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0. INTRODUCTION, by *Paolo Federighi* and *Francesca Torlone*

In Europe, in 2008 there were approximately 77 million citizens with a basic or less than basic level of education (ISCED 2). This is 28% of the population.

We find 23% of the active population in the same situation. In some European countries this percentage exceeds 50%.

If we were to consider indicators that measure actual basic competences, the picture would be even more serious.

This is Europe's hidden face, a substantial part of the forgotten population that little attention is paid to even in statistical and comparative studies.

Nevertheless the dimensions of the phenomenon go well beyond physiological selection. They could worsen as a consequence of the economic crisis if, even for this population segment, active policies of competences development are not put in place that would lead the low-skilled one step up¹. While in other areas of the world the growth of competences is constant and general, the absence of strategies aimed at a significant active measures will accentuate the trend to a decline of competences in Europe.

The problem is present in all countries, though in highly differentiated dimensions.

Compared to countries capable of potentially guaranteeing everyone the chance to achieve and exceed the levels of minimum qualifications (EQF² 1 and 2), there are others in which the provisions are decidedly inadequate with regard to managing the phenomenon of low levels of basic skills.

Even though the matter is often neglected, current experiences in Europe – and not just in the countries with good performance – are able to show that effective solutions do exist and are already in place, but often with limited scope, i.e. directed at very specific target groups.

This is why this study is aimed at learning more about existing good practices, to help those with low or no qualifications to achieve a qualification at least one level higher in their lifetime, in particular. The study set out to achieve these results by looking at and investigating existing good practices

- supporting improvement of basics skill levels of adults

¹ "Increase the possibilities for adults to go one step up and achieve at least one level higher qualification" is a priority of The Action Plan on Adult Learning (COM(2007) 558 final, Brussels, 22.9.07).

² The Report looks primarily at groups corresponding to Isced-2 level and below, corresponding approximately to EQF levels 1 and 2.

- raising the qualification levels of those who do not have the EQF level 1 and 2.

The target group of the present study consists of adults with no or insufficient qualification, or whose professional skills are obsolete and need to acquire key competences at any stages in their lives.

The present synthesis report is the result of a thorough examination of examples of good practice. It analyses the key factors which made the practices examined successful and makes recommendations for European and national policy makers as well as for practitioners.

Empirical data on sixtyfour (64) good practices from 33 European countries on which the analysis is based are described in details in the European Inventory and the Case Study Reports for 14 of the practices selected for deeper examination (available as a separate annex).

The present Report is made up of different parts:

1. The *Challenges which the good practices were designed to meet*, where the object of the study is investigated in relation to its action fields
2. The *Key Factors Analysis*, based on an evidence-based approach
3. The *Final Recommendations*, focused on key messages addressed to policy makers
4. The *Methodology*, explaining the methodological framework and tools behind the whole study.

1. THE CHALLENGES WHICH THE GOOD PRACTICES WERE DESIGNED TO MEET

1.1. Reaching the low skilled in active employment

The majority of the low skilled population is active in the labour market.

In 2008,³ in the European Union the total activity labour market rate for the Isced-2 group was 62.7%. In some countries they represent more than 50% of the labour force.

This data shows that the majority of lower educated citizens are active in the labour market and that this is the place where they can learn. While this fact in itself is positive, it poses challenges for the provision of learning in combination with work. At the same time it shows the strong potential demand for upgrading coming from the labour market.

Several of the selected good practices are focused on this challenge.

1.2. Upgrading the educational level of the workforce

Upgrading the level of education has an impact on labour market performance because access to the labour market is deeply influenced by the educational attainment of individuals.

