



The Strategy for Lifelong Learning in Hungary

– An Overview –

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A European concept and Hungary

A European concept – lifelong learning as a prism for development policy

The European Union decided at the Feira summit in 2000 that, as part of the Lisbon strategy, member states have to write their own lifelong learning strategies. The meta-discourse of lifelong learning is very flexible; it means that individuals can take up learning at any stage in their lives (lifelong), that they can take up any form of learning (lifewide) and that there is a constant pressure or urge to learn in a knowledge-based society (learning society). The meta-discourse of lifelong learning is manifested in distinctive regional models according to distinct regional affinities, determined by the conjuncture of several societal characteristics, such as welfare systems, geo-politics of state systems, the concepts of statehood, political economy, etc. There are three progressive forces behind the meta-discourse of lifelong learning: personal fulfilment, the improvement of the democratic system, and the development of adaptability. Lifelong learning can thus serve as a prism for developmental policy which unifies not only strategic guidelines concerning the field of education but also policy considerations and developments of other sectors that contribute to the improvement of the country's human resources.

The Hungarian paradigm

Previous models of approaching education and the organisation of education placed the institutional system and the respective expectations in the centre of development policies. The focus of lifelong learning is on learning, the customisation of learning processes, and the needs and abilities of the individual. Key elements of the Hungarian lifelong learning paradigm include:

- **from cradle to grave** – lifelong learning encompasses the entire lifecycle of the individual, from early socialisation and pre-school education to retirement age in terms of employment;
- **learning for all** – targeted programmes combating learning disorders, alternative learning and teaching strategies that offer another chance for drop-outs, and measures strengthening the relationship and the interaction between learning situations and the environment are appreciated;
- **diverse learning objectives** – learning is not only a tool for finding and holding the appropriate job, but something positive in and of itself: it also permeates several other dimensions of an individual's quality of life;
- **emphasis on the development of competences** – general, professional, social competences enable people and communities to retain their integrity in a permanently changing environment;
- **schools can also build on out-of-school knowledge** – formal, non-formal and informal learning;
- **new learning culture** – by means of an adequate shift in attitude and approach through appropriate teaching/learning methods and tools, motivation to learn can be increased, and learning can become an enjoyable, rewarding and successful activity;
- **integrating the different forms and levels of learning, education and training into a single system.**

The Hungarian lifelong learning paradigm is based on the premise that in a competitive knowledge-based society and economy, there is an ever intensifying demand for the institutional systems, which assist learning and the dissemination of knowledge, to be adjusted to individual and community expectations. The aim of the Hungarian strategy is to outline the policy guidelines and the practical work to be performed to this end. Based on this strategy, education, training and certification systems become capable of ensuring – in the long run – adequate foundations and an opportunity for continuous development for all with a view to the dynamic development of their competencies. These in turn facilitate productive participation in the labour market and the improvement of national competitiveness. The programme for the development and building of the system of lifelong learning can only be successful if it forms an organic part of the overall programme of the development of Hungarian society and economy. To this end – in terms of its nature – the strategy does not follow the content and structural model of traditional sectoral strategies; instead it relies on a novel approach. An overt aim of the strategy is to promote consensus around the action programmes and action plans of the various sectors which target systemic development.

The accomplishment of the strategic objectives – contribution to the improvement of the individual's quality of life

The **SWOT ANALYSIS OF LIFELONG LEARNING** below shows the challenges the strategy is facing:

STRENGTHS

Consensus among political decision-makers and professional directors on the need for the strategy

Wide publicity of the EU's strategy for lifelong learning among experts and decision-makers

Sub-sectoral strategies and legal regulations, and an operating institutional network related to their implementation

Considerable non-state sources for subsidising training

Training levels and paths that are relatively open towards each other

Exclusive innovative capacity of formal education and training systems

A developed institutional system of the labour-market, high standards of active measures

Continuous increase in the number of participants in secondary and tertiary education

Improving qualification level of the population

Growth of education and training expenditure relative to GDP

Institutional frameworks for cooperation between the concerned partners have been established

Wide market of adult education supply

OPPORTUNITIES

Growing public and private sources for human resources development

The spread of knowledge-intensive sectors in the economy

Measures to disseminate more flexible forms of employment

Expanding learning forms due to technological development (e-learning, ICT)

Partly as a result of EU membership, an increase in the interest of the population in learning and the acquisition of marketable knowledge

The EU's long-term policy commitment to the strategy for lifelong learning, the implementation of national policies for lifelong learning is expected to be funded from growing community resources

Strengthening international cooperation will facilitate familiarisation with best practices

WEAKNESSES

Absence of a legitimate and coherent institutional system designed to monitor the strategy for lifelong learning and its implementation and the lack of stability of legal and financial backgrounds

