

MAIN CHALLENGES TO ADULT LEARNING IN MONTENEGRO



The contents of this paper are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the ETF or the EU institutions.

© European Training Foundation, 2011
Reproduction is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.

MAIN CHALLENGES TO ADULT LEARNING IN MONTENEGRO

**PREPARED FOR THE ETF BY GORDANA BOSKOVIĆ
AND LJILJANA GARIĆ
March, 2011**

1. INTRODUCTION	2
2. LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPING ADULT EDUCATION.....	4
3. KEY ISSUES IN ADULT LEARNING	5
4. ELEMENTARY FUNCTIONAL LITERACY PROGRAMME.....	8
5. CURRENT CHALLENGES AND CONCLUSIONS	12
REFERENCE.....	14

1. INTRODUCTION

Economic transition in Montenegro caused the disappearance of companies that previously employed a large number of people with varying levels of education and skills. Consequently, the unemployment rate increased. Much of the previously acquired knowledge, and many skills and competences became obsolete. The Employment Agency of Montenegro tries to enhance individuals' employability by offering professional training, retraining and upskilling opportunities.

According to the latest census from 2003, the official number of illiterate people in Montenegro is 12,617 or 2.35% of the population. However, if one considers the definition of literacy, the actual number of illiterate people is higher. In Montenegro, literacy is generally associated with basic education and key competences. Functional literacy is regarded as literacy for the 21st century and implies comprehensive knowledge and skills that help individuals understand natural and social processes and allow them to respond actively to them. It implies knowledge of key competences such as foreign languages, entrepreneurship, IT and other technologies, and a value system that is based on sustainable development and lifelong learning. Training is offered in these competences and those who succeed in mastering them receive a certificate.

The traditional education system was geared mainly towards knowledge rather than skills, while competences hardly featured at all. Given the large number of people who did not complete basic education, achieving the level of literacy mentioned above will prove to be a challenge.

The general education goals for both young people and adults in Montenegro are:

- to acquire professional and general functional knowledge, skills and competences to allow people to enter the labour market and become useful members of society;
- to find employment or keep existing jobs through continuous professional development.

Educational institutions, in cooperation with other public institutions and local self-government bodies, are charged with creating the conditions for meeting these challenges. Within the scope of their activities, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Centre for Vocational Education, the Bureau for Educational Services, the Examinations Centre and other relevant institutions try to ensure equal access to education for both young people and adults. This involves including people with special needs, adapting training programmes and teaching methods to the needs and capabilities of learners and delivering high-quality knowledge, skills and competences. The latter in turn requires high-calibre training programmes, well-trained teachers, relevant learning contents, suitable didactic materials and learning conditions.

Since education reform began in 1999, the quality of work by educational institutions has improved considerably. In recent years, the Centre for Vocational Education has made a significant contribution to developments in education and training for both young people and adults. The centre was set up according to the principles of social partnership and is responsible for carrying out developmental, advisory, research and technical tasks.

The centre develops occupational standards subject to an analysis of labour market needs for certain profiles. Training programmes¹ are elaborated on the basis of these standards. The programmes are then adopted by the Council for Adult Education. Training programmes contain clearly defined and easily measurable learning outcomes to be achieved by trainees at the end of the programme. At the time of writing, the council had adopted 63 job-oriented programmes

¹ In the Montenegrin system we distinguish between 'curricula' – a term that refers to programmes used in the formal education system – and 'training programmes'. The latter are typically shorter and used for adult learning; they may focus on a number of areas including professional qualification, pre-qualification, additional qualification and upskilling.

(leading to a qualification) and 33 programmes focused on the acquisition of additional knowledge, skills or key competences (not leading to a qualification). The Centre for Vocational Education has prepared more programmes and these are currently awaiting adoption. Drafting such programmes in line with labour market and employers' needs is a continuous process.

2. LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPING ADULT EDUCATION

Adult education in Montenegro is an integral part of the education system. The field is governed by the General Law on Education² and the Law on Adult Education³, as well as a number of other laws (rulebooks). The Strategy for Adult Education in Montenegro for the period 2005–15 provides guidance for adult education development. The Adult Education Action Plan for the period 2010–14, which has been derived from the strategy, defines priority areas, objectives, and tasks in more detail. An annual Action Plan implements the strategy and the plan.

Adult learning in Montenegro is based on a lifelong learning concept, which is defined as a continuing learning activity aimed at improving knowledge, skills and competences. As one of the central principles of EU policy, lifelong learning in Montenegro is considered to be extremely important and the basic strategy for socio-economic growth and individual wellbeing. Education and learning is not just about preparing for life, but is also an important aspect of life in a modern society. As such, the role of the Adult Education department at the Centre for Vocational Education is to develop adult education by:

- ensuring continuous learning with the aim of acquiring and improving knowledge, skills and competences;
- raising awareness of the importance of investing in human resources;
- acknowledging non-formally or informally acquired knowledge and skills and their links with the formal educational system;
- using appropriate adult education methods;
- establishing a quality system in adult learning;
- providing quality information and counselling on lifelong learning opportunities;
- ensuring the availability of education and learning for all citizens;
- developing a variety of educational services for all population groups.

² Official Gazette of the Republic of Montenegro No 64/02 and amendments to the law in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Montenegro Nos 31/05 and 49/07.

³ Official Gazette of the Republic of Montenegro No 64/02 and amendments to the law in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Montenegro No 49/07.

3. KEY ISSUES IN ADULT LEARNING

Since reform began in Montenegro, increasing recognition has been given to the importance of adult learning. Adopting the Law on Adult Education and various other laws and developing strategic and methodological documents have helped to define more clearly the aims and activities involved in adult learning. However, further development of the system and its harmonisation with EU policies is hampered by a number of factors. These include a lack of investment and sufficient numbers of well-trained people to provide support to the staff responsible for adult learning at the Centre for Vocational Education. Key issues in adult learning in Montenegro currently include the following:

Legal issues

As already mentioned, adult education is governed by the General Law on Education and the Law on Adult Education. Legal barriers, caused by delays in adopting laws governing the provisions of the Law on National Vocational Qualifications, have led to practical problems.

Shared responsibilities and social partner involvement

One of the main issues in adult learning is the development of a concept whereby the responsibility for adult education is shared between individuals, local communities and the state rather than being the remit of just the state and the Ministry of Education and Science. The general plan is for Montenegrin citizens to become responsible for their own education or improvement, while local communities and the state are to provide the necessary conditions.

Adapting adult education practice to the needs of learners requires the active participation of local self-government in planning, organising and financing education and training. The acceptance of responsibility for developing adult learning by local self-government is therefore a key issue that must be addressed.

The lack of active participation by social partner organisations and individual employers, primarily because they do not recognise the important role they play in education, poses a serious barrier to adult education development in Montenegro.

Even if they have good structures in place in terms of technology and human resources, companies are ill-prepared to organise practical training. They provide scarcely any training, including training for unemployed people that would allow them to acquire up-to-date, practical and useable knowledge and skills.

Developing key competences for all

The immediate focus is on developing functional literacy and key competences among the entire population, including employed and unemployed citizens. The Centre for Vocational Education is currently providing professional and technical assistance to adult training providers in the preparation of training programmes. These programmes will cover the acquisition of key competences, including English, information and communications technologies (ICT) and entrepreneurship. However, no research has been conducted in Montenegro to assess levels of key competences and inform the discussion about development in these areas.

Licensing of providers and programme quality

A specific problem faced by institutions is that many adult training providers have still not been licensed for this work by the Ministry of Education and Science. This raises the issues of equal treatment of all providers and quality assurance in education. No deadline has been set by which all providers engaged in training activities, either on a part-time or full-time basis, must undergo such a licensing process.