In 2008,⁴ in the European Union the activity rate of the total population was 76.8% against 62.7% for the Isced-2 group. In other words there was a gap of more than 14% [in labour market activity] between the total population and the less educated population. This gap increases to about 19% for the female segment (68.9% versus 50.1%). That means that, unlike the female segment, a high proportion of the lower educated male population remains in the labour market although the prospect of changing job or obtaining a better job is relatively low. Isced-2 women present very low activity rates in Turkey and Malta (below 30%), countries characterised by very low overall female labour market activity rates. In 14

³ Data are extracted from the European Union *Labour Force Survey 2008* (<http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/microdata/lfs>) that covers the 27 European Member States, including two from the three EEA countries (Norway and Iceland), and the candidate countries (Turkey, Croatia and FYROM). The analysis of this paragraph is based on the data related to the population with at most Isced-2 level (hereafter shown as Isced-2) of education with the total population.

⁴ See footnote 3 and source quoted therein.

countries the gap for the female low educated segment is greater than 20 percentage points (Table 1 in Annex).

If data for age groups are compared this shows that for the youngest group (the 25-39 age-group) the activity rate is higher and the gap is lower than in the older age group. It could mean, especially for men, that young people tend to enter the labour market regardless of the level of education attained, but a large part of the lowest educated experience difficulties remaining in it.

The disadvantage for the low educated population is more evident when employment rates (i.e. the percentage of the employed in the total adult working age population – 25-64 years old) are considered. On average the gap in employment rate is above 15 percentage points (56.6% for the Isced-2 group and 72.2% for the overall population); this gap increases to about 20 percentage points for the female segment (44.6% against 64.4%).

The lower educated population also shows higher unemployment rates. In Europe the average unemployment rate in 2008⁵ was 6.0% (this is rising as a result of current financial and economic crises). For the Isced-2 segment it increases to 9.8%; for men the comparative values with the overall population are 5.5% and 9.0% and for women 6.5% and 10.8% respectively. The low gap in unemployment rates for males and females is due to the discouragement effect, with women, who face poor opportunities in getting a job, deciding to exit from the labour market and renouncing actively looking for work. In two countries, FYROM and Slovakia, Isced-2 women present very high unemployment rates, with values above 30%.

However, in FYROM the rate for the whole female population is above 30%.

1.3. Including the lower educated population in learning processes and educational activities

Looking at the data on participation rates in education and training of adults (individuals aged 25 - 64) by highest level of education attained⁶ it is clear that the Isced 2 adults experience very few opportunities to be involved in the education process (Table 2 in Annex).

⁵ See footnote 3 and source quoted therein.

⁶ Data are extracted from the Eurostat, *Adult Education Survey 2007* (http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/microdata/adult_education_survey). They are limited to 24 countries: 22 European Member States (we have no data for Denmark, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Romania), Norway and Croatia.

public education schools.

*(Komvux – KOMmunal VUXenutbildning/Municipal Adult Education, Sweden).*¹¹

The integrated actions adopted by the Competence Centre are for promoting education and training within small and medium enterprises (fewer than 20 employees). Businesses, skilled and unskilled employees (working in public and private sector, with a low or insufficient qualifications level), competence centre middle managers, and teachers and trainers participate in competence development and continuing education. Centres were set up in 2006.

(Competence Centre, Denmark).

- The interpretation of such an objective in plans, programmes and adequate financing to achieve a measurable impact, based also on the financial commitment of public and private parties and – amongst them – companies.

Box 4 – Basic competence in working life

The 'Basic competence in working life' programme's opportunities have been taken up by a number of private and public enterprises with employees who need basic skills training. The programme is part of the government's overall competence policy. The education providers, which may be public and private providers and even companies themselves, if they have the necessary teaching staff, organise the courses and help recruit the participants in cooperation with enterprises. Trade union representatives often play an important part in the recruitment phase and throughout the whole process of setting up a course. The programme has been running 2006.

(Basic Competence in Working Life Programme, Norway)

- The creation of sustainable conditions for participation in education and training through the encouragement of motivation to invest in education and training, reduction of direct and indirect costs and the guarantee of returns.

¹¹ Isfol (2008), *Fostering participation in lifelong learning. Measures and actions in France, Germany, Sweden, United Kingdom-The specific measures*, I libri del Fondo Sociale Europeo-Unione Europea e Ministero del Lavoro, della Salute e delle Politiche Sociali, ISSN 1590-0002.

