

Adult learning in Europe – European priorities and good practices

Uczenie się dorosłych w Europie – europejskie priorytety i dobre praktyki

Key words: adult learning, European priorities of continuing vocational education development, Erasmus+ programme.

Słowa kluczowe: uczenie się dorosłych, europejskie priorytety rozwoju ustawicznej edukacji zawodowej, program Erasmus+.

Streszczenie: Idea uczenia się przez całe życie jest podstawą wizji nowoczesnego społeczeństwa opartego na wiedzy. Państwa najlepiej rozwijające się uznają kształcenie ustawiczne jako priorytet w swoich strategiach rozwoju, a także planach rozwojowych dotyczących oświaty. Z punktu widzenia badań nad rozwojem ustawicznej edukacji zawodowej w Polsce, istotnym zagadnieniem jest analiza zmian głównych tendencji rozwoju ustawicznej edukacji zawodowej (C-VET) w kontekście strategicznych dokumentów Komisji Europejskiej oraz edukacyjnych programów z uczestnictwem polskich instytucji kształcenia i doskonalenia zawodowego. Prezentowane wyniki stanowią próbę odpowiedzi na pytanie: Jak ewoluowały główne tendencje priorytetów rozwoju ustawicznej edukacji zawodowej w Polsce po przystąpieniu do UE? oraz jakie są europejskie dobre praktyki ukierunkowane na zwiększenie uczestnictwa osób dorosłych w uczeniu się i uwzględniające potrzeby rynku pracy.

Introduction. From the point of view of research on the development of continuing vocational education in Poland, an important issue is to analyze the changes in the main development trends in continuing vocational education from the perspective of the strategic documents of the European Commission and educational programmes (especially Erasmus+ programme) with the participation of Polish VET institutions. The good practices presented in the article are the examples of research international projects carried out under Erasmus+ programme. Adult learning is key for personal development, active citizenship and social inclusion. Adult learning is also needed to meet the need for new skills and answer the needs of the labour market but also of life in society and as an individual. According to EU statistics, participation

of adults in learning varies greatly between European countries: overall, the numbers are stagnating and go from 1.4% to 31.6%¹. Participation rates are especially disappointing for low-skilled and older adults. Urgent action is needed at European level to increase knowledge about successful policies, provide support, and enable a better exchange of experiences between countries.

Methods and procedures. The paper attempts to answer the following research problems:

- *How have evolved the main trends in the development of continuing vocational education in Poland after the accession to the EU? and*
- *What are good European practices aimed at increasing the participation of adults in learning, with particular attention to the needs of the labour market?*

The first phase of the study was a critical analyse of documents (including reports, strategic papers at EU and national level) using a desk research method. The existing data available from various sources, including literature, the press, the Internet, analytical reports, statistical data were analysed and peer reviewed to synthesize the experience. The second stage of the study was a qualitative analysis of the European Union strategical educational programmes (summary action reports, evaluation report) to analyze the evolution of the main trends in the development of continuing vocational education. The programmes were selected intentionally, including those representing the adult learning issues including vocational education, i.e. Leonardo da Vinci (2008-2012) and Erasmus+ (2014-2016). The feedback from the analysis were verified with the assumptions and supplemented with own experience from international cooperation with multicultural research teams carrying out EU projects.

European priorities of lifelong learning including continuing vocational education development. The European Commission states on its official portal: *More adult learning can help Europe overcome the economic crisis, meet the need for new skills, and keep its ageing workforce productive. Learning is also essential for social inclusion and active citizenship*². To achieve this goal, the Commission is working with 32 countries to implement the European Agenda for Adult Learning³. The Agenda emphasizes the need to increase participation in adult learning in formal, non-formal and informal learning, whether to acquire new skills for new jobs, for active citizenship, or for personal development and fulfilment.

¹ <http://www.eaea.org/en/policy-advocacy/european-agenda-for-adult-learning.html>, access: 10.01.2017.

² https://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/adult-learning/adult_en, access: 10.01.2017.

³ http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_2011.372.01.0001.01.ENG, access: 10.01.2017.

One of the current strategic document at EU level is *The Strategic framework – Education & Training 2020* which defines four common objectives to address the challenges of adult education by 2020:

1. Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality;
2. Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training;
3. Promoting equity, social cohesion, and active citizenship;
4. Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.

These priorities are addressed by the European Commission, by European member States, by education institutions, education stakeholders, networks, associations by working on the following topics: Awareness-raising; Financing adult learning; Higher education: access to adults; Monitoring the adult learning sector; Quality; Reaching out to specific target groups; Validation of non-formal and informal learning. In the field of adult education, the target set is as follows: by 2020, 15% of adults aged 25–64 should be taking part in adult education⁴. This situation shows urgent initiatives and engagement not only at European but especially at national level in member countries.