To date, the Ministry of Education and Science has issued licences for 38 adult training providers. The majority of them are located in the central region, with only smaller numbers in the south and north. This illustrates a disparity in terms of the availability of education programmes in different regions in Montenegro. The large number of providers operating without a licence offer programmes that are not accredited or recognised at national level. No information is available regarding the number of beneficiaries (participants), programme contents or outcomes.

Another issue is that learning outcomes are not defined. If programmes are carried out by unlicensed providers it often means that trainers know the subject matter, but lack pedagogical skills and practical experience in training adults. Learners' prior knowledge is not assessed or taken into account and other factors result in non-homogeneous groups of learners.

Basic vocational education programmes, despite the fact that their quality has improved in recent years, can hardly be used for adult training. No modular system or mechanisms for programme accreditation exist. Consequently, the basic conditions for a gradual vertical progression, which would allow adults to switch back and forward easily between learning and work, are not yet in place.

Montenegro has no national database containing information on licensed institutions, programmes and trainers or people who underwent training at different levels of competence.

Qualified trainers

The quality of training needs to be improved and targeted more towards the existing and future labour market. Apart from revising programmes, this also involves updating teachers' knowledge and skills. The lack of teachers trained to teach adults and suitable didactic materials for learners poses a particular problem and is a major barrier to achieving programme goals in a quality fashion.

One area that requires attention is the training and professionalisation of teachers skilled in intercultural education, team work and conflict resolution. Improvements in this area would help to encourage inclusive education, generate respect for and understanding of learners' cultural diversity and identify shared values.

Training for vulnerable groups

Social inclusion is a challenge facing Montenegrin society as a whole. A number of measures need to be taken to successfully integrate marginalised or socially disadvantaged groups, including disabled people, into society.

The Adult Education Plan for the period 2010–14 identifies the education of vulnerable groups as a priority, as it is clear that ethnic minorities and disabled people have a low level of participation in adult learning. A certain standard of education needs to be encouraged and supported, and is a prerequisite for further education and employment. However, the state still cannot guarantee adults belonging to these social groups a continuous provision of programmes leading to basic literacy and a job that is in demand on the labour market.

Due to a lack of funds, considerable methodological work still has to be undertaken with a view to adapting training programmes for people with special needs and other vulnerable groups.

Data collection and research

The further development of adult education in Montenegro depends heavily on research and suitable data. Such data is currently not available. Apart from the fact that the lack of reliable data precludes a systematic approach, it hampers planning at a national level. The lack of information on the numerous training activities carried out within private companies means that the resulting picture of adult learning may not be complete. The basic conditions for conducting research are not in place, again due to a lack of funds.

No system exists for monitoring the impact of training on the professional development and career of graduates.

Regional balance

Another problem is the imbalance in educational offerings in different Montenegrin regions. While a good network of adult training providers exists in the central region, network development remains poor in the south and non-existent in the north.

4. ELEMENTARY FUNCTIONAL LITERACY PROGRAMME

One of the aims of adult learning is to achieve universal basic education, which, according to Montenegro's constitution, is compulsory and free.

The illiteracy problem is especially widespread among both the settled and travelling Roma population in Montenegro. Research shows that 80% of the Roma population are illiterate, the majority being women (Zeković and Delić, 2008)⁴. The starting point for completely illiterate people is elementary functional literacy. Apart from basic linguistic and mathematical literacy, this involves basic life skills or the minimum knowledge and skills required to successfully master work, family and social life. These skills may then be developed and improved further.

The Centre for Vocational Education prepared an elementary functional literacy programme which was adopted by the Council for Adult Education in 2006.

It consists of six subject areas:

- basic linguistic literacy in the Montenegrin mother tongue (for programmes conducted in Albanian, additional classes are envisaged in Montenegrin as a non-native language);
- mathematical literacy;
- education for parents and families, including basic health education;
- environmental education;
- education for life in the community;
- functional skills.