Box 5 – Sustainable conditions to enhance participation in education and training

The individual credit card for training is based on the ILA (Individual Learning Account) model and is intended to overcome obstacles of access to education and training, to develop ways back to work and the integration and personalisation of learning courses for those involved. It is particularly effective in helping those with low educational levels (EQF2) back into training and education. It combines three different aspects: institutional financing of education and training, supply of information and counselling services and the participant's freedom in his/her choice of learning. This measure allows the individual to develop a varied learning path over a number of years. The practice was introduced in 2005. It has had a special importance as a measure for unemployed people during the 2009-2010 economic crisis.

(Individual credit card for training, Italy).

The Adult Learning Grant (ALG) is one of the key learner support schemes put in place by the Learning and Skills Council in order to remove financial shortcomings as a barrier to participating in learning. The ALG is intended to help low income adults studying full time for their first full Level 2 or first full Level 3 qualification with the cost of learning. The amount eligible adult learners can receive varies and depends on their financial situation. The ALG was announced in July 2003 as part of the "Government's Skills Strategy 21st Century Skills: Realising our Potential". Following the first pilots of the ALG, it was expanded to cover the whole of England in 2007/08.

*(Adult Learning Grant, United Kingdom).*¹²

- For some groups in the population in particular conditions, special routes for approaching jobs and education and training must be contemplated. In these cases the aim is not certification; it is building a personal life project.

¹² Isfol (2008), *Fostering the participation in lifelong learning. Measures and actions in France, Germany, Sweden, United Kingdom-The specific measures*, I libri del Fondo Sociale Europeo-Unione Europea e Ministero del Lavoro, della Salute e delle Politiche Sociali, ISSN 1590-0002.

Box 6 – Integrated support for labour market integration of some disadvantaged categories of citizens

Integrated support for labour market integration (SIIL) is a service designed to reduce the risk of social and labour market exclusion of people with psychological, social and economic disadvantages as a result of low level basic and transversal skills, personal fragility and social vulnerability. It encourages the acquisition of social and professional roles through workplace mediation that consists of accompanying the person throughout his/her professional integration process, and stimulating its emancipatory effect. The integrated approach of the service is based on a strong cooperation among local centres and services providing counselling, education and training and introduction into the labour market.

(SIIL-Sistema Integrato Inserimento Lavorativo/Integrated support for labour market integration, Italy).

2.2.3. *Models of policies for the development of basic education* by Paolo Federighi and Francesca Torlone

The good practices collected in the Inventory highlight four different types of approach, potentially complementary, which must be taken into consideration while building strategies and policies:

1. The **validation approach**, which is characterised by accrediting and motivating the adult on what has been learnt during work and life experiences and with a subsequent aim of validation and recognition through appropriate methods, sometimes leading to certification.

During this study, this approach was found in a number of countries and contexts. The following features describe two specific types:

- Adoption of widespread national systems of validation for knowledge acquired in life and work;

Box 7 - Recognition and validation of vocational competences acquired in non-formal and informal contexts

The *Centro Novas Oportunidades* (CNO/New Opportunities Centres) identifies and validates skills that have been acquired through informal, non-formal or formal learning by adults with limited schooling and

ultimately awards a diploma equivalent to an official certificate. The NOC was set up in 2003 and has been growing throughout Portugal ever since. The target is to reach 500 in 2010.
(New Opportunities Centres, Portugal).

In Romania, individuals who would like vocational competences acquired through non-formal and informal routes to be assessed with a view to recognition apply to an assessment centre authorised for the appropriate occupation or qualification. The work is carried out by the assessment centres authorised by the National Adult Training Board (NATB). The candidate receives a certificate of competency for all the competency units for which he/she was declared “*competent*”. The certificates of competency have the same value as the nationally recognised graduation or qualification certificates issued in the authorised formal accreditation system. The practice was adopted in 2004.
(Recognition and validation of vocational competences acquired in non-formal and informal contexts, Romania).

- Adoption of correlation systems between formal and informal models through the introduction of activities bringing people up to the level to achieve school diplomas.