Below there are presented the key feedback from the author's qualitative analysis of the European Union strategical educational programmes (action plan reports, evaluation reports) to analyze the main trends and priorities in the evolution of the development of European priorities of lifelong learning including continuing vocational education.

Against the general problems, strategic areas are identified, with particular support for the various actions of the EU programmes. Desk research analysis has highlighted priority areas, i.e. promoting innovative approaches to education and training, in such a way that education systems meet the needs of the labour market to the fullest, taking into account the acquisition of qualifications according to modern standards and the development of openness and intercultural tolerance, learning languages and skills and adapting to living and working conditions in various European countries (Table 1).

As it was presented in Table 1, the priority areas of adult learning in terms of vocational education and training are closely linked to the world of work. They cover the improvement of skills and qualifications, including key competences, and are aimed at SMEs, disadvantaged groups, adult learners and tutors/mentors.

⁴ <http://www.eaea.org/en/policy-advocacy/european-agenda-for-adult-learning.html>, access: 10.01.2017.

Table 1. Priorities of the continuing vocational education development

Year	Strategic at EU level	Strategic at national level
2008-2010	<p>General priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language-oriented vocational training (VOLL) • integrated language and object teaching (CLIL) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition of the competences and qualifications of Polish workers in the European labour market - Recognition of how to use common benchmarks for professional qualifications, certification, credit scoring to enhance transparency, comparability and transfer of qualifications and competences between Poland and European systems and levels Education. • Improving the quality and availability of vocational training and vocational training for people with disabilities and those with low qualifications. • Promote the professional development of small and medium enterprise employees including managers by creating new training programs / offers and content, identifying training needs assessment tools. • Improve knowledge and skills in communicating in foreign languages on the labour market.
2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging cooperation between the vocational education and training sector and the workplace • Supporting training and further training of teachers, vocational trainers and tutors involved in vocational education and training and managers of vocational education and training institutions • Promoting the acquisition of key competences in VET • Development and transfer of mobility strategies in VET • The ECVET system for transparency and recognition of learning outcomes and qualifications • Improving quality assurance systems for vocational education and training 	
2014-2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning mobility of individuals: learning mobility opportunities aim to encourage the mobility of students, staff, trainees, apprentices, volunteers, youth workers and young people. • Innovation and good practices: Opportunities for cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices are designed to modernise and reinforce education, training, and youth systems. • Support for Policy Reform: supporting the overall EU policy agenda, the Education and Training 2020 cooperation framework, and the Youth Strategy. 	

Source: Own elaboration.

European good practices. Well recognized in vocational education and training area – the Leonardo da Vinci programme has been replaced in the current financing perspective in 2014 by the Erasmus+ programme, however there is a continuation of strategic areas of support:

- Opportunities to study, train, gain work experience or volunteer abroad.
- Education, training and youth sector staff to teach or learn abroad.
- The development of digital education and the use of ICTs.
- Language learning.
- Recognition of skills, including those learned outside the formal education system.

- Strategic Partnerships among educational institutions and youth organisations with peers in other countries in both their own sector and other sectors, in order to foster quality improvements and innovation.
- Knowledge Alliances and Sector Skills Alliances, to address skills gaps and foster entrepreneurship by improving curricula and qualifications through cooperation between the worlds of work and education.
- A loan guarantee facility for master’s degree students to finance their studies in another country.
- Teaching and research on European integration.
- Exchanges, cooperation and capacity building in higher education and the youth sector worldwide.
- Initiatives to foster innovation in pedagogy, and progressive policy reform at national level through
- Prospective Initiatives.
- Good governance in sport and initiatives against match-fixing, doping, violence, racism and intolerance, particularly in grassroots sport.

