



# Country Profile: SLOVAKIA

**REGIONAL**  
**Comparative Analysis of Regional Policies**  
**for Adult Learning**

**Academia Istropolitana Nova**

[www.regionalproject.eu](http://www.regionalproject.eu)  
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**Lifelong  
Learning  
Programme**

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## Executive Summary

In the course of the REGIONAL project, that aims to comparatively analyse Adult Learning (AL) policy formulation, implementation and financing in 21 regions in six countries within Europe, the project partners have conducted interviews with policy makers and, in support of the interviews, analysed policy documents released between 2011 and 2014 in order to gain detailed insight into policy making processes.

On the level of NUTS 2 Slovakia's regions have no governing structures. Therefore the analysis was done on the level of NUTS 3 regions. Out of 8 regions, 2 were chosen - Bratislavský Self-Governing Region and Prešovský Self-Governing Region as examples of two very different situations: Bratislavsky Region represents a central region, situated around the capital city, it is a competitiveness region, rich, urban, industrial, and covering a small area. The Presovsky Region is a remote region, lying in the easternmost part of the country, agricultural, rural, convergence region covering a relatively large area. The number of inhabitants is similar in both regions.

In Slovakia, a total of 5 interviews with policy makers were conducted between April and October 2014. Additionally, a variety of policy documents were studied to prepare for the interviews and put the results into context.

The decentralisation process in Slovakia (handing over the competencies from the central government to the regions) has been completed only recently and some policies have not yet been elaborated on the regional level. According to the research, Adult Learning is an example of such policy. Policy making is still done only at the central level, as well as implementation tends to be administered centrally. What can be found on the level of regions are partial policies on learning related to structural funds allocation and planning, mainly in connection with lowering unemployment through ("re-qualification") training.

## Introduction: REGIONAL Project and Slovakia

The main motivation for the project *Comparative Analysis of Regional Policies for Adult Learning* (REGIONAL) is the need to identify and exploit key factors influencing adult learning policy making. In doing so, the project pursues objectives on three different levels: firstly, detailed insights into the processes of policy making and their differences across Europe will be gained, secondly, the effectiveness and impact of policies will be improved and therefore, thirdly, the project will contribute to the overall objective of reducing major geographic disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes across and within EU regions.

More specifically, on the level of insights into policy making processes REGIONAL aims at supplementing large international comparative studies that ascertain regional disparities in performance of adults but also in participation in adult learning programmes. In their communication “Adult Learning: It Is Never Too Late to Learn” (2006) the European Commission highlights how “barriers to participation by individuals may be policy-related”. The project therefore grants insights into the process of policy formulation, implementation and funding to shed light on the formal aspects of policy making and their influence on adult learning.

The primary research was based on interviews using a standardised questionnaire comprising open and closed questions on formulation, implementation and funding of AL policies. Since on the level of NUTS 2 Slovakia’s regions have no governing structures, the analysis was done on the level of NUTS3 regions. Out of 8 regions in Slovakia, 2 were chosen: Bratislavský Self-Governing Region and Prešovský Self-Governing Region, a competitiveness and convergence regions in 2007-2013 terminology (transition and less developed regions in 2014-2020 terminology) with very different characteristics in terms of unemployment, inhabitants per square kilometre, GDP.

A total number of 6 interviews were conducted, 1 as a test interview and 5 interviews that were used further. In all cases, non-elected policy makers were interviewed. One representative from each region was interviewed and three representatives of the national level policy making, Ministry of Education, Slovak Academic Information Agency and National Lifelong Learning Institute. We had to turn to the national level, since the regional levels do not deal with AL as such. They include elements of AL or lifelong learning into overall regional development strategies, though. Therefore the main finding is that on the regional level in case of Slovakia

we cannot speak of a policy on AL. As for the national level, all relevant main documents refer to lifelong learning, not AL as such. However, they cover the training realised after the formal learning which we believe is the equivalent of AL. The 3 national agencies that we interviewed deal with different aspects of AL - accreditation or formalisation of teaching products (Ministry), funding of selected projects through EU funds (SAIA) and implementation of national projects aimed at lowering unemployment and being a contact point for several EU initiatives in the area of AL (NLLLI). Also their understanding of the overall goals of AL policies differed.