Box 8 – Low skilled employees access a national diploma

The *Evoluance* (Evolution) programme of the French group Danone is a qualification programme with the aim of helping the company’s low skilled employees access a national diploma or enter a VAE-*Validation des acquis de l’expérience* (certification of skills no matter how and where they are acquired) programme. The learning programme is initiated by the company using training plans and making a financial contribution to it. The national network of public and adult education centres, *Greta-GRoupements d’ETAbissements*, is involved as well as the body responsible for the formal adult education service in France. The programme began in 2004.
(Basic education for workers in Danone, France).

2. The **approach centred on embedded learning**, which aims to build learning pathways both structured and incidental, while at work or in some regular social activity. In its method of developing specific competences (fine tuning), this approach consists of organising activities carried out in the workplace or elsewhere, in order to accelerate the learning of the interested adult.

Box 24 - Enforced regional/local responsibility and governance

Adult basic education addressed to parents of immigrant pupils showed how in the province of Prato 7 municipalities set up an inter-institutional network and a joint project to respond to the issue of high levels of inward migration and signed a Protocol Agreement. They were supported by the Region of Tuscany which made the financial resources available, and the National Ministry of Education.

The objective is to support and develop a collaborative relationship between schools and local authorities in order to research new strategies for integrating foreign children of school-going age and to promote courses aimed at educating for diversity through the full involvement of all teachers, parents and students.

The actions planned relate to the following areas: *Reception services* (including the welcoming of parents and young people, guidance, recognition of skills, certification of educational credits and debits); Italian language workshops; intercultural workshops and active citizenship workshops; staff training, parenting support through the involvement of voluntary and third sector associations; counselling for teachers and non-teaching staff (by cultural mediators and linguistic facilitators) etc.

(Adult basic education addressed to parents of immigrant pupils, Italy).

Removing the barriers to access for all adults with less than upper secondary level education requires articulated actions at different levels: from the certification (and accreditation system) of different forms of provision, to designing open and flexible access, transfer and progression pathways to different/ alternative education or employment, and ensuring that people find it easier to gain credit for any learning they have undertaken. This also means introducing greater flexibility into the education system, as well as greater synergy between different forms of provision and bridges between the different learning pathways. This creates more opportunities for learners to move between different parts of the system, in this way widening the range of learning opportunities available, as more choice means more chances.

This approach builds bridges mainly inside the educational system (passages between formal and informal learning, alternative routes, credit system, etc.) and also between the educational system and the “real” world of the people at the workplace and in the social environment. Above all, supported by awareness campaigns, it builds up an effective system for informing people about their possibilities.

Box 25 - Bridges for alternative learning pathways

Reintegration of women in the healthcare sector programme is addressed to women with rural and/or migrant backgrounds struggling to get back into the labour market after a long period out of employment, for family reasons.

Different healthcare institutions provide training courses for this target group to learn and validate healthcare skills and competences. Most of them had no formal qualification.

The successful participants of the training courses not only had their skills validated, but also found employment at one of the participating healthcare institutions.

(Reintegration of women in the healthcare sector, The Netherlands).

2.3.5. *Basing strategy on sufficient and empirical data*

The interventions designed into an integrated strategy are to be based on the use of empirical data, research findings and documented experiences (also from abroad), that can give information not only about the size of the problem, but also suggest areas and ways of tailored intervention, providing at the same time a scientific and reliable rationale.

Box 26 - Relevant and reliable data

In Scotland the information about the size of the target group reached by the good practice is quite precise:

The International Adult Literacy Survey (1996) suggested that approximately 23% of Scotland's adults (800,000 people) had some level of literacy or numeracy difficulty. New research (New Light on Adult Literacy and Numeracy in Scotland (2008) suggests that 36% of Scotland's adults do not have the literacy skills they need to be able to achieve everything they might in their personal lives and in their work and that 71% of adults lack the numeracy skills they need in order to be able to achieve everything they might.

(Networking and partnership with adult literacies tutors in Scotland, United Kingdom).

