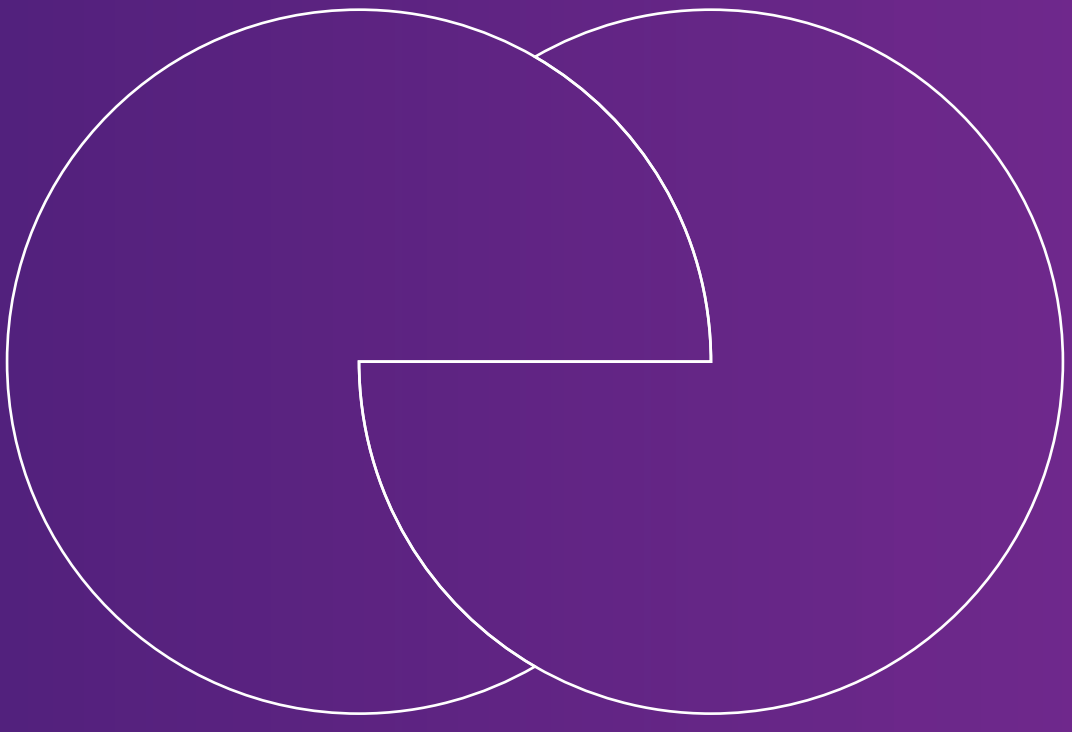
DIFE: Digital Integration for Equality

Transnational Report

IDENTIFYING BARRIERS IN ADULT EDUCATION
FOR ROMA AND MIGRANTS



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Rationale

This transnational report results from research conducted within the framework of the European-funded project DIFE - Digital Integration for Equality (project no. 2022-1-HR01-KA220-ADU-000088806).
The project is implemented by the following consortium members:

- Initiative – Centre for Education (Croatia)
- Welcome Home Brussels (Belgium)
- Ljudska univerza Lendava (Slovenia)
- Institute for Roma and Minorities Inclusion (Germany)

The aim of this project is to support the lifelong learning and education of migrants and members of the Romani community through the development of free digital learning platforms. These platforms will focus on key areas such as active citizenship, workforce integration, digital literacy, and healthcare, with particular attention to women's reproductive health. Additionally, the project includes research on the obstacles faced by these vulnerable groups in adult education.

This transnational report presents the results of national surveys and reports from the four participating countries, addressing:

- Barriers to education and training for Roma and migrants that hinder their integration.
- The adult education systems and the professional development pathways for adult trainers and educators.
- Perspectives from teachers, trainers, and educators on skill-building and mismatches in the adult education system.
- A summary of field research outlining the challenges and needs to enhance Roma and migrant participation in adult education.

The report is based on desk research, online questionnaires distributed to Roma and migrant citizens, adult educators, and professionals engaged in digital and social inclusion. It also incorporates insights from focus groups with Roma and migrant citizens and expert educators working in the field of digital and social inclusion across the participating countries.

1. A Perspective: An Overview of Barriers to Education and Training for Roma and Migrants That Hinder Their Integration

Belgium

The current situation

The current situation of refugees, migrants, and Roma in Belgium encompass various aspects such as employment, health, involvement in public life, as well as education and training opportunities. These conditions are influenced by a multitude of factors, including policy, social determinants of health, and access to basic services (European Commission, n.d.).

Health Challenges and Human Rights

The experience of migration is a key determinant of health and well-being, with refugees and migrants remaining among the most vulnerable members of society, often faced with xenophobia, discrimination, and inadequate access to health services (Belgium - European Commission, n.d.). The situation is compounded by the problems migrants face in realising their human rights and accessing health services, which underscores the critical importance of developing cultural/transnational competence in health professionals and institutions working with migrants and refugees (UNHCR, 2023)..

Roma and Refugees in Belgium

The situation of Roma refugees from Ukraine in Belgium presents a complex set of challenges. Their harsh travel conditions mean some Roma refugees have arrived in a state of exhaustion and in need of medical care (Council of Europe, 2018). Faced with antigypsyism and discriminatory behaviour in Belgium while in a state of trauma as refugees from war, Roma and refugees tend to gather in larger groups to increase their sense of security, hindering the voluntary activities of Belgian society towards them. The Roma refugees currently residing in Belgium are under the care of various assistance structures organised by the authorities, either central or local, or by Roma NGOs (Belgium - European Commission, n.d.).

Education Opportunities

Access to education is a critical aspect of the living conditions of refugees. UNHCR and its partners are committed to achieving the enrolment of 15% of young refugee women and men in higher education by the year 2030 through initiatives such as the DAFI program, scholarships, and Connected Learning (UNHCR, n.d.). Education enlightens refugees, enabling them to learn about themselves and the world around them while striving to rebuild their lives and communities. However, the access to education for refugee children is limited, with almost half of them unable to attend school at all (World Data Info, n.d.).

The living conditions of refugees, migrants, and Roma in Belgium are multifaceted and require comprehensive approaches to address the challenges they face in employment, health, public life involvement, and education and training opportunities.

Drop-out of Roma and Migrants learners

The drop-out rates of Roma and refugee learners in Belgium are influenced by various factors, including migration patterns, educational challenges, and social integration. The National Roma Integration Strategy (NRIS) progress report highlights the increased immigration flows from Central and Eastern Europe, leading to a higher number of Roma and refugees in Belgium (Belgium - UNHCR, 2023). Concrete policy developments related to the inclusion of Roma are relatively new, and there are no official statistics on the various ethnic groups living in Belgium due to strict interpretation of the EU Data Protection Directive (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2023).

Research has shown that early dropouts and low educational attainment are the result of complex issues, which are already observed in secondary school where the phenomenon of dropouts is prevalent (OECD, 2021). Member States could consider making education more relevant to the labour market, which can reduce dropout rates, as students learn that knowledge gained in school is converted into marketable skills (OECD, 2012). A study conducted among Roma mothers and fathers in Belgium aimed to better understand the Roma's relationship with schooling. The study found that Roma children face regular absenteeism at primary school and prematurely dropping out of school at the start of secondary school (Council of Europe, 2018). The study also highlighted the need for appropriate means and strategies to address these issues.

The European Commission estimates that there are approximately 30,000 Roma living in Belgium, constituting 0.29% of the population (Demographics of Belgium). The main objectives of Belgium's national strategy are to set up a Council for the Roma and Travellers and a Roma helpdesk in the federal ministry for social inclusion. The assessment of Belgium's strategy implementation includes key areas such as education, employment, healthcare, housing, and the fight against discrimination (Belgium - European Commission).

In conclusion, the drop-out rates of Roma and refugee learners in Belgium are influenced by a complex interplay of factors, including migration patterns, educational challenges, and social integration. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that considers the unique needs and circumstances of these communities.

Most frequent adult qualifications and courses acquired

Based on the search results, specific information on the most frequent adult qualifications and courses acquired by refugees and Roma in Belgium is not explicitly outlined. However, the sources provide valuable insights into the challenges faced by refugees and Roma in Belgium, including education, employment, housing, and health. The sources highlight the need for comprehensive approaches to address the challenges faced by migrants, refugees, and Roma in Belgium. The sources emphasise the importance of education for the inclusion of Roma and other marginalised groups in Belgium (European Commission [EC], 2023). The EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies identifies a clear goal for Roma education that each EU Member State should achieve and develop in its own national integration strategies (European Commission [EC], n.d.). The Framework recommends that EU Member States ensure that all Roma pupils complete at least compulsory education. The sources also highlight the low completion rates of secondary education among Roma adults in Belgium (Centre for Policy Studies - CEU CPS). While the sources provide valuable context on the situation of refugees and Roma in Belgium, specific information on the most frequent adult qualifications and courses acquired by refugees and Roma is not explicitly outlined.

