past 20 years in eight countries <sup>(11)</sup>. The aim is to explore whether European and national policy on transparency and transferability have promoted developments affecting the possibility for individuals to enter, re-enter and combine education, training and learning over time across different institutions, sectors and countries. Attention is also given to the identification of the most affected ‘learner groups’ taking into account their age, work experience, level of formal qualification, employment status and other factors.

### 2.4. Future developments

The last phase of the project (ongoing) aims to identify key and future trends to develop a set of policy scenarios envisioning alternative paths to 2040 <sup>(12)</sup>. This would serve to illustrate and prompt discussion on choices available for future policies, practices and developments, at European and national levels, and their implications.

## 3. Scope of the workshop

The workshop is an opportunity for participants to present and discuss insights from the project and shape its next steps.

### 3.1. Panel discussion

Following Cedefop’s opening remarks and presentation setting the scene, a panel discussion involving representatives from the European Commission, national authorities as well as learners’ associations will delve into the landscape of transparency and transferability of learning outcomes, identifying not only achievements and success factors, but also persisting barriers to lifelong learning and the way ahead.

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<sup>(11)</sup> The countries selected are Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Ireland, Netherlands, Poland and Romania.

<sup>(12)</sup> A scenario is a ‘story’ illustrating visions of possible future or aspects of possible future. (...) Scenarios are not predictions about the future but rather similar to simulations of some possible futures. They are used both as an exploratory method or a tool for decision-making, mainly to highlight the discontinuities from the present and to reveal the choices available and their potential consequences. *Source:* [European Foresight Platform: scenario method](#).

### 3.2. Breakout sessions

Participants will be invited to join one of the three parallel breakout sessions on the following topics:

- Session 1: European policy initiatives on transparency and transferability of learning outcomes: synergies, success and future pathways
- Session 2: Past and present barriers to lifelong and life-wide learning
- Session 3: Exploring past and present trends and their influence on future developments

#### 3.2.1. Session 1: European policy initiatives on transparency and transferability of learning outcomes: synergies, success, and future pathways

This session will discuss the interplay among existing policy initiatives on transparency and transferability of learning outcomes. It will focus on identifying success factors while highlighting areas demanding future attention or better European cooperation. A brief presentation of the results of the ongoing Cedefop project will help kickstart the discussion. Participants will be encouraged to share their views on the synergies and impact of European initiatives over the past two decades. Emphasis will be placed on identifying success factors and lessons learned, which will also help participants reflect on areas that may benefit from future attention, as well as conditions for successful European cooperation.

##### *Main questions for discussion*

- (a) To what extent have EU policies on transparency and transferability of learning outcomes been working in synergy? Which initiatives can be considered as successful and why?
- (b) Reflecting on past experiences, what fundamental lessons should guide and shape future policy choices? Which aspects and areas would require improvement or better cooperation to support lifelong and life-wide learning?

#### 3.2.2. Session 2: Past and present barriers to lifelong and life-wide learning

This session will discuss past and present obstacles to lifelong learning focusing on transparency of systems and transferability of learning outcomes. The session will start with a brief presentation of the interim findings of Cedefop's ongoing project. Participants will be invited to share their considerations on what elements should be considered to capture what has changed since 2000 in terms of learner opportunities and barriers to lifelong learning. The session will be an opportunity to discuss which obstacles to vertical and horizontal learning mobility have been removed or reduced over the past two decades, and the extent to which education, training and learning systems are evolving towards more flexible and individual-centred systems.

##### *Main questions for discussion*

- (a) Over the past 20 years, which barriers to lifelong and life-wide learning, with a focus on transparency of systems and transferability of learning outcomes, were reduced by European and national policy initiatives? Which policy initiatives have contributed the most?
- (b) Which barriers persist or have emerged? What aspects would need more attention in the future?

#### 3.2.3. Session 3: Exploring past and present trends and their influence on future policy developments in lifelong learning

This session will discuss past and present trends that can help participants reflect on potential policy scenarios related to European policies and national developments in lifelong learning. The session will start with a brief presentation of Cedefop's ongoing project about the development of future scenarios towards 2040. Participants will be invited to discuss the relevance of identified trends, as well as other trends concerning policy initiatives and developments over the past 20 years, and the influence these can have in shaping future policy scenarios. Macro 'external' factors or factors not

directly connected to policy developments in transparency and transferability are expected to impact future developments (e.g. conflicts, health crises) <sup>(13)</sup>. However, the workshop will primarily focus on aspects that can be considered as influenceable by actors such as policy-makers, practitioners and other stakeholders. The session will offer participants an opportunity to reflect on relevant factors for the development of alternative policy scenarios, as well as their implication for European policies and national developments in lifelong learning.

*Main questions for discussion*

- Reflecting on the past two decades and the current landscape at European level, what have been the prevailing trends and priorities to support lifelong learning? How might these past trends influence and shape future European policies on lifelong learning?
- Reflecting on the past two decades and the current landscape at national level, what have been the prevailing trends and priorities to support lifelong learning? How might these past trends influence and shape future national development on lifelong learning?

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<sup>(13)</sup> For example, STEEP (acronym for social, technological, economic, environmental and political) factors are used to identify developments in macro environments; in the context of the study they will be considered as including, but not determining, education and training policy choices aimed to promote lifelong/life-wide learning through transferability and transparency of learning outcomes.