More specifically, basic linguistic literacy in the mother tongue (150 lessons) covers training aimed at:

- understanding and being able to express oneself orally and in writing;
- reading and writing the Cyrillic alphabet;
- reading and writing the Latin alphabet;
- knowing basic linguistic and grammar rules, gaining a higher level of cultural awareness and becoming more articulate in one's mother tongue.

Depending on the structure of student groups, the option of acquiring elementary literacy in the language of other ethnic or national groups should also be offered (72 lessons).

Mathematical literacy (120 lessons) implies the knowledge, understanding and use of cardinal numbers up to 1,000. Students practise adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing values. They also deal with ordinal numbers, percentages, units of measure for length, weight and time and basic geometrical forms and figures. Mathematical literacy also covers everyday tasks, such as managing household budgets, comparing prices, understanding weights and measures and dealing with travel-related issues such as currencies and time differences.

The family education programme, where participants can learn about basic health, parenthood and family life, comprises 20 lessons. This programme covers the concept and development

⁴ Additional data on Roma and Egyptian people is available on the websites of the Employment Agency of Montenegro (www.zzzcg.org) and the Roma Scholarship Foundation – Institute of Social Inclusion (www.isi-mne.org).

phases of a family, basic rights and obligations of family members, family relations and decision-making techniques, family needs, basic problems relating to family life and strategies on how to overcome them, conflict resolution and family planning. Health education addresses health risks, health protection and promotion, personal hygiene, nutrition (vitamins, foodstuffs and their correct preparation), first aid, symptoms of basic diseases and the appropriate response. It also highlights the institutional and social support that is available in the event of health problems.

Environmental education (10 lessons) deals with elementary natural phenomena such as air, light, water and climate, but also herbs and their significance for human beings. It also covers environmental pollution and its impact on human health. This module raises awareness of environmental problems and the need to develop a responsible attitude towards nature and to help protect it.

Education for life in the community (10 lessons) helps people understand the system of social institutions, basic civic rights and obligations and how life is organised in the community. It includes the hierarchy of institutions and how requests, documents and forms are submitted to them. The aim of this module is to emphasise how human rights are universal and indivisible for all people, regardless of their material situation, social status, colour, place of residence, nationality or religion and to help people exercise their rights and civil freedoms.

Functional skills cover basic information literacy (20 lessons). Participants learn how to use everyday modern technology such as cash machines and the means of mass communication.

The duration of the programme depends on the needs of the target group. However, it cannot be shorter than 20 weeks in total.

Upon completion of the elementary functional literacy programme, participants get a certificate that is equivalent to one that would be awarded on completion of the first cycle (third grade) of the nine-year elementary school system. After that, participants have the opportunity to continue with the adult elementary education programme, which is conducted at workers' or public universities. Alternatively, adults can enrol in a vocational education programme that qualifies them to enter the labour market at a lower skills level (level 2).

Implementing a pilot programme

At the end of 2007/beginning of 2008, the elementary functional literacy programme was carried out on a pilot basis within the framework of the EU-financed Second Chance project. Only licensed adult training providers were allowed to participate. Target beneficiaries were Roma and Egyptians living in Nikšić and Podgorica who had never attended primary school or had completed less than four grades of primary school.

All phases of the Second Chance project (2007/08) – and later also the Integration of Minority Groups in South-eastern Europe project (2009/10, see below) – were well advertised by the media. The Centre for Vocational Education also promoted the projects, and their results, at the Adult Learning Festival.

Ten assistants who had completed secondary education themselves were recruited from the Roma community and were key figures in motivating and supporting students. Incentives for course enrolment included monthly allowances for students and the possibility of entering training programmes for occupations at a lower skills level once they had completed the elementary functional literacy programme.

Six groups of students were established, 40% of whom were women. All students attended the programme for the same duration. Extra classes were organised and the Roma assistants provided learning support. Of the 88 participants who started the course, 67 met the requirements

for sitting the final exam; 90% of them passed the knowledge test and were able to move on to a vocational training course for lower-level occupations.