An insufficient level of basic skills, labour-market skills and social competences of Hungary's human resources

A low headcount of the participants in adult education compared to the EU, under-representation of people with low level of qualifications, the elderly and the inactive

Poor participation of the formal education and training systems in lifelong learning with special regard to adult education and the development of key competences

Low participation rate in higher education in the field of natural sciences and engineering and in PhD and doctoral training (ISCED 6)

Considerable school drop-out rates (particularly in specialised secondary schools)

Weak institutional cooperation between the formal education system and the labour market:

- the content of training does not match economic requirements
- the vocational composition of school-leavers does not meet labour-market expectations
- weakness of career guidance and counselling
- the lower-than-EU-average ratio of people with an academic degree in the active-age population

Insufficiency of cooperation between the concerned actors at a regional level

Inadequate standard of human and infrastructural conditions needed for the wide-scale dissemination of a modern learning culture

Absence of a modern, nationwide measurement, assessment and career monitoring system

The relatively low participation rate of the business sphere and the individuals in financing the costs of lifelong learning

THREATS

A significant restructuring in the number of students and the active-age population as a result of demographic processes

A process of falling behind and exclusion of social groups suffering difficulties

International competitiveness of Hungary will weaken owing to the further deterioration of the quality of human resources
Society's willingness to invest in learning will decrease

Deteriorating social cohesion and economic dynamism of the EU will weaken Hungary's commitment to the policy of lifelong learning and its promotion

A widening digital gap

Basic considerations of the strategy

The strategy adopted by the Government in September 2005 is a multi-sectoral document prepared by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour. It structures its fields of intervention along five priorities in order to introduce a comprehensive reform of the education and training system. These priorities will respond to individual demands throughout the life-cycle:

- equal opportunities;
- strengthening the links between the education and training system and the labour market;
- application of new governance methods;
- enhancing the efficiency of the education and training system, and increasing related public and private investment;
- improving the quality of education and training.

All five priorities aim at the improvement of the Hungarian education and training system with the basic premise that competence-based education in a lifelong learning perspective increases the capacity of individuals to adapt to labour market demands and thus their employability.

The importance of school-based initial education in the Hungarian lifelong learning strategy - lifelong learning can bring a strategic perspective to school reform rather than encouraging reforms which are narrowly defined by the targets that the system has set itself

The strategy does not only consider the ideal of lifelong learning as a strategy for continuing to educate people beyond their school years but as a cradle-to-grave concept of which schooling is an early phase. Particularly within the fifth priority of the strategy on the improvement of the quality of education and training, several strategic considerations focus on the improvement of early-socialisation, basic education, particularly on primary level as well as on the introduction of a new learning culture which involves the training of teachers and trainers within a lifelong-learning perspective. Accordingly, in order to educate lifelong learners the teachers themselves have to be self-reflective lifelong learners. In this case the students will become lifelong learners as well, who with their competence-based education will always be able to adapt, train and re-train, re-school and de-school (for older students) in accordance with the labour-market demands.

This means that the concept is based on the strong belief that education systems need to pay greater attention to improving broad cognitive and motivational outcomes of schooling. In so doing, schools will have to transform, ensuring that their staff are themselves lifelong learners, and that they become innovative as organisations to create more effective learning cultures centred around the perspective of the students. Moreover, education systems have to face the fact that prolonging initial education – through focusing too much on development in adult education – makes learning too front-loaded over the life course and is not cost-efficient.

Strengthening links between the initial and post-initial phase of education – the idea of self-directedness in the learning process: lifelong learning serves the purpose of being able to participate in and cope with a changing society across all stages of life

In order to avoid the Matthew-effect: the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, it is crucial to avoid individualised polity in the areas of initial and post-initial phases of education. If the two areas of polity remain divided, the present differences in participating in education will grow, and even cause similar differences in working conditions. The Hungarian strategy intends to create this link. Within this context, it focuses on questions of equal access to the institutions of public education as well as on providing a second chance for drop-outs. It encourages work-based learning and offers a smoother transition from school to adult life by combining education and employment, and thus bringing flexibility to pathways and choices in line with a less rigid demarcation between initial and continuing education. Moreover, it puts lifelong guidance and counselling to the forefront and emphasises their importance in the early phase of school education in order to improve students' progress through complex learning pathways. Lastly, a great part of the strategy deals with the evaluation of outcomes of formal and informal learning.

Several key changes encouraged within the strategy help the schools more systematically to transform themselves into learning organisations: networking, professional development, individualised learning assessments and responsive teaching strategies, R&D, and the exploitation of ICT by schools and educational management.