Furthermore, a desk research was conducted. It included all documents related to AL from 2011 until 2014 and reflected also older documents which were significant, such as the Act on Lifelong Learning (2009) which sets the main legislative framework. It should be mentioned here that there are specific laws regulating certain professions and further training in these, such as teachers, medical workers, veterinary care etc.

All documents were found on the websites of institutions – the Regions’ offices or national agencies. The documents on the level of regions were mainly the Regional Social and Economic Development Strategies while the national level documents were either the main overall strategic documents of the country (National Reform Programmes, Government Programme) or specific LLL documents.

	Slovakia	Bratislavsky kraj	Presovsky kraj
Population (2013)	5 421 034	606 537	818 916
Area in km <sup>2</sup>	49 035,30 km <sup>2</sup>	2 052,62 km <sup>2</sup>	8 973,36 km <sup>2</sup>
GDP/capita (2011, in PPS)*	75,4	186,1	44,1
ESF Region Type 2007-2013		competitiveness	Convergence
ESF Region Type 2014-2020		Transition region	Less developed reg
Employment rate (2013)	65,1%	-	-
Employment figures (2013)	2 177 848	437 666	245 428
Unemployment rate (2013)**	13,5	6,17	19,35
Participation in LLP (2013)	3,1%	6,2%	1,0%
Participants in labour market policy measures (training, 2012)	75 415	-	-

\*PPS – Purchasing Power Standard, an artificial currency unit. Theoretically, one PPS can buy the same amount of goods and services in each country. However, price differences across borders mean that different amounts of national currency units are needed for the same goods and services depending on the country.

\*\* Employment and Unemployment rates do not add up to 100% as they are calculated on the basis of different data sources.



## Policy Formulation

The AL policy is formulated at the national level, by the Ministry of Education. The Law on LLL adopted in 2009 has been amended several times and now a new law is being prepared. The initiative is driven by the Ministry in close cooperation with the National Lifelong Learning Institute. The aim of the new law is to define the system of monitoring and prognosing of training needs for the area of further education and harmonise the training offer and demands of the labour market. The law is prepared in wider partnership with employers' associations, trade unions, university and the Academic Association of Further Education.

The various national agencies deal mainly with non-formal and informal education in the context of AL. In interviews, the regional representatives referred to formal education and referred to secondary (professional schools) which partially offer also further education / AL courses in their premises. This reflects our finding that the concept of AL policy is not developed at the regional level. There it is connected with formal education and with perceiving the providers of formal education also as providers of courses for adults that can help reduce unemployment. We can see here a mix with Vocation Education and Training. So the comments that the regional representative gave about policy formulation are of general nature, concerning policy formulation process in general not specifically on AL.

The goal of AL policy was perceived as economic or social or in combination of both. Nevertheless the social goal was connected to the economic one – when the economic situation improves, also the social conditions improve. Most respondents see a clear link between the AL policy and actions for work.

The national level representatives agreed that AL policy is a stand-alone policy item, as it is not included in strategy papers on the school system and education, and it is framed by a separate national Law on Lifelong Learning from 2009 complemented with a Strategy on Lifelong Learning, updated in 2011. The regional policy makers felt that AL policy is included in general education policy or simply not included.

All respondents state that whenever they pursue a certain initiative, they make consultations. They are organized on different levels and with different parties, though. There is not a practice of preparing a sort of Green Paper, and the consultation is done on the basis of a document drafted by the body responsible. The stakeholders for consultations are identified on the basis

of a prescribed list or on the basis of processes from the past. The main stakeholders are business associations / private sector as the representatives of employers from the perspective of the regions, and also universities and civil society, seen by the national level organisations. The consultations are usually done at the beginning of the process, in case of need, and the reports on consultation process are usually not produced, unless a new law is prepared. Then the consultation process is formalized and comments are collected and included in the Explanatory Memorandum.