Knowledge of the problems, the structure of the field and the advantage and disadvantage of actions, along with careful analysis of the situation is fundamental to ensuring an in-depth understanding of the whole complexity of the problem, and to make sure that quick decisions are not taken that might be wrong.

Box 27 - Gathering empiric facts

The primary aim of the NOBI Network and the Coordination Centre, *German in the workplace*, is to find solutions which emphasise the responsibilities of society, the labour market, and the companies themselves. The prime purpose of the programme is to enable migrants with limited German language skills to participate in cultural, social as well as working life without, however, demanding one-sided assimilation. Thus, one of the main tasks of the project is to develop training programmes for companies and adapt learning methods and materials which are relevant to the respective target group or company.

To do so, drawing on identified work-related and individual needs, the Coordination Centre, *German in the Workplace*, offers to design and deliver customised programmes for in-house training in companies. The focus is on the language skills specific to a particular company, which are identified on site by observing and analysing work processes.

(*German in the workplace, Germany*).

Also, very important is the information coming from peer learning activities, from “lessons learnt” in running similar activities. Going into the concrete reality and gathering the empiric data, and also listening to the “learner’s voice”, forms the basis to make sure that we have a proper understanding of their situation and needs.

Box 28 - Encourage the learner’s voice

The *Adult Learner’s Week* in United Kingdom is one of the learning campaigns and activities which promotes and encourages the “learner’s voice”. Adult Learners’ Week was conceived as a national campaign, with local action. Some of the key *elements* of the campaign are: the local coordination through *learning festival groups* or regional coordinators; the development of a *learner network* to promote learning through word of mouth; the inspiring award on behalf of learners who have had a life changing experience through learning.

(*Adult Learner’s Week, United Kingdom*).

Consistent, broad and rigorous information collection (that might come also from monitoring and evaluation), can open debate about the implications of the strategy as the whole, or of the different measures. A stronger and broader analysis of the benefits and costs of the intervention over time, and systematic experimentation on what works, is also needed, and these aspects are addressed in the section on *Evaluation* below.

2.4. Organisational components, by Vanna Boffo

2.4.1. Promoting the demand for education and training centred around the individual

The key factor in creating specific organisational conditions is to focus on the promotion of learning demand. Good practices in such diverse cultural, social and environmental contexts as those observed in the European countries in question, are characterised by an underlying spirit of promotion of the individual, as a person having to determine how to build one's life path through empowerment and personal growth.

The organisation of each practical activity destined to become a successful practice is founded on this unspoken assumption: the notion that the individual must become the primary agent of his/her very own "project" and must therefore become "his/her own guide" in life, in places of study and at work.

Box 29 - Promotion of the Individual through a Learning Path

The *Back to Education Initiative* aims to facilitate adults' access, transfer and progression to other education and employment pathways. The Initiative is designed to overcome the inflexibility of the existing further and adult education system by providing adults with the opportunity to combine education with other family and work responsibilities. In this case the education and the learning is combined with the opportunities of the labour market.

(Back to Education Initiative, Ireland).

All the prisoners after release could find employment and work as welders. For example, in the period of 2007-2009, two-thirds of the programme's participants passed the centralised qualification exam and acquired the 2nd professional qualification level. They started work in the prison's production unit, which enhanced their professional competences providing the opportunity for paid work and to develop new social skills in labour relations.

(New solutions for promoting ex-offender employment, Latvia).

Empowering adults, selected as beneficiaries of education and training policies and professional development, to act in their own capacity to understand the importance of learning to improve their professional level, implies granting adults the capacity to "demand learning" and to access education and training opportunities. To this end, good practices sustained

The European Commission should commit itself to promote “viral” information campaigns every year, in order to support the development of policies and interventions aimed at reaching low skilled adults. In this regard, it would be appropriate to concentrate the objectives of the campaigns on specific priorities affecting each organisation involved in the planning process.

3.2. Integrated strategic action, by *Simona Sava*

Make the system comprehensive and well articulated

The approach to underprivileged target groups has to be complex; all relevant partners have to be involved, all suitable instruments and measures have to be combined.