The lifelong learning strategy also seeks the improvement of the education and training system on an institutional level. It encourages close partnership between all actors – central and local administration as well as social partners – involved in the implementation process of the measures following from the strategy. Within this context, the strategy encourages the deep involvement of school-based education institutions in adult education in order efficiently to make use of all their available capacities, both in terms of staff and infrastructure. It also promotes close cooperation among formal education institutions (incl. secondary schools and universities) regional training centres, etc. in the field of adult education.

Areas of intervention and policy principles

The strategy distinguishes the following areas of intervention

Development of basic skills and key competences in public education

- Improving the standards of school preparation based on personality development
- Emphasis on key competences
- Transformation of secondary education with a view to competence development: competence-based secondary school leaving examination

The key to adaptation: a diverse and abundant supply in vocational education, higher education and adult learning

- Modernisation and streamlining of the institutional network of training
- Establishment of higher education-based regional knowledge centres
- The successful implementation of the Bologna Process in higher education institutions
- Development of the school-based/formal adult education in higher education institutions

Ever-extending learning opportunities

- Making the use of information and communication technologies a basic requirement
- The future of learning at the workplace
 - Creation of learning and development partnerships through the inclusion of social partners in order further to improve and boost the efficiency of the entire system of further training
 - Introduction of a national prize and financial incentives for employers who support training at the work-place on the basis of Western European models
- The prospects of informal learning, alternative learning forms
 - Development of distance learning

Career guidance, counselling and monitoring

- Career guidance in public education
- Establishment of an information and counselling system of nationwide scope implemented at regional and micro-regional bases, operating in the form of a network
- Measuring the success of school leavers in the labour market and feeding the results back to the training institutions

Recognition of informal and non-formal learning

- Creation of a new model of service provision and the transformation of the structure of vocations to assist the recognition of informal and non-formal learning
- Personal education identifier and joining the Europass system
- Building a single system of validation

Supporting disadvantaged groups and groups at risk on the labour market

- Preventing drop-outs
 - Development programme for vocational schools
 - Dissemination of the system of integrated education
 - Levelling out regional differences in education and training
- Chances for integration into lifelong learning
 - Rethinking social assistance and creating an environment that encourages the combination of learning and work
 - Disseminating part-time work practices
 - Designing an independent training programme for women on maternity leave
 - Improving the levels of qualification of the working-age population
 - Rethinking the support scheme of adult education

Establishment of a new teaching/learning culture

- New teacher roles
 - Enhancing the teachers' capacity for self-reflectivity
 - The model of learning organisation
 - Training and in-service training of teachers and trainers
 - International mobility in teacher training and in-service teacher training
- Culture of quality
 - Building a national assessment and evaluation system in public education which is focused on the elements of knowledge and key competences compulsory for all
 - Disseminating the culture of quality assurance
 - New emphasis in the content of examinations