Croatia

The current situation

As for the Roma in Croatia, the living conditions remain challenging, with many facing significant poverty and social exclusion. According to the National plan for the inclusion of Roma for the period from 2021 to 2027 of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, 92.3% of Roma in the Republic of Croatia are poor, while around 70% of families of the Roma national minority live in extreme poverty (Vlada Republike Hrvatske, Ured za ljudska prava i prava nacionalnih manjina, 2021). Most Roma households below the poverty risk threshold are located in Central Croatia (97.5%) and Slavonia (97.3%), followed by Međimurje (96.4%) and Northern Croatia (94.9%), and then Zagreb and surroundings (77.7%) and Istria and Primorje (76.8%) (Vlada Republike Hrvatske, Ured za ljudska prava i prava nacionalnih manjina, 2021). Overcrowded living conditions are common, exacerbating health and social issues (Lucić et al., 2020). Employment rates among the Roma community in Croatia are notably low. Discrimination and a lack of education and training opportunities are major barriers to employment. Many Roma are engaged in informal, low-paid jobs, with few enjoying stable and formal employment. Initiatives are in place to improve job prospects for Roma, but progress is slow, and many still face significant barriers to entering the formal job market (Potočnik et al., 2020). Health outcomes for Roma in Croatia are generally poor. Limited access to healthcare services, coupled with the poor living conditions, contributes to higher rates of illness and lower life expectancy. Many Roma communities face barriers to accessing health services, including discrimination and a lack of awareness about available healthcare options (Milas & Martinović Klarić, 2020). Roma participation in public life and decision-making processes remains limited. Discrimination and social exclusion often prevent Roma from engaging fully in civic activities (Rašić et al., 2020). Efforts are being made to increase Roma representation in local and national politics, but significant gaps remain. Education for Roma children is improving but still lags behind the general population. Many Roma children attend segregated schools or classes and face higher dropout rates (Rašić et al., 2020). There are initiatives to support Roma education, such as additional classes in the Roma language and programs aimed at reducing dropout rates. However, educational attainment remains a significant challenge, impacting their long-term employment prospects.

Regarding migrants in Croatia, many faces various challenges regarding their living conditions. Many reside in temporary accommodation centres which can be overcrowded and lack adequate facilities. This often results in substandard living conditions, impacting their quality of life. The government has been making efforts to improve housing conditions by providing housing units for up to two years for those under international protection who are lacking financial resources (Ministarstvo prostornog uređenja, graditeljstva i državne imovine. (2021, June 23). Employment opportunities for migrants in Croatia are gradually improving. Legal reforms have made it easier for migrants to enter the labour market. For example, migrants seeking international protection can start working three months after their application if they have no financial resources (Iljazović, 2023). However, many still face barriers such as language differences, recognition of qualifications, and discrimination. Seasonal work in agriculture, tourism, and forestry is common among migrants due to relaxed labour market tests for these sectors. Access to healthcare for migrants has been a significant concern. The Croatian healthcare system, while extensive, often presents barriers for migrants, such as language and cultural differences, and limited awareness of available services (Médecins du Monde, (2023). Efforts are being made to integrate migrant health needs into national health policies, improve service provision, and train healthcare providers on culturally sensitive service delivery. Migrants' involvement in public life is limited, primarily due to language barriers,

discrimination, and a lack of information about their rights and opportunities. Legal frameworks are in place to protect migrants' rights, but practical implementation often falls short. Efforts to involve migrants more in public life include initiatives to provide legal aid, information services, and support for civic participation. Education and training opportunities for migrants are improving but remain inconsistent. Migrant children have the right to primary and secondary education, and there are programs aimed at helping them integrate, such as language classes. However, access to higher education and vocational training is limited. Policies are being developed to better include migrant children and adults in the education system, but significant gaps remain.

Drop-out of Roma and Migrants learners

The dropout rates among the Roma population in Croatia are significantly higher compared to the general population and approximately two out of three Roma children do not complete their primary education. This high dropout rate starts early and continues to worsen as children progress through the education system. The situation does not improve in secondary education, where the dropout rates remain high. Only a small fraction of Roma students continues their education beyond the primary level. Less than one percent of Roma youth reach tertiary education. A significant proportion of Roma adults do not complete adult education programs. This is largely due to socio-economic factors, language barriers, and a lack of targeted support. Efforts are being made to address these issues, including targeted educational programs and initiatives to provide better support for Roma adults. However, much work remains to be done to ensure that Roma adults have equal opportunities to complete their education and improve their socio-economic status.

Croatia does not currently collect data on these indicators relating to migrants, highlighting a significant gap in understanding how migrants engage with lifelong learning opportunities (SIRIUS, 2024). The tertiary educational attainment rate for non-EU citizens is considerably lower than for Croatian nationals, reflecting difficulties in accessing and completing higher education for refugees (Hrvatski pravni centar, 2021).

Most frequent adult qualifications and courses acquired

The recognition of refugees' previously acquired qualifications is essential for their successful integration into the labour market and inclusion in the education system. In recent years, the significant influx of refugees and migrants to Europe, including Croatia, has spurred a growing number of initiatives aimed at recognizing these qualifications. For labour market integration efforts to be effective, the identification, recognition, and validation (notification) of refugees' qualifications and skills must be incorporated into a broader system supporting their labour market integration. However, applicants for international protection and persons under international protection in Croatia face numerous systemic obstacles in the recognition of qualifications acquired in their country of origin, such as lack of knowledge of the language, unsystematic organisation of approaches to language learning, practices of non-recognition or difficult recognition of qualifications, non-recognition of previous work experiences or involvement in the process of training those who did not have the opportunity to gain work experience before coming to Croatia, as well as long-term economic inactivity, limited social contacts and weak involvement in social networks (Šelo Šabić et al., 2023). People who arrive in Croatia from third countries, and who have not certified their diplomas, are employed in low-paid jobs for which it is usually not necessary to acquire any qualifications. However, the available data show that a certain number of international protection seekers and persons under international protection were involved in formal and informal forms of adult education in Croatia. Thus, within the framework of the project of the organisation Initiative -

Centre for Education and the partner institution, the Trade School in Zagreb, 43 people of migrant origin are included in professional training programs for simple occupations in the hospitality tourism sector, where there is a shortage of manpower (n.d.) Also, the Jesuit Service for Refugees (the project holder) and the Public Open University Zagreb (the project partner) implemented the joint project "TrAZILica - social inclusion and strengthening the competitiveness of asylum seekers on the labour market in the Republic of Croatia" in 2020. The project involved 131 unemployed persons with refugee status, including the long-term unemployed, for training in deficit occupations - waiters, cooks, hairdressers, computer operators, confectioners and painters (n.d). As for informal education programs for adult refugees, international protection seekers and persons under international protection are most often included in Croatian language learning programs and in programs to strengthen professional capacities and skills with the aim of easier integration into the labour market. To learn the Croatian language, in 2024, the city of Zagreb announced a competition for the allocation of funds to organisations that organise and conduct Croatian language courses for people of migrant origin, which is an example of good practice of the intervention of the local self-government unit in the education of adult members of this group. As for intervening at the state level, the Croatian Employment Service launched in 2023 a program of awarding vouchers for learning the Croatian language to foreign workers, but the condition is that they have been in Croatia for at least one year before submitting the application for awarding the voucher.

In paid jobs performed by Roma, simple occupations (e.g. cleaning jobs or work on the production line) are most often represented (34.2%), which is not surprising considering the low average level of education and the extremely low representation of people with secondary or higher education (Rašić et al., 2020). They are followed by jobs in agriculture and related occupations, service and trade occupations, and work with machines and plants (e.g. assembly of electronic equipment, drivers, forklift operators). These occupations make up 54.2% of Roma work activities. All other professions are represented by less than 1% of the research participants. According to data from 2020, a total of 56.0% of members of the Roma minority did not complete compulsory education, i.e. 62.5% of Romani women and 49.6% of Romani men did not. A total of 15.1% of Roma, i.e. 11.4% of Roma women and 18.7% of Roma, completed secondary school. Only about 0.4% of respondents from the sample had completed a three-year college or some form of academic education (Potočnik et al., 2020).