For nearly 30 recent years, The Institute for Sustainable Technologies – National Research Institute (ITeE-PIB) has been specialising in building up innovation performance in the areas of machine construction and maintenance, technical and environmental safety. Centre for the Research and Development of Vocational Education, a separate unit in the structure of ITeE-PIB with 2 departments: Vocational Education Research Department and Continuing Education Department, revolves around the issues of lifelong learning and continuing vocational education, modelling of technology and knowledge transfer processes for the development of an innovative economy human capital, improving quality in VET, standardization of professional competences/qualifications. Currently, several international projects are carrying out or have been already finalized in the area of adult learning and C-VET by ITeE-PIB, among others:

- *Transfer of good practices and development of professional competences of employees in waste management area supported by IT tools (Green-Comp-IT)*, Erasmus+ KA2, 2014-1-PL01-KA202-003649.
- *Increasing employability of inactive women and women with disabilities via e-mentoring and e-training by women (ID-Women)*, Erasmus+ KA2, 2014-1-TR01-KA204-013351.
- *Recognition of vocational qualifications for the purpose of transfer on the European job market (TransVETjob)*, Erasmus+ KA2 2015-1-PL01-KA202-016632.
- *Innovation Laboratories in the development of competences of special pedagogy teachers and people with special educational needs (i-Lab3)*, Erasmus+ KA2, 2014-1-PL01-KA202-003428.
- *Implementation and Validation of Non-formal Training on Sustainability for Environmental Testing Laboratories workers (ECVETlab)*, Erasmus+ KA2, 2016-1-ES01-KA202-024977.
- *Training and certification model for photovoltaic trainers with the use of ECVET system*, Erasmus+ KA2, 2016-1-PL01-KA202-026279.

The two examples of European good practices presented below were selected intentionally to show the evident link between the labour market needs and aims defined in the EU international projects.

Increasing employability of inactive women and women with disabilities via e-mentoring and e-training by women (ID-Women), 2014-2016. Partners: POINT - ICT & Artificial Intelligence (Turkey; leader); GAZI University (Turkey); TAKIDD Association (Turkey); H-FOUNDATION (Romania); Training Centre IFI (Spain); Instytut Technologii Eksploatacji-PIB (Poland); PENTHESILEIA (Greece); ZARIF Foundation (Slovakia).

The aim of this project was to train inactive women as e-mentors and consequently support micro-entrepreneurship of women with physical disabilities by means of e-mentoring, so that they can work from their home. Thus project focuses on inactive women bearing a strong potential to become a mentor and addressing women with physical disabilities, having mobility restrictions as potential future mentees, who are aiming to work from their home as a micro entrepreneurs. The projects outcomes included among others: ID-Women Mentoring e-Course offering modules in 8 identified competency gap areas; ID-Women Self-assessment Toolkit for self-evaluation of learning outcomes; ID-Women - e-Learning Website for e-learning.

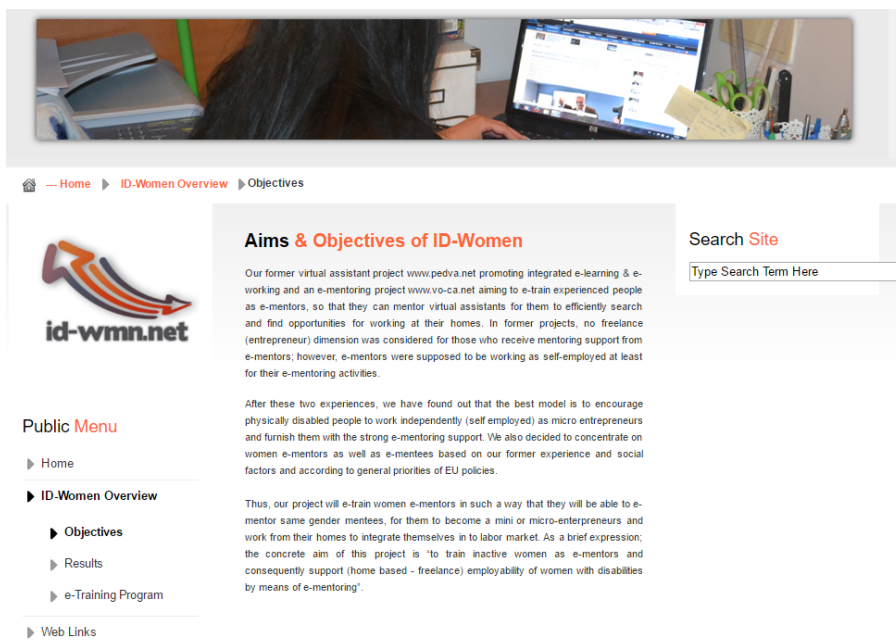


Fig. 1. Internet portal for ID-Women e-learning course

Source: <http://www.id-wmn.net/>, access: 12.01.2017.

Unique and comprehensive e-Training programme was made available to potential e-Mentors for developing themselves and for introducing their existing skills into labour market. This was to help them to facilitate their existing skills and knowledge accumulation and work free-time based from their homes and at the same

time, support home based working efforts of mentees, who will also integrate themselves to virtual working environment. Thus, the project e-trained women e-mentors in such a way that they would be able to e-mentor same gender mentees, for them to become a mini or micro-entrepreneurs and work from their homes to integrate themselves in to labour market.