Removing the barriers to access for all adults with less than upper secondary levels of education requires articulated actions at different levels: from the certification (and accreditation system) of different forms of provision, to designing an open and flexible access, transfer and progression to different/alternative education or employment pathways, and to ensure that people find it easier to gain recognition and credit for any learning they have undertaken. This also means introducing greater flexibility into the education system, as well as a greater synergy between different forms of provision and bridges between the different learning pathways, creating more opportunities for learners to move between different parts of the system, and, in this way, widening the range of learning opportunities available. More choices mean more chances.

At the delivery level, ensuring wider access to learning and successful provision of "one step up" opportunities requires:

- Bringing learning closer to learners in their communities and workplaces.
- Offering a wider range of choices appropriate to the particular circumstances of learners and leading to national certification or accreditation.
- Combining literacy provision with other courses, including vocational training.
- Learning activities that are contextualised in and based on work-oriented competences supported by education and training.

In addition, more support should be available for all those involved in delivering education and training for those in the NEET (not in employment, education or training) group.

Base the strategy on reliable data

The prerequisite of strategic outreach programmes is use of empirical data, research findings and documented experiences (including experiences from abroad). Knowledge of the problems, the structure of the field and the advantages and disadvantage of measures is fundamental.

A “One step up” strategy will not work for these specific target groups without an holistic view of their lives and daily environment. The barriers and problems faced by low-skilled adults are multi-dimensional and extremely complex.

The success of integrated outreach strategies is highly dependent on an understanding of learning, which is not just focused on educational aspects. Social, personal, economic and political factors must be considered as well.

Define responsibilities clearly

The drivers and decision-making centres of a strategy need to be clearly identified (e.g. civil society, some faith organisations, economic and social entities, etc.), with a clear specification of the necessary levels of action (e.g. from the macro/ ministry level, to micro level, including the involvement of all social partners and relevant stakeholders).

Local responsibility needs to be enforced (for instance financing education of people with low literacy levels is usually supported by the state), to ensure proximity of intervention to the real life situation of these learners. *Local governance* can draw on effective and tailored *local strategies* which will encourage local authorities, employers, colleges and voluntary organisations to work together to meet the needs of low skilled people in the most effective ways. A diversified and tailored-made infrastructure can be developed if the local actors have the power to design and set up the offer for learning and support services. Employers should be motivated to strengthen a culture of learning in and outside work, to be part of the infrastructure and network for supporting learning.

3.3. Organisational components, by Vanna Boffo

Developing the learning offer

- State or regional governments should create a structural network that can continuously sustain nationwide adult education and training projects and which allows access to the highest EQF

- levels.
- They should also develop different types of education and training schemes that cover the different life and work circumstances of low skilled adults.
 - Governments should extend the power to award qualifications to all entities authorised to offer learning opportunities (in childcare services, in the army, in workplaces, etc.) and introduce certification systems that validate individual skills, based on learning outcomes, that take into account knowledge gained throughout adulthood in any setting.
 - Companies should create internal education and training activities that develop the basic skills of their workers.

Developing support services

- Governments must promote extensive and detailed awareness campaigns that allow adults in a country to benefit from the broadest and most widespread social and political intervention and which guarantee the open access to information on all existing learning opportunities.
- Public systems and companies must work together to find a balance between the provision of public guidance and counselling systems and similar corporate activities in this area (evaluation of career assessment, etc.), in order to provide those involved with better quality information and lifelong guidance services.

Overcoming financial obstacles:

- In addition to the measures already in place in certain Member States – vouchers and study grants related to other provisions that cover living costs while studying - further measures are required that encourage adults – and also companies - to invest in education and training.
- Measures such as Individual Learning Accounts should be widespread (integrated with guidance services). Other measures should be studied in order to give each person a share of resources that can be used to fund his or her learning activity (from forms of incentive-based saving or tax relief to the introduction of forms of benefit entitlement for those who left school early or who have not gained suitable skills).