Slovenia

The current situation

Living Conditions

In Slovenia, Roma mostly live in so-called Roma settlements, which often resemble "ghettos." Roma communities still experience inadequate living conditions, especially in some settlements in the south-eastern part of the country, where access to basic rights and infrastructure is lacking (Kovič Dine et al., 2021).

In most cases, the living conditions of migrants in Slovenia are less favourable than those of native residents. Migrants are more likely to be renters and less likely to be homeowners. They often live in overcrowded dwellings with a smaller area per inhabitant and lower quality housing compared to the native population (Bešter et al., n.d.).

Employment

The Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia cannot accurately monitor the share of Roma in employment due to legislative restrictions on collecting data on their national or ethnic origin. The National Employment Office can only keep records of unemployed Roma who self-identify as such. Despite some improvements, the integration of the Roma population into the labour market remains problematic due to their low level of education and limited participation in training and employment processes (Vlada Republike Slovenije, 2022; Bešter & Pirc, 2022).

Statistics show that the majority of foreigners come to Slovenia for employment and family reunification. More than 68% of temporary residence permits issued from 2018 to April 2023 were for employment. Although the unemployment rate among migrants is decreasing, it remains higher than that of the native-born population, especially among those from non-EU countries (Gov.si, 2023).

Education

The educational structure of the Roma in Slovenia is extremely deficient. A significant proportion do not have primary education, and even fewer have completed secondary or higher education. This lack of education poses a barrier to employment and increases vulnerability to poverty. In the 2018/19 school year, estimates indicated between 166 and 172 Roma pupils in secondary schools, with only 14 attending university (Bešter et al., 2022).

Slovenia has a much lower proportion of highly educated migrants compared to other countries. A 2016 survey showed that students with an immigrant background were more likely to enrol in vocational courses rather than regular university programs. The share of foreign-born young people aged 15-29 who were neither in employment nor education has been higher than that of native-born young people, although this gap has been decreasing (Eurydice, 2022).

Health

The health situation of the Roma is adversely affected by factors such as unemployment, poverty, and social exclusion. A government report indicates that Roma often underutilizes health services and face conflicts in healthcare settings. Progress in addressing these health disparities has been insufficient (Nacionalni inštitut za javno zdravje, 2022).

The Resolution on the National Health Care Plan 2016-2025 identifies migrants as a vulnerable population group in the health sector. A survey revealed barriers to accessing health services, with some migrants lacking health insurance, which contributes to poorer health perceptions compared to native-born individuals (Gov.si, 2023).

Social Integration

The Roma community in Slovenia is diverse, with significant differences in socio-economic status. Conditions can vary greatly between families and settlements, leading to misconceptions that some regions are uniformly better off than others (Vlada Republike Slovenije, 2023).

A survey of descendants of migrants found that some faced discrimination in employment opportunities due to their background. While most do not feel discriminated against, those who do report negative experiences primarily in schools and workplaces (Gov.si, n.d.).

Drop-out of Roma and Migrants learners

Data analysis from 27 primary schools shows a significant decline in Roma pupils from 1st to 9th grade. Schools do not keep official statistics on Roma pupils due to legislation, and factors contributing to their lower educational status include family illiteracy and poor living conditions (Bešter et al., 2022).

Among young people aged 18-24 born abroad, early school leaver rates were significantly higher from 2009 to 2020 compared to those born in Slovenia. However, this gap has narrowed in recent years, indicating gradual improvement (Eurydice, 2023.).

Most frequent adult qualifications and courses acquired

There is no precise data on the most common courses attended by migrants and Roma. However, publicly funded programs targeting these groups include Slovenia for Foreigners and Initial Integration of Immigrants. Roma in Slovenia participate in various programs, with adult primary school being the most common (Gov.si, n.d.).

Germany

The current situation

The general housing situation in Germany is very difficult. Estimations are that Germany in 2023 was lacking more than 700,000 apartments (ZDF, 2023). According to the Heinrich Boeckler Foundation, the lack of low-cost flats is even higher (Infomigrants, 2022.). In addition, migrants including Roma face discrimination on the regular job market or scepticism when the rent is paid by the Social Welfare Office.

No accurate statistics or studies on the housing situation of migrants and Roma are available. Some detailed figures are available for the Federal State of Bavaria: In 2022, 20.2% of persons living in collective accommodation centres in March 2022 were considered to be 'false occupants' (*Fehlbeleger*), which is the bureaucratic term for persons who are allowed to leave the centres, but have not found an apartment yet. Many local organisations and initiatives try to support refugees in finding apartments. One initiative operating for the whole of Germany, 'Living Together Welcome' (*Zusammenleben willkommen, formerly 'Refugees Welcome/Flüchtlinge willkommen'*) runs an online platform providing assistance for people who want to share a flat with migrants. If these groups cannot provide for the Sinti and Roma face discrimination at the labour market. This phenomenon has stronger features when they are disadvantaged. Low levels of German proficiency, accent, foreign name, and religion are currently factors in the discrimination of migrants in the labour markets, which also affects Romani migrants. Often, employers do not employ them, when they notice that they are Roma. Interview partners have stated that German Sinti and Roma also face discrimination in the labour markets when offering their services as self-employed people.

Drop-out of Roma and Migrants learners

In the years 2010 to 2018, the drop-out rate of training contracts nationwide has risen from 23% in 2010 to 26.5% in 2018. The drop-out rate for German trainees rose from 27.6% in 2010 to 29.5% in 2018. The drop-out rate for foreign trainees rose from 35.6% in 2010 to 48.2% in 2018. In the University the basic comparison between drop-outs and graduates shows that the proportion of migrants dropping out of higher education is higher than among graduates (22% versus 17%). Depending on the situation, there are clear differences between dropouts and graduates. While 37% of migrant leavers are in the second generation, the corresponding proportion among graduates

is 27%. On the other hand, graduates are significantly more likely to immigrate themselves and thus come from the first generation (38% vs. 30%). Heinrich Böll Foundation. (2020).

Youth at risk develop skills more slowly and thus tend to need more instruction time, which may create higher costs for employers OECD (2018). The risk of taking a migrant apprentice is higher than a native apprentice, as migrant students are more likely to drop out. These students may struggle with lack of language and other skills, adjusting to both school and workplace environments that are still new to them, and dealing with a variety of other socio-cultural issues. Several reasons may explain this higher dropout rates among migrants such as:

- Low completion rates among migrants are largely due to lack of academic proficiency or relevant skills;
- Difficulty in securing training placements. The majority of young people who enrol on such programmes do not have a training contract beforehand and they face the difficulty in securing a training place during the school-based part of their programmes.
- Discrepancy between workplace and school is exacerbated among newly arrived migrants.
- Longer length of residence may not necessarily reduce the chance of dropping out, without appropriate interventions.

There are also other challenges to overcome: health, housing, security, mobility and family care.

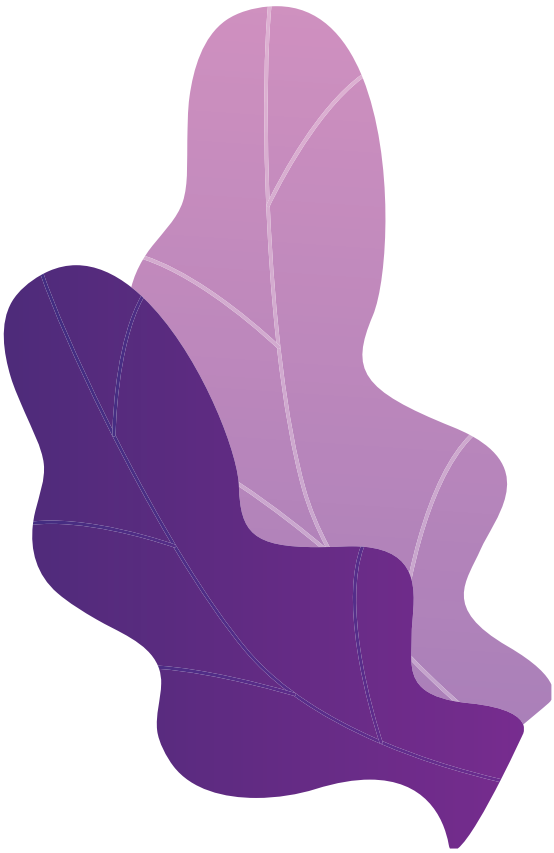
Most frequent adult qualifications and courses acquired

According to the Federal Employment Agency, one in ten employees in Germany in 2017 was a foreigner: 3.6 million of the 32.7 million jobs were carried out by people who have a different citizenship.

