



Executive summary of IO 1

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Strategies, policies, and challenges of partnerships for Lifelong Learning (LLL)

in Germany, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, and Spain at a glimpse

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1. Comparative synopsis of country examples for LLL partnerships

With Germany and Spain there are two countries represented in the project which address both fields of LLL partnerships, integrated learning programmes and bridging programmes, very similarly. The integrated learning programmes are preferably dual study programmes while the bridging programmes focus on accreditation of prior learning (or learning in other contexts). As in many cases of bridging programmes the proceeding from vocational to tertiary education is concerned, the accreditation of experience-based learning or learning in practice is the crucial challenge to be solved. Though there are always national pathways and institutional settings that influence the modes and types of accreditation, we can find two major pathways of accreditation: individual and blanket accreditation – the latter very often supplements the former. The bridging programme reported from Latvia shows clear regulations for accrediting learning outcomes from previous (professional, continuing vocational education) experiences or programmes. And it connects vocational with higher education. The Latvian example of a partnership for integrated learning seems to have weak links with higher education. Instead there is a strong theory-practice integration (in the given cases labelled "work-based training" preferably on VET level). The Irish example addresses a bridging programme with elaborated pathways from further education to a Higher Education Institute (HEI). As pointed out, the advantage for the learners is to gain automatic entry into the HEI after successfully complete a VET course (exemption).

The given Greek examples comprise some kind of bi-lateral bridging programmes between private VET schools and foreign universities, and in the field of integrated programmes cooperations between VET schools and companies are dominating with the purpose to integrate theory and practice during VET programmes.

2. General challenges and prospects

In the following the challenges and prospects for partnerships in LLL will be outlined.

Since the national VET systems as well as the specific priorities and measures in lifelong learning are different, the following statements are briefly presented country by country. In Germany with its huge number of dual study programmes a direct comparison between (traditional) dual vocational pathways and dual study programmes with a smaller part of in-company training but leading to the same qualification may cause some difficulties as such development might lead to “1st and 2nd class certificates”. (Depending on the viewpoint of the learners enrolled in either these programmes.) Traditional apprentices, who work longer hours in a company may find their degree inferior because other learners are students and will not only receive a vocational qualification but also a Bachelor degree.

Such developments might undermine dual vocational education and training and may lead to a further decline in the number of apprentices in favour of dual study programme learners.

Partnerships for lifelong learning in **Ireland**, as mentioned before, predominantly relate to the progression and pathways between Further and Continuing Vocational Education and Training (F/VET) and Higher Education (HE) and/or the world of work. When considering F/VET to HE progression it turns out that stakeholders in the educational field assume that the traditional educational progression route deems that students who are in further education are students who did not achieve an adequate standard to progress directly into HE. This perception overvalues higher education, undervalues further education and training, and suggests that there is only one educational route. This perception suggests that F/VET is an unwelcome diversion in the race for highly valued HEI places. This perception validates that HE is the valid qualification in education for life. In this way, it negates the value of learning that happens in F/VET.

When considering the **Spanish** VET system as such; there are a number of challenges that might have an impact on its future development:

- Keeping vocational schools and their staff up-to-date;
- Ensuring students sustain and develop core academic skills;
- Modernizing career guidance in the general Spanish education system;
- Furthering the development of workplace learning.

The recently introduced dual VET system addresses these issues, but the challenges and potentials remain to be assessed in the future.

As **Latvia** prioritizes, among others, work-based learning as a new type of vocational education and training and by doing this dealing with the challenge of improving the linkage of skills and competence acquisition (in the VET system) with the needs of the labour market, its current and near-future VET policy focusses on implementing short-cycle programmes which will increase the number of partnerships in VET. Additionally, programmes for unemployed persons are renewed and improved on a yearly basis, therefore providing new partnerships for companies to attract new employees.

Current challenges and potentials of LLL in **Greece** are strongly influenced by the ongoing double crises: debt crisis and economic recession. These crises have revealed structural weaknesses in Greek economic and social infrastructure, one of which was the divide between its education and training system and the labour market. Besides, the long-term poor image of the VET sector in the country is a fact.

With special focus on LLL the following emerging challenges can be summarized and generalized, being relevant for **all** participating **countries**:

- Increase of the percentage of the population aged 24-65 participating in LLL;
- Decrease of the percentage of early education leavers;
- interministerial cooperation for the coordination on LLL matters at national level;
- validation and accreditation of LLL service providers, registry of providers in the LLL portal;
- consideration of complementarity and synergies among providers with view to upgrading quality and saving resources in LLL;
- strategic restructuring of the LLL services in terms of their field, their content, tools, methods, procedures and their beneficiaries, in order for those services to be of high quality,
- adapted to the citizens' needs and interests,
- easily and equally accessible to all,
- directly connected to the labor market and to society,
- being part of the broader education and training framework, thus enabling mobility.