The respondents confirm that also internal consultations take place, with the aim to harmonise individual steps in implementation of the policy within an organisation. These internal consultations tend to be informal. Also other documents/programmes are taken into consideration – at national level: the Law on LLL and Strategy on LLL, government programme; on the EU level: Europa 2020, Structural Funds documents and AL documents. Regarding the data sources, there are Eurostat data used, national statistics (on further education, for example), regional statistics.

According to all respondents, the final documents are made available, however there is not a practice to publish the minutes of meetings or summaries of comments of informal consultations. A different situation is with drafting new laws when all the comments are collected together with responses or final solutions.

On the regional level, the most important documents that are consulted are regional development plans, national education policies, including lifelong learning. On the national level, the EU documents are mainly reflected, such as European Agenda for Adult Learning (2011), CEDEFOP documents, Europa 2020, European Qualification Framework.

With regard to specific data sources, the respondents at regional level listed the regional statistics on employment, reports from the Central Labour Office. The national level respondents mentioned the national information system on accredited training programmes, statistics on adult learning, on the EU/international level it was Eurostat and RegData as well as the PIAAC survey.

All respondents reported that they have contacts with other subjects. Whether on the regional or national level, there are contacts for example with the Czech organisations. Many contacts at the national level are maintained through the EU-wide fora.

Since there is no comprehensive AL policy and policy cycle in place, there is also no evaluation system in place.



In general, it is evident that planning documents are formulated in cooperation and consultation with relevant stakeholders. The formalised process of consultations takes place on the national level, when a new law is prepared, for example. This is apparent also in case of a new law on further education which is currently prepared in cooperation of the Ministry of Education, employers and academia. It is a pity, though that private providers and civil society are left out of the first stage of the consultation process. The wider consultation will apparently be conducted once a draft law is completed and submitted for inter-ministerial as well as public consultations.

On the regional level there seems to be an automatic intra-service consultation and in case of larger planning documents they also rely on help of external advisory committees.

The regional planning in general is very much linked to structural funds programming cycles and administrative requirements thereof.

## Policy Implementation

The activities listed here are mainly various accompanying measures, not really activities directly implementing the AL policy. On the regional level, there are for example activities, such as training courses offered by the secondary schools which are not systematically reported or registered anywhere.

In the Bratislava region they are thinking of introducing a voucher system for training based on the example and experience from the Czech Republic. In the Prešov region, there are various (international) projects running that support the schools and their teaching which are promoted also by the Prešovský Region office.

On the national level, the respondents list various conferences and seminars promoting AL (in order to increase the interest of citizens in adult learning) and in one instance the allocation of decentralized (EACEA) funds through EU wide calls for projects (ERASMUS+).

In general, it seems that the following are identified as problems:

- Lack of interest in AL / further education from the side of citizens in general
- Lack of funds to finance AL actions (covering not only professional training activities related to employability but also activities for personal growth)
- Lack of training offered in reaction to the needs of the labour market
- No system of recognition of results of non-formal training
- No system of recognition of trainers' knowledge/skills obtained through practice, non-formal or informal training
- AL not sufficiently defined and recognised as a stand-alone policy by the Ministry of Education
- Low level of cooperation between state regulatory agencies and private providers of training for adults

On the national level, there are a few national projects implemented that are relevant for the AL area. One deals with the National System of Qualifications, another with the National System of Professions. They should provide tools for better prognosing of training needs. The National Lifelong Learning Institute is implementing a project titled *Further Education and Guidance for Adults as a Tool of Better Employability on the Labour Market*. The project designed a number of training programmes for obtaining of certain qualifications identified as missing on the labour market, courses for trainers and set up guidance centres providing career advice. The project was criticised for not building upon what already exists, not cooperating



with private providers and creating new structures that have questionable future after the project is finished.