There are differences between people with and without a migrant background in that migrants are more likely to be workers (40.8% compared to 23.1% of non-migration workers); to a lesser extent as employees or civil servants (47.5% instead of 58.8% and 1.3% instead of 6.3%).

Most common occupations (mentioned in the recognition process in 2012-2018):

- Iraq: doctor, nurse, dentist, pharmacist, office clerk
- Syria: (dental) doctor, pharmacist, office clerk
- Afghanistan: doctor, draftsman, office clerk



2. A Country Perspective: Adult Education Systems and Professional Development for Trainers and Educators

Belgium

Characteristics of the Adult system

The adult education system in Belgium is characterised by a diverse range of programs and opportunities, with specific features varying between the different regions of Belgium. Here are some key characteristics of the adult education system in Belgium, including Flanders, Wallonia, and the German-speaking Community.

Educational Competence and Structure: The educational competence in Belgium is primarily the responsibility of the Communities, with the exception of three competences that remain a federal matter. The Ministry of Education and Training in Flanders is responsible for all stages of education and training, starting from pre-primary education (Eurydice, n.d.) The French Community of Belgium has specific competences related to cultural affairs, language use, education, childhood, youth, and research (Eurydice, n.d.). In the German-speaking Community of Belgium, only non-university higher education is available. Adult education programs are organised as a coherent modular system of course units that students can capitalize on. These programs lead to an Associate Degree at qualification level 5 and last for six semesters (Scholaro, n.d.).

Programs and Subjects: Adult education in Belgium covers a wide range of programs, including adult basic education, secondary adult education, and higher vocational education. The programs offered by the Adult Education Centres and the Adult Basic Education Centres provide various adult education programs (Eurydice, n.d.). Additionally, adult training in Flanders encompasses all forms of non-formal and informal learning by adults, including those organized by the Flemish Employment Services and Vocational Training Agency, the Flemish Agency for Entrepreneurial Training, and other institutions (EAEA Country Reports, 2023).

Qualifications and Access: Adult learners of at least 18 years old and those who have completed compulsory education may enrol in adult education. The qualifications obtained through adult education are recognized within the Belgian qualification framework (Eurydice, n.d.).. Access to higher vocational education in Flanders is open to individuals with various qualifications, including certificates of the 2nd grade of the 3rd stage of secondary education, diplomas of secondary education, and certificates of a program of secondary adult education of at least 900 teaching periods (Eurydice, n.d.).

Continuing professional development system of adult trainers, educators

Belgium has a continuing professional development (CPD) system for teachers and trainers working in adult education and training.

Continuing Professional Development: In the French Community of Belgium, each network provides continuing training in various training fields for teachers and trainers working in adult education and training. The training course catalogues are available on the website of the Ministry of Education and Training (Eurydice, n.d.).

Teacher Professional Continuum: In Flanders, the teacher professional continuum starts with teacher training and induction and further entails continuous professional learning. The basic principles of the teacher professional continuum are set out in the Decree on the Qualification Requirements for Teachers and School Leaders. The Flemish government provides support to adult education centres that want to start a program with a substantial share of distance learning (Eurydice, n.d.).

Adult Education and Training: Adult education and training in Belgium comprises all programs of adult basic education, secondary adult education, and (adult) higher vocational education. In Flanders, the Adult Education Centres and the Adult Basic Education Centres provide adult education programs. Adult training is a broader concept than adult education and provides all forms of non-formal and informal learning by adults. It comprises the programs offered by the sector of adult education as well as those organised by the Flemish Employment Services and Vocational Training Agency, the Flemish Agency for Entrepreneurial Training, the employment sectors, socio-cultural organisations, private institutions, etc. (EAEA Country Reports, 2023).

Croatia

Characteristics of the Adult system

The education system in Croatia comprises multiple levels, including early and preschool education, primary education, secondary education, higher education, and adult education (both formal and informal). The Ministry of Science and Education (MSE) oversees educational activities, while the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education (AVETAE) is responsible for planning, developing, organizing, and monitoring vocational and adult education.

Key Developments in Adult Education

Significant milestones in the development of Croatia's adult education system include:

Adult Education Strategy (2004): Adopted by the government to provide a framework for adult education.

Establishment of the Adult Education Agency (2006): Created by government decree to enhance vocational education and adult education.

Adult Education Act (2007): This act lays the foundation for adult education principles, emphasizing lifelong learning, equal access, respect for diversity, and quality assurance.

The act defines two primary goals for adult education:

Transversal Competencies: Fostering skills such as initiative, entrepreneurship, cultural expression, social inclusion, and media literacy.

Employability Skills: Equipping individuals with knowledge and skills that enhance their adaptability and mobility in the labor market.

The Act stipulates that adult education is based on the following principles:

- lifelong learning; rational use of educational opportunities, territorial proximity and universal access to education under equal conditions and following the abilities;
- freedom and autonomy in choosing the manner of content, form, means and methods; respect for diversity and inclusion;
- professional and ethical responsibilities of andragogic workers;
- guarantees of the quality of the educational offer and respect for the personality and dignity of each participant.

The two main goals of adult education are:

1. Acquiring individual transversal competencies – initiative and entrepreneurship, learning how to learn, cultural expression, social inclusion (volunteer, environmental, political, and similar activism), adopting and applying democratic values and attitudes, parenting skills, creative and artistic appreciation and expression, developing basic economic, financial, and media literacy, etc.
2. Acquiring knowledge and skills that specifically enable employability, greater adaptability, i.e., mobility in the labour market.

Continuing professional development system of adult trainers, educators

The Continuing Professional Development (CPD) system in Croatia for adult trainers and educators is structured to ensure that educators continuously enhance their skills and knowledge to meet the evolving demands of adult education (Agency for Education, AZOO). This system is vital for maintaining high educational standards and ensuring that trainers are well-equipped to provide quality education. The CPD system for adult educators in Croatia is governed by the Adult Education Act and aligned with the Croatian Qualifications Framework (CROQF). These regulations ensure that adult education is consistent with national educational standards and European guidelines. Adult educators can participate in formal education programs offered by universities and higher education institutions. These programs include postgraduate studies and specialised courses designed to enhance pedagogical skills and subject-specific knowledge.

Numerous workshops and seminars are organised by educational institutions, professional associations, and NGOs. These events cover various topics, including innovative teaching methods, digital competencies, and inclusive education practices. The Croatian government and European Union provide funding and grants to support the CPD of adult educators. Programs such as Erasmus+ offer opportunities for educators to participate in international training and exchange programs, enhancing their professional skills and expanding their educational networks.

Characteristics of the Adult System

Adult education in Slovenia encompasses the learning and training endeavours of individuals who have completed their legally mandated compulsory education and are seeking to acquire, update, expand, or deepen their knowledge. These individuals are not enrolled as regular students in basic or upper secondary schools. The adult education landscape in Slovenia is diverse, offering a wide array of programs and training options (Eurydice, 2022).

The regulatory framework for adult education is primarily governed by the Adult Education Act (ZIO-1, 2018), although certain specialised programs for adults may be subject to sector-specific legislation. Public organisations providing adult training can be established as either public institutions or organisational units within educational institutions, other entities, or legal bodies. These organisations may be founded by local communities or the state. At the national level, the primary responsibility for adult education and training lies with the Ministry of Education, Science, and Sport and its Directorate for Upper Secondary, Higher Vocational, and Adult Education. Other ministries responsible for specific aspects of adult education and training include the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Food. Decision-making in this area by the ministry is supported by the expertise of the Council of the Republic of Slovenia for Adult Education, which is one of the expert councils appointed by the government.

Providers of adult education include adult education institutions, schools or their divisions, as well as other public or private entities listed in the relevant registry. Additionally, company training centres and private individuals authorised as private instructors also contribute to the provision of adult education services.

The adult education network encompasses specialised institutions dedicated to adult education, alongside various organisations that offer adult education as an additional service. Participation in publicly funded programs, which are officially recognized and geared towards obtaining formal qualifications, is contingent upon public calls for applications issued regularly by the relevant providers. The Adult Education Master Plan and annual plan dictate which adult education programs are deemed to be in the public interest. Funding for such programs adheres to the “rule of thirds”: participants’ fees cover one-third of the total cost, municipal public budgets cover another third, and the national budget contributes the remaining third (Urad Vlade Republike Slovenije za narodnosti, 2021). Certain programs, such as basic school education and specific targeted initiatives, are fully publicly funded, and providers are prohibited from charging participation fees for such programs.

