

Round table discussion: Financing adult learning – Vision for the future

- **Introductory statement:** Based on all that we have heard during the last two days while looking at the EU policy ambition in the field of adult learning and the different regulatory and financing arrangements at European, national and regional level, but also at the various (legal and financial) constraints as well as to a certain extent restricted mandate of publicly-provided or publicly-financed adult learning,...
- **Question:** ...what role would you see for public intervention in financing adult learning now and in the future? What are the main gaps that still need to be addressed, which areas require improvement, and overall which topics call most urgently for further research?
- **Answer (Marcella Milana, University of Verona):**

Let me start by thanking CEDEFOP for the invitation to what I found a very interesting event, rich in information shared, and lively debates in and between sessions. Considering many inputs received from yesterday and this morning, let me now turn to your question.

- **Role of public intervention in financing adult learning now and in the future**

There is no doubt that public intervention is core for “moving Europe from ambition to action” and is so in many ways:

First, it is important to establish enabling and regulatory frameworks which function as 'policy levers' or mechanisms for change. The Council Recommendation on ILA is a 'policy lever', but we have also heard how, in different countries, frameworks have been established, revisited or even abandoned when they failed to promote change towards the desired direction.

But we have also learned that such regulatory frameworks to function as policy levers need to be negotiated among stakeholders comprising, at a minimum, the public powers, the public sector and the social partners. The Danish taximeter is an example in this respect. Yesterday, Diana Spiridon evoked the negotiation principle that “nothing is agreed until everything is agreed”. Mimicking this principle, for the future, we could foresee a new principle: “nothing is agreed until everybody has agreed”. Moreover, one could wonder if this concertation should not be extended to also include the organised civil society and the final beneficiaries: the European working-age citizens, who have been the elephant in this room. While we have been speaking of what would help and motivate them to engage in further learning, they were never given a voice. But I will return to this point.

Second, public intervention is also important in terms of direct or indirect financing that benefits the individuals, the employers or both. From ILAs to training leaves or training funds, from the studies that were presented and the examples shared, none would have been or will be possible without extensive investment from the public purse at the European, national or even regional level. But although important, public financing is not sufficient. For the future, public funding should be increased for the implementation of ILAs, but also for other supporting mechanisms like training leaves, just to recall this morning's presentation. Here is where I see the major challenges for the future. It has been clear in several presentations and discussions that the private sector (namely private employers), but also the individuals engaging in further training, should cover to a different extent part of the direct or indirect costs. In this respect, several issues have been raised, from the need to change the mindset of employers to the need to distinguish between individuals who might be able to contribute financially and those who certainly cannot. Thus, the relevance of the further training and skills acquired by the working-age European citizen should be made clear: who will benefit from this? How? And to what extent? This is a deeply political question that involves all three levels of society: the micro (individual citizens), the meso (organisations), and the macro (public power).

For instance, in workshop no. 4, while discussing training leaves yesterday, one aspect emerged from the discussion, funding mechanisms always dedicate attention to the eligibility criteria in terms of who can benefit from this scheme or that, for the most based on individual characteristics (the unskilled worker, the worker moving between jobs or roles, etc.). But one aspect has received less attention: the need for adaptation of a scheme or mechanism to what are different working places, conditions and needs. For example, if two unskilled employees need training but are in different jobs, one may not need to be replaced when trained during working hours, while the other may not be able to leave the workplace in the absence of a replacement. Hence, the need for several mechanisms to be in place to account for a variety of conditions to be matched is important.

In the case of ILAs, one more question that comes to mind is whether such an entitlement is to be spent only within national borders? What if what is needed matches a provision in another EU country?

Still, as time is limited, let me turn to the second part of your question:

- **Gaps, areas that require improvement and call for further research**

A few gaps were mentioned by Mantas and the rapporteurs of yesterday's workshops, like the limited knowledge on the financial arrangement for the training of employees in the public sector or the need for forecasting exercises to calculate the amount of financial investment needed to launch a new scheme or mechanism. To these, I would like to add a few more that also call for research attention:

We need to know more about the effective benefits for all those who have made use of existing schemes and mechanisms:

- Before I mentioned the European working-age citizens as the elephant in this room. Individual beneficiaries of, for example, the French Compte personnel de formation (CPF) or other ILA-type schemes or training leaves: have they got better job satisfaction, a salary increase, a new job, etc. or none of this?
- But we could also consider the employers that have had their employees engaged in further training, for instance, through a training leave: has their overall performance improved? (and with this comes the question whether employees are aware that better performance may not necessarily result from a higher-skilled employee, but could also be based on a happier and more committed one?) Or have employers lost their employees for better jobs (e.g. skilled worker poaching)?

Also: What are the barriers to using existing schemes by those who could be entitled to benefit from them?

In other words, what I am suggesting is to listen to the voice of those who used, and those who were potentially entitled to but did not use, available funding mechanisms to better understand existing barriers as well as their level of satisfaction and outcome (e.g. new job, better job satisfaction, salary increase, none?)

One more research need that surfaced in the conversation is to give more attention to so-called “negative cases”. Most of the studies concentrated attention on what financing instruments are in place to understand their characteristics in view of their possible replicability and/or improvement. But to better understand what works and what does not, negative cases – those schemes or mechanisms that were initiated and then abandoned – are equally important for evidence-based policy.

Finally, better data exploitation could also be considered for the future. Some mechanisms (like the French Compte personnel de formation (CPF)) collect data that might be further used for analysis. So, and with this, I conclude that besides new research, secondary data analysis may also help deepen knowledge of what is already in place and how the performance of the system could be further improved/enhanced, as well as provide useful insights on what further policy interventions could be developed.