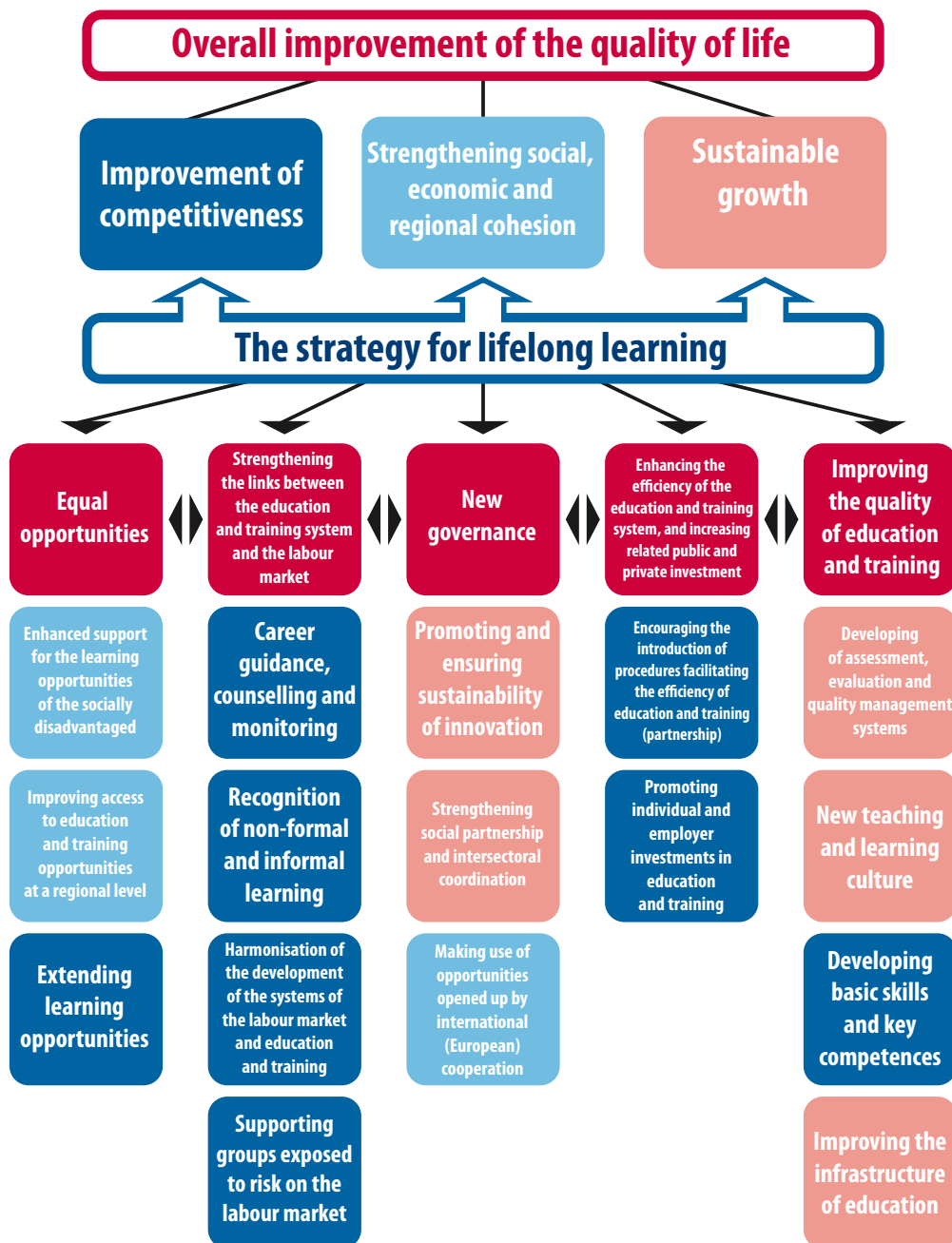
The strategy introduces the following policy principles for ensuring the development of lifelong learning on a systemic level in Hungary

- **Promoting innovation:** regulatory frameworks promoting change on the one hand, and capable of assuring reliability within a changing system on the other, shall be established.
- **Institution management, institution maintenance:** to create quality options and their utilisation, education managers should be aware of the latest educational tools, of the options of educational management and financing, as well as of intersectoral approaches to make education policy successful. It is important that these local initiatives have an influence on integration and social cohesion.
- **Financing:** individuals, employers and the state shall all assume responsibility for building an operating system of lifelong learning. The state should take steps favourably to influence investment mechanisms and to guarantee the quality of trainings. An increased contribution of economic actors to the investment can only be expected if investment in lifelong learning complies with quality requirements and contributes to the promotion of the financial position and competitiveness of the economic organisations involved. With a view to the efficient boosting of the demand side, the approximation of the financial incentive tools of lifelong learning should be ensured. Co-financing models – in-line with the learner-centred and demand driven orientation of lifelong-learning – build on the application of new financial incentives and tools, the aim of which is the support of individuals, particularly of those, whose participation is hindered by the costs of learning.
- **Coordinated development founded on social consensus:** it is important to maintain constant social communication on the strategy. In order to ensure intersectoral cooperation an interdepartmental committee, created from the representatives of the ministries concerned and operating in addition to government-level coordination, is indispensable. Through the continuous development of operating standards of the institutions and the continuous monitoring thereof by professional networks, the systematic dissemination and introduction of innovations can be ensured.

- **Lifelong learning in the context of European cooperation and global competition:** the sector of education, traditionally considered an area of public consumption, is emerging as a revenue producing one. Consequently, although the coordination and financing of the development trends outlined in the strategy are implemented in a national framework, it is already apparent that in the medium term, a major part of professional developments extends across national borders. This practice could lead to a regulation which takes into account both the best practices of other Members States and the features of global competition developing in the field of education-learning services.

Lifelong learning and quality of life

The chart below shows how the areas of intervention are related to the priorities of the strategy and how they contribute to the improvement of the individual's quality of life.



The **Strategy for Lifelong Learning** of the Republic of Hungary was adopted by the Government on the 28th of September.

The Government Decision (Nr. 2212/2005 (X.13) published in the official journal of the Government of the Hungarian Republic attached to the Strategy defines tasks for the different sectors regarding the implementation of the strategic objectives.

An outline of the Strategy's basic considerations and objectives is available in English on the official website of the Hungarian Ministry of Education: <http://www.om.hu/main.php?folderID=1027>

The full text of the Strategy will be available in English soon on the same website.