Adult education units within primary schools, high schools, and higher education institutions provide programs designed to achieve formal education milestones, including obtaining vocational qualifications or completing the “matura” exam (school-leaving exam required for the completion of secondary education and for university entrance) (Vlada Republike Slovenije, 2022).

Slovenia has 27 publicly subsidised adult education centres, which have a long tradition since independence. They offer a wide range of programs, from basic skills and formal education at primary and secondary levels to foreign language courses and non-formal education. In the 2021/2022 school year, the published catalogue contains information on 244 providers and 3,437 educational programs. These providers include secondary schools (adult education units), private institutions, schools, and adult education centres (Eurydice, 2023).

The Adult Education Act lists adult education programs as:

- Elementary School for Adults
- Publicly recognized programs for adults that do not lead to a valid educational qualification (non-formal education): the range of non-formal education programs for adults is wide and varied (e.g., Read and Write Together – Training for Success in Life; Bridge to Education – Training for Success in Life; Computer Literacy for Adults; Initial Integration of Immigrants)
- Non-formal adult education programs aimed at both the general public and specific target groups of adults (e.g., Project Learning for Younger Adults; foreign language courses) (Javrh, 2018).

Professional staff in public adult education programs include teachers, adult education organisers, and other professional staff. Professionals in public adult education programs must meet the following conditions:

- Have a command of the Slovene language
- Have a degree obtained in a second-level study program or equivalent to a second-level degree
- Have a pedagogical-andragogical qualification
- Have passed a professional examination in the field of education (Gov.si, n.d.).

Continuing professional development system of adult trainers, educators

Continuing professional development for adult educators, as well as for those who are already involved in adult education or encounter it in their work in other fields, is run by the Andragogical Centre of Slovenia (ACS). The ACS provides three basic types of training: general basic training and advanced training for work in andragogy, basic specialist training for specific roles in adult education, and advanced training and professional identity building through andragogical advanced training (Mikulec & S. Perčič, 2019).

Professionals can obtain pedagogical-andragogical training at five public faculties in Slovenia for professionals working in primary and secondary schools and for lecturers at higher vocational schools. This enables professionals who have graduated from other faculties to obtain a teaching licence (Eurydice, 2022).

A study conducted by the ACS in 2008 showed that almost 70% of the respondents are upgrading their andragogical knowledge in the organisation where they work as adult educators. Around 40% of them receive further training from the ACS, while 36% attend national professional consultations. In addition, about one-fifth receive further training in international projects, and a smaller proportion in study visits abroad, at the Faculty of Arts or other faculties. Just under a tenth of the respondents do not improve their knowledge (Javrh, 2020).

In addition to formal initial and continuing education systems, participation in Erasmus+ mobility projects or strategic partnership projects can also contribute to the professional development of adult educators. A survey among adult educators shows that they consider that participation in the EU program has a positive impact on the use of new learning materials and methods, familiarity with innovative teaching approaches, the use of different teaching techniques, foreign language education, understanding of adult education systems in other countries, as well as motivation to make changes in their teaching. The results of the survey underline that the EU program makes an important contribution to the development of didactic knowledge, the use of foreign languages and international action, and strengthens the organisational and managerial skills of adult educators (Andragoški centre Slovenije, 2016).

Characteristics of the Adult system

The approximately 900 adult education centres in Germany offer around 700,000 events a year, mainly courses, but also lectures, study trips and excursions. With around nine million participants, adult education centres are by far the largest provider of general adult education in Germany (Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband, 2022).

Number of Adult Education Centres in Germany

Characteristics of adult education centres

Adult education centres are supported by local self-government and democratically legitimised. In addition to this public educational mandate, they also support their local municipalities by providing cross-institutional advice on continuing education and by implementing labour market and social policy measures (Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband, 2022).

Around 900 adult education centres with almost 3,000 branch offices form a nationwide unique network of local continuing education and cultural institutions. In rural regions, the adult education centres are often the only training providers available (Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband, 2022).

- Adult education centres and legal entities 2017 (as a percentage)
- Municipality
- District
- Special-purpose vehicle
- GmbH or other private institution
- Volkshochschule in the city-state
- Registered association

Lifelong learning for all

The adult education centres organise and support the process of lifelong learning with their offers. They stand for the right to education, for equal opportunities and a comprehensive understanding of education.

Adult education centres are open to all people regardless of age, gender or origin, social status or educational level, religion or worldview. They are open to people with and without disabilities. They invite people with different and conflicting views to engage in dialogue.

Learning locations in the city district and barrier-free spaces make the offerings of adult education centres easily accessible for their target groups. The adult education centres also fulfil their public mandate by setting social prices. They work economically, but not profit-based. The attendance figures impressively prove the success of this concept (Federal Ministry of Education and Research, 2020).

Financing structure of adult education centres

Adult education centres must earn more than one third of their financial resources from enrolment fees (and this is on the rise). With stagnating or even falling public subsidies, economic pressure is growing on adult education centres, which are increasingly having to gear their programme design and address of participants according to economic aspects.

1. Public subsidies
2. Enrolment fees
3. Other revenue

Programme areas

The public mission of adult education centres is to provide all citizens with a wide range of educational opportunities. It is geared to the individual interests and needs of the participants and to the needs of society. The programme is correspondingly multi-faceted.

The diversity of content is reflected in seven key programme areas:

1. Languages and German as a second language
2. Health courses
3. Culture and creativity
4. Politics, society and the environment
5. Work and career
6. Basic education
7. School-leaving qualifications

Continuing professional development system of adult trainers, educators

The professional further training of tutors in the field of continuing education takes place within the scope of the responsibility of the Länder for continuing education. The relevant statutory provisions include laws and regulations for teacher training, *Studienordnungen* (study regulations) for teacher training courses, *Prüfungsordnungen* (examination regulations) for the *Erste Staatsprüfung* (First State Examination) or for Bachelor's and Master's examinations, *Ausbildungsordnungen* (training regulations) for the *Vorbereitungsdienst* (preparatory service) and examination regulations for the Second State Examination. In addition, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung - BMBF) promotes various projects for the improvement of academic and pedagogical competence of staff in the field of continuing education.

Qualification requirements are diverse

The landscape of adult education (AE) in Germany presents a diverse and evolving framework for qualification and professional development. Below are the key elements of this system:

Diverse Qualification Requirements

Regulatory Landscape: Access to the field of adult education is not uniformly regulated by law, resulting in varied qualification requirements defined by individual employers.

A significant portion of adult education trainers are highly qualified, yet their qualifications may not necessarily align with pedagogical expertise.

Trainer Qualifications:

40% of adult education trainers hold a formal pedagogical qualification.

35% have no pedagogical qualifications.

20% have received some form of continuing training in pedagogy.

Academic Pathways

University Education: Germany has a rich tradition of university studies in adult education. Programs are designed to prepare individuals for full-time positions in AE, focusing on management and leadership roles.

Since the 1970s, there have been four-year degree programs specifically aimed at qualifying individuals as adult educators.

Currently, there are **9 Bachelor's programs** and several Master's programs that emphasize adult education.

Importance of Continuing Professional Development

Career Changers: Many educators enter the field as career changers, often lacking specific backgrounds in adult pedagogy.

Targeted Training: Community centers (Volkshochschulen, or VHS) have developed standardized training modules to address pedagogical gaps among staff.

Employer-Sponsored Training: Approximately 21% of adult education teachers have participated in training organized by their employers.

Challenges in the Continuing Education Market

Lack of Quality Standards: The growing market for continuing training lacks uniform quality standards, leading to confusion and making it difficult for educators to assess training options.

Transparency Issues: There is no comprehensive overview of available training programs, complicating the decision-making process for educators.

Emerging Solutions: Initiatives like QUALIDAT aim to enhance transparency by providing a database of training opportunities for adult education staff.

Varied Job Titles

The field encompasses a wide range of job titles, including lecturer, teacher, trainer, coach, counselor, moderator, facilitator, and others, reflecting the diversity of roles within adult education.

Conclusion

The qualification landscape for adult educators in Germany is characterized by its diversity and complexity. While the country offers strong academic pathways and a tradition of adult education, the variability in qualifications and the lack of standardized training present challenges. Fostering clearer career pathways, enhancing the quality of training programs, and improving transparency in the market for continuing professional development are essential steps toward advancing the effectiveness and professionalism of adult education in Germany.