Transfer of good practices and development of professional competences of employees in waste management area supported by IT tools (GreenCompIT), 2014-2017. Partners: Fundacja Europejskie Centrum Przedsiębiorczości (Poland);

Instytut Technologii Eksploatacji – Państwowy Instytut Badawczy (Poland); eDialog Sp. z o. o. (Poland); Gastrike atervinnare (Sweden); Związek Pracodawców Warszawy i Mazowsza (Poland); Instituto de Soldadura e Qualidade (Portugal); Forschungsinstitut Betriebliche Bildung (f-bb) gGmbH, (Niemcy).

The aim of the Green-Comp-IT project is the transfer of European good practices, development and improvement of the quality of training and professional qualifications of employees within the waste management area, with use of IT tools supporting processes of competency management and development of training modules based on standards of professional qualifications and learning outcomes (knowledge, skills, competences). The project assumes the development of an international standard of professional competences for the new occupation: Technician / Organiser of Waste Management in an Enterprise.



Fig. 2. Internet portal of GreenCompIT project

Source: <http://greencompit.eu/> access: 12.01.2017.

The project topic is correlated with green economy what responds to global problems of natural environment degradation through the expansive economic activity of a man. Waste management economy is a fast growing field in the European Union. It generates new work places demanding new knowledge, competences and skills. These aspects are being analyzed in research and cooperation in the project.

The European Year of Adult Learning. Not only the European Commission does offer a wide range of educational programmes, but also it cooperates with

European associations, networks, and labour organisations to promote and support adult learning. One of the biggest, if not the biggest indeed, a European network promoting adult learning is the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA), established in 1953. Currently it associates 141 member organisations in 45 countries and represents more than 60 million learners Europe-wide. In 2017 and its members (including ITeE-PIB as EAEA's member) celebrate the Year of Adult Education in Europe. The Year of Adult education is initiated by the EAEA, to make the power and joy of learning visible. EAEA brings together European adult education organisations to demonstrate how adult learning can improve citizens' lives and prospects in Europe, both on a personal and on a professional level. The adult education organisations in Europe are invited to join the campaign to highlight the power and joy of learning. EAEA is collecting events and campaigns organised by adult education bodies across Europe under the campaign "2017: The Year of Adult Education in Europe – The Power and Joy of Learning". The campaign brings together adult education organisations from around Europe to join forces in making adult education activities visible. By combining the different activities under one campaign, EAEA want to make a stronger common voice for adult learning. The campaign offers the participants an opportunity to exchange practices with other adult education actors in Europe.

The EAEA "Manifesto" is a basic document for this celebration. EAEA encourages its members to choose a topic or all the topics from the Manifesto to promote in their events. The topics of the Manifesto are as follows:

- Active citizenship, democracy and participation. People who participate in adult education have more trust in the political system, participate more in society, by voting, by volunteering or taking active roles in communities.
- Life skills for individuals. Adult learners feel healthier, lead healthier lifestyles, build new social networks and experience improved well-being.
- Social cohesion, equity and equality. Adult education provides many opportunities to equalise societies on a larger scale and to create fairer societies as well as more economic growth.
- Employment and digitalization. Workplace learning is one of the key drivers for adults' participation in lifelong learning. At the cusp of enormous digital changes, adult education can help in closing the digital gap.
- Migration and demographic change. Civic education and intercultural learning can create integration-friendly cultures. Language and basic skills training will enable migrants to become active citizens in their new home countries. Learning seniors are more active, volunteer more, work longer and are healthier.
- Sustainability. From environmentally friendly consumption and transport to energy efficiency, European citizens need a lot of information and innovative spaces to develop new lifestyles, new projects, new approaches. Adult education can help provide the information, the debate spaces and the creativity.
- European policies. Adult education contributes to main European strategies in the field of growth, employment, innovation, equity, social cohesion, active citizenship, poverty reduction, climate change, internal market, migration, peace and more⁵.

⁵ <https://adulthoodeducation2017.eu/portfolio/about/>, dostep: 10.01.2017.

Summary. International cooperation within EU programmes enables the exchange of good practices and the development of the international dimension of vocational education and training. The strategic priorities of continuing vocational education development have been evolving in specific areas, however the general recommendations and support are aligned with the priorities of the previous initiatives and seem to be continued. There is a need for professional analyses and studies, to be financed from huge research programmes, on the changes and tendencies in evolution of the European priorities of C-VET development to support the educational policy mainstreaming and reforms.

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