For the purposes of this project, the Centre for Vocational Education developed five occupational standards and relevant training programmes for (auxiliary) occupations, taking into consideration as much as possible labour market needs and participants' interests. Students could choose from the list of training programmes available. As an additional incentive, participants were allowed to attend computer schools for free and sit a driving test at the end of the course.

Evaluation findings

The Adult Education department at the Centre for Vocational Education monitored programme implementation from the very beginning up to the final exams. Further to its findings, the department suggested amendments to the programme, which were eventually adopted by the Council for Adult Education. The department recommended:

- setting up a technical commission to assess the mental, physical and other capabilities of prospective students before the programme started; the commission should be composed of a psychologist, an adult educator and experts from specialised institutions (mobile services);
- increasing the number of mother tongue classes from 150 to 200, as the programme is expected to deal with two alphabets (Cyrillic and Latin);
- increasing the number of maths classes from 120 to 150, given the complexity of the contents;
- organising seminars for teachers of the elementary functional literacy programme so that they can learn about working with adult learners and the methodological approaches to be adopted in adult education; this in turn should enhance the success of the programme;
- gradually increasing the number of classes per week (i.e. it is preferable to start the programme with a smaller number of classes each day/week and then increase the number over the course of the programme);
- guaranteeing funds to pay allowances to course participants to cover expenses such as travel and personal hygiene; the purpose of such funds, the conditions for obtaining grants and the amounts granted would have to be clearly defined;
- organising preparatory classes to help participants prepare for the final exam;
- engaging Roma assistants and organising training for them, as they provide excellent support in implementing the programme, helping to overcome language and other barriers to learning, preparing learning materials and ensuring regular attendance;
- planning 10 additional classes for participants who have difficulty in keeping up.

Teacher training

In 2009, the Adult Education department took part in the regional 'Integration of Minority Groups in South-eastern Europe' project. This was aimed at settled adult Roma in Podgorica.

The Adult Education department was responsible for organising and delivering introductory adult education training for teachers involved in implementing the project. Training focused on the specifics of adult learning, the adaptation of contents, working methods, training techniques, materials and duration. The seminars also involved Roma assistants who proved to be a valuable link between teachers and trainees.

The Adult Education department also engaged in project monitoring and in taking final exams, together with representatives from the Examinations Centre and the Bureau for Educational Services.

Adult learning requires special didactic and methodological skills on the part of teachers, a requirement that is recognised by the Law on Adult Education. Key principles relating to the

teaching of adults include the acceptance of the adults' experience in the learning process and the adaptation of learning contents, working methods, time, place and other conditions to the needs of adult learners.

The Centre for Vocational Education prepared a training programme for teachers working in adult education. The Council for Adult Education adopted the programme, which consists of seven modules. Six of them have been developed, while the conditions for implementing the seventh module (on distance learning) are still not in place.

The modules include:

- the specifics of adult learning, including lifelong learning, how adults develop knowledge and learn, socio-psychological factors, motives for and barriers to adult learning;
- communications in adult learning, including characteristics, elements and forms of communication, barriers to communication, conflicts and techniques to resolve them, interrelation and interaction between teachers and students, enabling adults to communicate;
- organisation, planning and programming in adult learning;
- facilitation of the learning process and group dynamics including visualisation and visual media, presentations, facilitation and relevant techniques, the role of facilitators, group dynamics, teams and team work;
- adult learning methods, including special adult learning methods and criteria for their selection and use;
- evaluation and self-evaluation, including the basic concepts and characteristics of evaluation, evaluation plans and processes, evaluation as part of the learning process, evaluation of the teaching/training, evaluation of the institution, educational indicators and standards, self-evaluation;
- modern adult learning models, including counselling of adults, use of contemporary ICTs, self-guided learning, options in adult learning, characteristics and alternative forms of adult learning.