3. Insights from Teachers, Trainers, and Educators on Skill-Building and System Mismatches in Adult Education

Belgium

Gaps and mismatches of the adult institutions and the sector

The search results provide insights into the education system in the German-speaking Community of Belgium, the Flemish Community, and the French Community. Here are some key points related to the gaps and mismatches in the adult education sector in Belgium:

Non-University Higher Education and Unemployed Adults: In the German-speaking Community of Belgium, non-university higher education is available, and unemployed individuals sometimes attend courses in institutions for adult education. This highlights the need for targeted educational programs to address the needs of unemployed adults (Eurydice, n.d.).

Adult Education and Training in Flanders: Adult education and training in Flanders is unrelated to the initial educational career. The programs offered by the Adult Education Centres and the Adult Basic Education Centres provide a wide range of adult education programs. However, there may be gaps in addressing the specific needs of adult learners, especially in terms of relevance to their career and employment opportunities (EAEA, 2023).

Compulsory Education and Adult Learning: Belgium has compulsory education from 5 until 18, but the duty to attend school does not necessarily apply, as parents may choose home schooling for their children. This highlights the need to ensure that adults who may have missed out on formal education have access to relevant adult learning opportunities to enhance their skills and qualifications Eurydice, n.d.).

Continuing Vocational Training and Inequalities: Although continuing vocational training in Belgium is increasing, participation by adults remains below the European mean, and major inequalities exist in terms of access. This suggests a gap in ensuring equitable access to continuing vocational training for adults, particularly those from diverse backgrounds and with varying levels of qualifications (European Commission, 2022).

This provides insights into the gaps and mismatches in the adult education sector in Belgium, including the need to address the specific needs of unemployed adults, ensure relevance and accessibility of adult education and training, and address inequalities in access to vocational training for adults.

Skill gaps and mismatches of adult trainers and the sector

The search results shed light on the prevailing skills gaps and mismatches within Belgium's adult education sector. Despite a growing trend in continuing training, participation rates among adults in Belgium still lag behind the European average, revealing disparities in access (EAEA, 2023). An examination of skills inequalities in the country underscores the urgency of addressing these gaps, particularly among adults with varying education levels. The European Union emphasises the pivotal role of vocational education and training (VET) in bridging skills deficiencies, offering support to individuals of all ages and stages of learning

while fostering business prosperity (European Commission, 2022). In Flanders, adult education and training are distinct entities, with the former providing recognized qualifications and the latter embracing diverse forms of non-formal and informal adult learning (Eurydice, n.d.). These insights illuminate the multifaceted landscape of skills development challenges in Belgium's adult education domain.

Continuing Training Participation: Although continuing training in Belgium is increasing, participation by adults remains below the European mean, and major inequalities exist in terms of access. This suggests a gap in ensuring equitable access to continuing vocational training for adults, particularly those from diverse backgrounds and with varying levels of qualifications (Statbel, n.d.).

Skills Inequalities: A report on skills inequalities in 21 countries, including Belgium, highlights the presence of skills gaps among adults with different levels of education. This underscores the need to address skills inequalities and gaps to ensure a more inclusive and skilled workforce (European Commission, 2022).

Addressing Skills Gaps: The European Union's focus on addressing skills gaps and mismatches emphasizes the importance of delivering skills and competences that facilitate labour market participation. The role of vocational education and training (VET) is highlighted as a means to support people of any age and at different stages of learning, work, and life, and to help businesses thrive (European Commission, 2022).

Adult Education and Training in Flanders: Adult education and training in Flanders is unrelated to the initial school career and allows course participants to obtain recognized qualifications or certificates. The distinction between adult education and adult training highlights the broader concept of adult training, encompassing all forms of non-formal and informal learning by adults (Eurydice, n.d.).

These sources suggest that there are skills gaps and mismatches in the adult education sector in Belgium, particularly in terms of participation in continuing vocational training, addressing skills inequalities, and the role of vocational education and training in supporting a skilled workforce.

Croatia

Adult education in Croatia plays a crucial role in integrating marginalised groups such as migrants and the Roma community. However, the sector faces significant challenges due to gaps and mismatches in the programs offered by adult education institutions and the skills of the trainers.

Gaps and mismatches of the adult institutions and the sector

Despite efforts to improve adult education, many Croatian institutions do not offer programs specifically tailored to the needs of migrants and the Roma community. This lack of specialisation leads to a shortage of relevant skills and knowledge that these groups need to improve their integration and employment prospects. Furthermore, while

there are programs financed by European funds and implemented by various NGOs, the involvement of formal adult education institutions in these initiatives remains limited. This discrepancy suggests that the broader adult education sector is not fully aligned with the needs of marginalised communities, leading to inefficiencies in program delivery and outcomes.

Still, there are some lifelong education programs for Roma adults - for example, at the People's Open University Čakovec, which also implements projects financed from European funds. As for the lifelong education of migrants in Croatia, their formal and informal education is not monitored in Croatia and there is no information about them.

Skill gaps and mismatches of adult trainers and the sector

Adult educators in Croatia often lack the cultural competencies and understanding necessary to effectively engage with Roma and migrant learners. This gap in trainers' skills makes it challenging to create inclusive learning environments where these groups feel understood and supported. Furthermore, training programs for educators do not sufficiently cover cultural sensitivities or the specific educational needs of these marginalised groups, which is critical for effective teaching.

Language barriers also contribute to the skill mismatch, as many trainers do not speak the native languages of the Roma or migrant communities, limiting their ability to communicate effectively with learners who may have limited proficiency in Croatian. This issue highlights a significant gap in the professional development of adult educators, where language training and cultural competence should be prioritised.

To address these challenges, there is a need for more targeted professional development for adult trainers, as well as the inclusion of specialised programs within adult education institutions that are designed to meet the specific needs of marginalised groups.

Slovenia

Gaps and mismatches of the adult institutions and the sector

The results of the research provide insight into the education system in Slovenia, focusing on the challenges and gaps in the adult education sector. Here are the key points related to gaps and mismatches in adult education in Slovenia:

Declining participation in adult education: The available evidence suggests that the logic that adults with skills deficits would choose to continue their education does not apply to all adults. In Slovenia, participation in adult education has declined compared to 1998. This is particularly worrying in view of the growing share of the older population, which is also the least active in education between the ages of 50 and 65. The data show a decline in skills in this age group compared to younger people in Slovenia and to the same age group in other European countries (Eurydice, 2022).

Socio-economic and educational disparities: Formal education attainment has a greater impact on participation in education in Slovenia compared to other European countries. The significant impact of parental education on participation in education in Slovenia, especially maternal education, is also highlighted. These findings suggest that family support for literacy development plays a key role in Slovenia, but the education system fails to effectively reduce social disparities, as systems in most European

countries do. Socio-economic differences from childhood onwards significantly determine the level of development of basic skills, which further exacerbates the situation of vulnerable groups, who are often more markedly marginalised in Slovenia than in some other countries (Andragoški center Slovenije, 2016).

Inadequate language course content: In the context of teaching Slovene to foreigners, there are questions about the content of the courses, which, according to the available data, may not correspond to the actual communicative needs of the course participants. One of the main reasons why immigrants do not attend courses, despite the need to improve their language skills, is the lack of time, which is usually filled with work, and the fact that they use little Slovene in their daily lives, especially men. Often, less educated foreign speakers may not see the point in learning a language if they cannot use it directly in real life. In teaching Slovene, the form of the language is often prioritised over its function, even though teaching is already moving in the opposite direction (Mikulec & Stanovnik Perčič, 2019).

Social stratification in adult education: There is a high degree of social stratification in adult education participation. The least educationally active groups in society are those who are already disadvantaged, especially older adults, the less educated, and those with lower employment status. The age factor stands out in particular, as being over 50 is a predictor of low participation in education. The analysis shows that employees, including the self-employed, are significantly more likely to participate in educational activities compared to other categories, such as the unemployed, retired, and housewives (Eurydice, 2023).

Infrastructure for non-work-related learning: There is also a need to reconsider how or whether it would be appropriate to pay more attention to the development of infrastructure for adult learning not directly related to work, as it has been found that learning not directly related to work is more linked to skills development than learning that is geared towards the needs of work (Urad Vlade Republike Slovenije za narodnosti, 2021).

Skill gaps and mismatches of adult trainers and the sector

Analysis of the adult education sector in Slovenia shows considerable skills gaps and mismatches between adult educators and the wider sector. While efforts are being made to improve adult learning, several challenges remain. Here are some of those:

Misalignment of language teaching methods: Language trainers may rely on traditional approaches that emphasise grammatical form rather than practical language use. This misalignment with the actual communicative needs of learners suggests a gap in trainers' ability to provide functional and applicable language education that addresses real-life situations effectively (Javrh, 2020).