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## AL Funding

As the main source of public funding, all respondents identified the EU funds, in cases of national level it was 100% of funding, on the regional level also national and regional funds were mentioned. In one case of a national agency, also employers were mentioned. All respondents report that they work with the EU funds according to EU/nation-wide rules, on the project basis. PPPs are not used in financing schemes as it is not a usual practice and no rules/guidelines are set.

Insufficient funding and the absence of an AL financing system have been mentioned by several respondents. One respondent (national level) suggested that since the formal education is free of charge in SK, also the adult education should be free. Other respondent mentioned that there are discussions on introducing a rule in the Labour Code requesting the employers to provide for employee education (eg set a number of days that should be spent on training) and urge them to pursue AL courses. The financing could be secured through setting up an Education Fund to which a certain percentage of the employee salary would be allocated.

## Key findings

There is a Strategy of Lifelong Learning (originated in 2007, updated in 2011) with an Action Plan from 2011. However it is not used as a tool for implementing the actions and it seems that no monitoring on progress is done at the moment. There are however a few nation-wide projects financed from ESF implemented that are aimed at fostering the AL issues.

On the regional level – there is naturally a number of training institutions offering non-formal learning activities, however there is no monitoring of these. Also a more active approach from the side of employers would be welcome – if they specified which qualifications are demanded and what skills the labour force should possess.

On the national level, there is no systematic approach to AL. The validation of training and financial mechanism are missing. There should be a clear system for designing and running of courses within the further vocational learning, in terms of scope, content, completion, financing, quality monitoring, accreditation. Such system needs to be accompanied with a set of

registers/databases (quality/certified institutes, of training programmes, of qualifications/professions demanded by employers).

The National Reform Programme in the chapter on Education deals also with Further Learning. The need to increase the quality of educational programmes as well as the quality of educational institutions are voiced.

Among the main drivers of the policy formulation the respondents list the availability of EU funding and efforts to lower the unemployment.

What could help the policy makers are best practices, examples from other countries and cooperation (especially the one between employers and schools in terms of stating the needs and reflecting them.) A survey such as PIAAC for regional levels and regional statistics on AL would be helpful.

A comprehensive statistics on (active) providers of education and available courses would be helpful as well as a good information system on courses, and providers.

## Conclusions

AL policy at regional levels is not formulated. The main national strategy papers on lifelong learning (covering also AL) were prepared on the basis of the European Commission's Memorandum on Lifelong Learning from 2000. The current activities in the area of AL are framed by the Act on Lifelong Learning from 2009 and a Strategy of Lifelong Learning including an Action Plan from 2011. The Strategy is being implemented slowly and basically only through national projects funded by ESF. It seems that no national funding is used for the AL sector. However, currently there are efforts to change this situation and a new law is prepared that should introduce a complex system of designing, quality control of training programmes, institutions, monitoring of needs and also financing.

However there are also regional activities in this area, albeit not recognised as such by name AL (the terminology that is used includes further education, continuous education, requalification). They are included in chapters on Employment or Human Resources within the regional Social and Economic Development Plans. Here the main goals are to create opportunities for labour force to qualify and re-qualify to be able to stay on the job or find a new one.

The planning and implementation of any activities in the AL area is driven by the EU programming, and Structural Funds administration.

The Strategy on Lifelong Learning mentions 3 dimensions of LLL, however only the economic dimension is being pursued through implementation. The social/societal/active citizenship and personal development are not reflected.

As lessons learnt we could offer the fact that a lot of funding can be directed to AL area from structural funds. The precondition for efficient use is good statistical data, information on learning needs and an AL strategy on regional level.

The national policy on AL formulated at the centre needs to be transferred to the regions and reflect the regional needs in order to be efficiently implemented.

Once there is a decision to formulate a regional AL policy, a network of all relevant stakeholders should be set up and an analysis of the situation with regard to training needs and existing opportunities should be prepared.

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