Challenges facing the literacy programme

One of the main challenges is the creation of a cohort of well-trained adult education trainers who can implement the relevant courses in accordance with the principles underlying the teaching of adults and didactic and methodological recommendations. In order to achieve this aim, funding is essential to ensure the ongoing implementation of programmes.

The Centre for Vocational Education recognises the need to extend the number of educational offerings and create the conditions for their availability to all Montenegrin citizens. It intends to adopt programmes that will be implemented by licensed adult training providers, thus ensuring quality.

An inventory of illiterate people and people who have received training would help us monitor progress.

5. CURRENT CHALLENGES AND CONCLUSIONS

In summary, we would advise the following actions to help address the current challenges facing adult learning in Montenegro:

- extend the number of educational offerings by preparing a variety of shorter programmes to enable more citizens to avail of education and training that suit their needs and capabilities;
- develop key competences by embedding them in both school curricula and non-formal training programmes;
- train and facilitate the professional development of teachers;
- create the conditions for the assessment, validation and recognition of non-formally or informally acquired knowledge, skills and competences, as provided for by the Law on National Vocational Qualifications;
- ensure that citizens are better informed and advised on the opportunities for education and learning in Montenegro;
- promote lifelong learning through various activities and events, such as adult learning festivals.

It is also important to work on the following:

- preparing a methodology for adapting both existing curricula for young people and adult training programmes to the needs of socially disadvantaged groups and disabled people and developing new programmes in line with labour market needs;
- modularising curricula in vocational education to ensure that a certain educational level is gradually attained, especially by socially disadvantaged groups and disabled people;
- creating the material, technical and other conditions for different forms (formal, non-formal or informal) of education and training for disabled people and people from socially disadvantaged groups so that they can attain a higher standard of education, obtain employment and integrate into society;
- designing and developing didactic materials and teaching aids;
- setting a deadline by which all adult training providers should have passed the licensing process for engaging in adult education;
- strengthening the network of training providers and establishing a database of providers and training programmes;
- creating the conditions necessary for the development of systematic and theme-based research in the field of adult education;
- establishing mechanisms for monitoring the training activities of companies;
- diversifying training programmes and training types;
- assigning a major role, in accordance with legal provisions, to local self-government in education and training-related decision-making, including areas such as establishing goals and policy; this requires capacity-building on the part of local self-government bodies and proposals for courses of special interest to certain local communities;
- establishing agreement among all parties, including the social partners, which have still not recognised the value of investing in adult training, on the implementation of activities; this would be important for the further development of adult education in Montenegro;
- considering the possibility of organising distance learning, given the imbalance in education and training offerings across the regions; this would provide all citizens with equal opportunities for improving their competences.

Continuous learning and professional development is undoubtedly recognised as a key factor in the country's development and its progress towards EU integration. The Adult Education department at the Centre for Vocational Education is clearly focused on European objectives and policies in adult learning. However, the key challenge facing adult learning is finance. Many development activities have not yet been implemented due to a lack of funding. We therefore expect adult learning to receive more intensive support from both national and international organisations in the future. This will allow us to achieve planned goals and tasks and to enhance the quality of learning in Montenegro, which in turn would contribute to a better quality of life for our citizens.

REFERENCE

Zeković, S. and Delić, S., *Prilozi socijalnoj inkluziji Roma u Crnoj Gori*, Fondacija Institut za Otvoreno Društvo, Predstavništvo Crna Gora, Podgorica, 2008. Last accessed on 28 September 2010 at: www.isi-mne.org/cms/images/doc/Prilozi_inkluzija_Roma_CG_%282009%29.pdf

CONTACT US

Further information can be found on the ETF website:

www.etf.europa.eu

For any additional information please contact:

European Training Foundation
ETF Communication Department
Villa Gualino
Viale Settimio Severo 65
I – 10133 Torino

E info@etf.europa.eu

F +39 011 630 2200

T +39 011 630 2222