Insufficient focus on vulnerable groups: Adult trainers and educational programs often do not adequately address the needs of vulnerable groups, including older adults and less educated individuals. There is a lack of tailored training programs that account for the specific challenges faced by these groups, leading to lower participation and less effective skill development (Andragoški center Slovenije, 2016).

Lack of emphasis on digital skills for vulnerable groups: The sector has been slow to address the digital skills gap among vulnerable populations. There is insufficient focus on developing digital literacy programs that cater to the needs of traditionally excluded groups. Trainers and programs need to develop more effective measures to include digitally illiterate individuals and support their integration into the digital world (Mikulec & Stanovnik Perčič, 2019).

Need for Improved Research and Data Collection: The scarcity of data on specific groups limits the ability to understand and address the reasons for exclusion from educational and digital resources. There is a need for more research to explore these reasons and develop targeted training programs that better meet the needs of vulnerable and socially excluded groups (Eurydice, 2023).

Infrastructure development for broad skills development: The focus on work-related education may overshadow the importance of developing broader skills through non-formal education. Trainers and educational institutions should prioritise creating and supporting infrastructure that facilitates skills development beyond immediate job requirements, fostering a more comprehensive approach to adult learning (Urad Vlade Republike Slovenije za narodnosti, 2021).

Germany

Gaps and mismatches of the adult institutions and the sector

Adult education is a large educational sector in Germany, but it faces staff shortages, an ageing workforce, low incomes and low job security. In-company continuing education remains the largest segment of adult education in Germany. Adult educators are on average highly qualified with about three quarters holding an academic degree and a high proportion of women educators 63%. About one quarter of the staff in adult education and training has a migrant background, the highest percentage of all education sectors. However, ageing is straining the workforce. Low incomes and low job security for large parts of the staff often combined with (self-) employment result in precarious working conditions. The shortage of training staff is especially visible in language and integration courses for migrants. (OECD, 2020.).

Despite comfortably achieving the EU targets on continuing education, participation in adult learning remains rather stable and unequal. Adults with low educational achievement, migrants, unemployed people and adults with low basic skills have a significantly lower participation rate than average. Unequal participation related to former formal education achievement remains a major challenge for the adult education system in Germany. Educational opportunities remain strongly linked to socio-economic background and inequality in education may continue to increase.

Two major policy frameworks seek to address the challenges in adult education. The National Skills Strategy (Nationale *Weiterbildungsstrategie*) and the National Decade for Literacy and Basic Education (*Nationale Dekade für Alphabetisierung und Grundbildung*) focuses on addressing the challenges, particularly the issue of inequality in adult education. They bring together action by the Federal and the Laender governments, institutions and associations, trade unions, churches and civil society organisations. Under the National Decade initiative, adult education is seen as a tool to provide wider benefits of learning and therefore it should also pursue the objective of social inclusion. The National Skills Strategy is a more general framework, while the National Decade explicitly addresses the needs of low-skilled adults.

Skill gaps and mismatches of adult trainers and the sector

Berlin recognises the importance of skills and a functioning adult learning system to support skills development and the local labour market.

In 2021, Berlin's first Adult Education Act came into force.

Addressing the barriers to accessing adult learning, supported by a long-term comprehensive skills and adult learning strategy, is within the scope of public action in Berlin. To future-proof the adult learning system, Berlin could build on the following policy recommendations laid out:

Develop a long-term strategy for adult learning in Berlin

- **Develop a new master plan for skills development and adult education:** The rapid labour market transformation requires a comprehensive strategy with a clear vision and objectives for the future of Berlin's labour market and economy. Creating a new advisory board that includes workers, social partners and employers could help inform and steer the strategic direction of skills development policies and ensure that it aligns with local skills needs.
- **Encourage a culture of life-long learning:** Creating stronger links between general adult learning and work-related continuing education and training could help enhance learners' willingness to stay involved in Berlin's adult learning system. Capitalising on Berlin's general adult education provision could support transversal skills that matter for a work-related context and foster "learning to learn".

Provide adult learning to all individuals and tailor it to the needs of vulnerable groups

- **Ensure learning and retraining opportunities reach workers most at risk of labour market transformation:** This could include an expansion of short, modular courses and online training as a complement to traditional learning modules. Introducing education and training instruments that target own-account workers and account for their greater need for flexibility could enhance access to training and participation.
- **Expand learning opportunities for both basic as well as digital skills:** Opportunities could include embedding digital skills training in adult learning programmes and expanding the Berlin Alphabetisierungskampagne ("literacy campaign") and the work of the *Grundbildungszentrum Berlin* ("Berlin Centre for Basic Education"). Furthermore, Berlin could scale up social economy programmes that offer targeted support for youth who leave school early or lack basic skills.
- **Adapt the adult learning offer for migrants to their specific needs:** A closer integration of education, labour market and career guidance services into Berlin's *Volkshochschulen* ("Adult Education Centres") could turn them into "one-stop-shops" for the economic and societal integration of migrants. Berlin could also scale up learning and training offers to migrants in areas that do not require German language proficiency, such as the IT sector.

Encourage employer involvement in adult learning and training

- **Foster demand-led training and labour market information:** Increasing employer representation in the planning of skills policies could create a better alignment with labour market needs. Setting up regular surveys of enterprises in Berlin to collect comprehensive data on skills challenges in recruitment and with the existing workforce could help inform the design of effective training programmes.
- **Strengthen workplace training and tailor support to the needs of SMEs:** Berlin could aim to establish peer-learning platforms that spread good workplace practices and share resources for training among both small and large firms. Additionally, Berlin could raise awareness of the value of training and learning among SMEs, by employing dedicated project account managers that contact SMEs proactively, help them develop joint skills needs assessment, and identify suitable training.

4. Summary of Field Research: Challenges and Needs for Enhancing Roma and Migrant Participation in Adult Education

This section of the transnational report summarizes the educational needs and specific characteristics of the target group, based on findings from online questionnaires and feedback received from specialized focus groups and interviews with Roma and migrant citizens, as well as adult educators and professionals engaged in social inclusion efforts.

Notably, respondents from the Roma and migrant communities across all participating countries acknowledged their low participation in adult education programs. They expressed that targeted training and educational initiatives would be beneficial for their communities, enhancing their involvement in social life and contributing positively to overall social integration. Similarly, the majority of trainers and support professionals involved in Roma and migrant social inclusion also emphasized the need for tailored educational measures to address social participation issues.

The training needs and specific characteristics identified in the national reports for the target group can be broadly summarized as follows:

Belgium

List of challenges

- Many Roma and migrant adults have limited proficiency in local languages (Dutch, French, or German), which hampers their ability to engage in educational programs and integrate into society.
- Cultural misunderstandings, prejudices, and discrimination persist within educational settings and the broader community, leading to feelings of exclusion and mistrust.
- There is a lack of access to information about available educational opportunities and resources, compounded by distrust of official institutions.
- Some Roma and migrant adults perceive formal education as irrelevant to their immediate needs, especially if they believe it won't lead to tangible benefits like improved job prospects.
- There is a need for innovative teaching methods, including digital materials, audiovisual aids, and interactive group activities.

What should be consider

- Inclusive Approach: Emphasize diversity, equality, respect, and acceptance.
- Recognition and Certification: Develop programs that enhance job prospects and earning potential.
- Language Support: Provide tailored assistance based on individual proficiency levels.
- Affordability: Ensure programs are free or affordable.
- Addressing Challenges: Highlight issues of discrimination and the need for equitable opportunities.

Areas of Interest for Roma and Migrants

- **Language Learning:** Opportunities to enhance language skills for improved communication and integration.
- **Career Counselling:** Guidance and support in navigating career paths and job opportunities.
- **Cultural Diversity:** Education and awareness programs focused on understanding and appreciating diverse cultures.
- **Communication Skills:** Development of effective communication skills to foster better interactions in various contexts.

Croatia

List of challenges

- **Language Barriers:** Programs offered in Croatian and English present challenges for individuals who are not fluent in these languages.
- **Perceived Inequities:** Migrants report feeling that they lack the same educational opportunities as the local population, largely due to financial constraints.
- **Information Gaps:** There is a widespread lack of information regarding access to formal education and the recognition of qualifications.
- **Program Continuity:** The absence of continuity in educational programs, coupled with limited opportunities to learn about Croatian culture and traditions, poses significant challenges.

What should be consider

- **Tailored Programs:** Educational offerings should be customized to meet the unique needs of adult migrants and Roma community members.
- **Innovative Teaching Methods:** Educators should adopt more creative and engaging teaching strategies to enhance learning experiences.
- **Language Support:** Providing comprehensive language preparation is essential for facilitating effective participation.
- **Accessibility:** Programs should be either free or affordable to ensure they are accessible to all participants.

Areas of Interest for Roma and Migrants

- **Labor Market Integration:** Programs designed to facilitate entry and success in the workforce.
- **Digital Literacy:** Training to develop skills for effective use of digital technologies.
- **Reproductive Health:** Education on reproductive health issues and related topics.
- **Protection from Discrimination:** Resources and support to combat discrimination in various environments.
- **Active Citizenship:** Encouragement of civic engagement and participation in community activities.
- **Financial Literacy:** Education on financial management, budgeting, and economic empowerment.
- **Language Courses:** Opportunities to improve language proficiency for better integration and communication.
- **Mental Health:** Support and resources focused on mental well-being and emotional health.

Slovenia

List of challenges

- **Limited Adult Learning Opportunities:** There are insufficient options for adult learning within these communities.
- **Time and Motivation Constraints:** Many individuals face challenges related to a lack of time and motivation to pursue educational opportunities.
- **Absence of Specific Training Programs:** There is a shortage of targeted training programs designed for these communities.
- **Digital Literacy Gaps:** Many individuals lack adequate knowledge of how to effectively use digital technologies.
- **Unawareness of Skill Benefits:** There is a general misunderstanding of the advantages associated with acquiring new skills.
- **Employment Discrimination:** Discrimination from employers remains a significant barrier, particularly for women. Many immigrants find it challenging to secure jobs, especially when specific language skills—such as knowledge of Hungarian for local cleaning jobs—are required in bilingual areas.
- **Segregated Living Conditions:** Living in marginalized environments hampers integration for the Roma community. There is often little motivation for change, as employers tend to prefer hiring locals. Additionally, newer generations of migrants may not socialize outside their communities and often struggle to learn the Slovene language effectively.

What should be consider

- **Program Delivery:** The majority of programs were conducted face-to-face, with only a small percentage offered online. Most sessions took place in the afternoon, which was convenient for participants.
- **Awareness Channels:** Many individuals were introduced to adult learning opportunities through friends, family, and NGOs, with less engagement from schools or educational institutions.
- **Inclusive Approach:** Programs emphasized inclusivity and offered opportunities for career progression, although cost was a secondary concern for participants.
- **Need for Variety:** There is a demand to expand the range of available programs and improve overall accessibility.
- **Information Accessibility:** Better dissemination of information about existing programs is necessary, along with adaptations to meet community needs. Participants also suggested that educators adopt more innovative teaching methods and provide necessary language support.
- **Program Improvement:** There is a clear need to enhance and adapt programs to increase their effectiveness and accessibility for this population group.

Areas of Interest for Roma and Migrants

- **Tailored Counselling Methods:** Develop adapted counselling approaches for educational training that focus on motivating inclusion in both formal and non-formal education programs. This includes a deep understanding of Roma culture and lifestyle, as well as the specific circumstances faced by migrants.
- **Motivation:** Foster motivation among participants to engage in educational opportunities and community activities.
- **Active Labor Market Participation:** Encourage and support active participation in the labour market, helping individuals to secure meaningful employment.
- **Social Inclusion:** Promote social inclusion initiatives that facilitate integration and community engagement for both Roma and migrant populations.

Germany

List of challenges

- **Intercultural Learning:** Difficulty in promoting intercultural understanding and embracing cultural diversity in educational settings.
- **Trust Deficit:** A significant lack of trust between educators and learners, which can impede effective communication and engagement.
- **Residency Issues:** Complications related to residency status that restrict access to educational opportunities.
- **High Competition:** Intense competition for limited enrolment spots in educational programs, making access challenging for many students.
- **Resource Scarcity:** Severe limitations in resources and training materials for upskilling adult professionals working with Roma and migrant communities.
- **Awareness Gap:** Many individuals are unaware of key European values, which affects their integration and participation.

- **Insufficient Educational Offerings:** A notable lack of adult education programs aimed at facilitating the social and economic inclusion of Roma and migrants.
- **Material Adaptation Needs:** Challenges in adapting educational materials to effectively address the specific needs of Roma and migrant populations.
- **Low Participation Rates:** A general disinterest among adult Roma and migrants in educational programs, exacerbated by ineffective outreach efforts.
- **Information Barriers:** A lack of accessible information for these communities, including the absence of materials in their native languages.

What should be considered

- **Demand-Driven Training:** Offer training programs focused on in-demand skills in the local job market, emphasizing practical, job-oriented competencies that enhance employability.
- **Positive Learning Environment:** Foster a supportive atmosphere that values and respects diverse cultural backgrounds.
- **Language Support:** Provide language assistance throughout the programs, ensuring that participants can effectively learn and engage with the material, even if they have completed a basic level of German.
- **Childcare Services:** Offer daily care options for women with children to facilitate their participation in training programs.
- **Inclusion Support Services:** Implement support services that address personal, financial, or social challenges that may hinder participation.
- **Community Collaboration:** Partner with local communities and leaders to effectively reach potential participants and facilitate enrolment.
- **Culturally Relevant Methods:** Incorporate cultural activities into educational content, using examples and materials that resonate with the cultural experiences of Roma and migrant learners.
- **Visual Learning Aids:** Utilize images, videos, and other visual elements to bridge language barriers and enhance accessibility in learning.
- **Interactive Learning:** Implement role-playing games and simulations to provide practical, real-world scenarios for participants.
- **Digital Engagement:** Leverage interactive digital platforms to create engaging and accessible learning experiences.

Areas of Interest for Roma and Migrants

- **Intercultural Learning:** A strong focus on understanding and appreciating diverse cultures.
- **Labor Market Integration:** Programs aimed at facilitating entry and success in the local job market.
- **Digital Literacy:** Skills development related to using digital technologies effectively.
- **Reproductive Health and Relationships:** Education on reproductive health issues and relationship dynamics.
- **Protection Against Discrimination:** Awareness and resources to combat discrimination in various settings.
- **Active Citizenship:** Encouragement of civic engagement and participation in community life.
- **Financial Literacy:** Education on managing finances, budgeting, and economic empowerment.
- **Language Courses:** Opportunities to improve language skills for better integration and communication.

Conclusion

The challenges faced by Roma and migrant communities across Belgium, Croatia, Slovenia, and Germany highlight significant barriers to accessing education and integrating into society. Key obstacles such as language proficiency, cultural misunderstandings, and limited access to information impede their ability to participate fully in educational programs. Each country exhibits unique challenges, ranging from the high competition for limited spots in educational programs in Germany to the scarcity of tailored training opportunities in Slovenia and the pervasive discrimination affecting Roma and migrants in Belgium and Croatia.

To address these challenges effectively, educational programs must adopt inclusive approaches that prioritize diversity, respect, and accessibility. Tailoring offerings to meet the specific needs of these communities—through innovative teaching methods, language support, and affordable options—is essential. Furthermore, fostering trust between educators and learners and enhancing awareness of educational opportunities can help bridge the gap for Roma and migrants.

Areas of interest for these communities, such as language learning, digital literacy, career counselling, and protection against discrimination, reveal a strong desire for skills that facilitate integration and improve quality of life. By focusing on these areas and implementing supportive measures, stakeholders can create pathways that empower Roma and migrants, fostering their active participation in society and promoting social cohesion. Collaboration among educational institutions, local communities, and governmental bodies will be crucial in driving these initiatives forward and ensuring equitable access to education for all.

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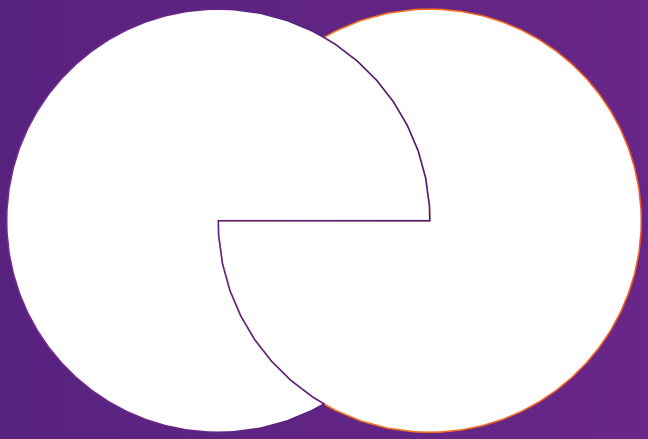

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