



**“A EUROPEAN OBSERVATORY OF THE USE OF ICT-SUPPORTED LIFELONG LEARNING  
BY SMEs, MICRO-ENTERPRISES & THE SELF-EMPLOYED IN RURAL AREAS”**

**Work Package 3:  
SURVEY OF THE TRAINING PROVIDERS,  
TRAINING RECIPIENTS & THE CONTROL  
GROUP**

**SYNTHESIS REPORT**

**Executive Summary**



**Athens, November 2007**

## **Executive Summary**

Innovation is an area of competitive economic behaviour that has implications for education and training systems. The focus is no longer solely on acquisition of knowledge but has widened to include new values, utilise past experience and give a stronger focus to Life-Long Learning by tailoring it to individual needs. Nowadays, the business world requires enterprises to accomplish more in a shorter timeframe. The skills of its employees and the speed of knowledge transfer is a dominant indicator of how fast and efficient an enterprise can perform. An equally important factor of organisational success is the ability of the organisation, and its people, to perform in a coordinated and systematic way, i.e. the capacity to adjust, transform and respond to technological changes.

New technologies have increased that demand for new skills, i.e. the specific skills required to operate Information and Communication Technologies and the generic skills required to operate the information interfaces that are entering most areas of life. Before choosing ICT-aided methodology in any form of continuing vocational training, however, it is essential to get as much information as possible about the target groups (e.g. experience, background), its resources (e.g. availability, access) and the contents of the training programmes. Further, it is important to motivate individuals to take up this form of learning, without, however, claiming that ICT-supported LLL is easy, i.e. it is important to know our audience, not to frighten potential trainees about the use of new technologies and try to speak the same 'language'. All involved stakeholders should realise that the enhancement of skills and business performance depend on certain strategies and techniques that go far beyond education and training. E-learning is not a goal in itself but a vehicle that contributes to accelerating and consolidating the transformation of individual and organisational learning. It is important to view e-learning as a tool for innovation and a key enhancer of change for the individual.

The EU has long appreciated the value of investing in new ICTs in transforming the EU economy into one of knowledge and innovation, i.e. the Lisbon Strategy. Modern ICTs configure new conditions for the entire European society by opening up horizons and offering opportunities that were – until recently – unimaginable. The technological convergence of all EU Member States is at the core of the Lisbon Strategy. However, such convergence takes time and cannot be achieved without providing the resources for research and innovation. The Observatory research comes at a time of great transformation in how individuals and organisations learn and how they transfer learning into performance and value.

Globalisation and the technological 're-' and/or 'e-volution' have modified the educational and training methods, needs and practices. The workplaces are now equipped with modern technological infrastructures and that calls for new tools, clear strategies and skilled workforce. But, can society really benefit from these changes, and if so, which social groups can cope with these new challenges and make the most out of these new opportunities? This report aims to critically present, analyse and synthesise the data collected from Training Providers, Training Recipients and a Control Group of people working or seeking employment in European rural areas. The collected data and the subsequent analysis assisted in building the 'provision' (supply) section (i.e. Training Providers) as well as the 'expressed' (i.e. Training Recipients) and 'latent' (i.e. Control Group) demand section of the Observatory.

In all three surveys, several issues such as the content and methods of training, location of activities, resources used for ICT delivery, training support and qualifications available to trainees, etc, have been researched, examined and analysed. In some of these issues, a certain degree of transnational convergence in the respondents' views has been observed. However, there were also topics where huge differences have been identified across the participating countries. Usually the training institutions are private commercial companies rather than public-owned institutions as it is the case in Finland and Poland. Further, in Greece, Hungary, Spain and the UK the vast majority of the training providers specialise in the services sectors while in Germany and Finland and Poland they specialise in several different sectors.

With the exception of Spain where most of the training providers are linked with Universities, in the remaining countries most of the training providers are linked with organisations concerned with certification and recognition of qualifications, or they are independent training organisations. The previous point is also confirmed by the training recipients and the members of the control group who have received training since they majority of them in all of the participating countries stated that on successful completion of their training courses they received just a certificate from the training institution. In other words, they seemed to be unsure with regard to the value of their studies and diplomas. Another key finding of this research is the fact that in countries like Greece, Poland and Hungary the training institutions hugely depend on EU and National subsidies while in Germany, Finland and Spain the trainees have to cover for the cost of their training.

Moreover, in Finland, Germany and Poland, the majority of the training providers target specific geographical regions as opposed to the Greek, Hungarian, Spanish and British training providers who target all the regions of the country in which they operate. Paradoxically though, while all training providers across the participating countries aim at different target groups, there is not a clear view as to how many of these courses are offered to the same target groups in rural areas. Additionally, the previous point is in accordance with the views of the training recipients and the members of the control group who stated that the main reasons for not taking up a particular ICT-supported course are family and job obligations. Also, the majority of the respondents of all three surveys seemed to believe that the main factors for the successful delivery of ICT-supported courses are modern infrastructures, trained staff and funding. At the same time, according to the training providers the previously mentioned factors constitute the main problems associated with the delivery of ICT-supported training, especially in rural areas.

Finally, e-learning platforms, websites, discussion groups and emails are the main methods and tools used for the delivery of ICT-supported courses, while the main type of ICT-supported courses offered by the training providers is that of blended learning. The training recipients and members of the control group expressed their views with regard to a number of statements related to ICT-supported training. The majority of them seemed to agree to the cost of the training is not too high (except the control group members in Finland, Hungary, Poland and Spain) and they also believed that good access to the basic equipment needed for such courses is a basic prerequisite. Also, it was also the Spanish control group members who thought that they do not have enough computer knowledge and skills in order to participate in

such courses, whereas the vast majority of the training recipients and the control group members in all of the participating countries stated that IT-tools can make learning easier. In addition, most of the respondents of both surveys clearly believed that using ICT tools in the training courses could save time because of the flexibility of training times, most of the training organisations had a good support systems and ICT-supported training is more motivating for them than a traditional training courses. The previous opinions that can lead to recommendations – and perhaps future policy decisions – clearly show that EU citizens are not afraid of this new ‘digital world’. On the contrary, they want to become familiar with the new technologies and their applications but their asking for user-friendly ICTs, trained staff and relevant infrastructures.

There are certain realities related to ICT-supported LLL, which should always be taken into account when designing future plans and strategies. All relevant stakeholders should realise that this is a digital era but at the same time society does not have to over-rely on technology. Also, it is misleading to believe that traditional education and training methods are not of any use anymore, but it is also wrong to rely too much on traditional education and training methods. Finally, even though the enterprises and their staff expect to see a return of their investment (i.e. money and time), nobody should expect/demand immediate results.

Since learning became a necessary precondition for employment, there is an urgent need for providing appropriate training programmes, designed to meet the requirements of the market and the needs of the trainees. The discourse of LLL has come to be dominated by the idea of employability, which seeks to place responsibility for continuing learning and the updating of skills on the labour force. However, in many cases, these continuing vocational training programmes come without the necessary level of support in terms of staff and equipment. Education systems should re-consider their aims and goals, and try to extend opportunities for learning outside the institutions and into wider layers of society at a widespread level.

Societal challenges indicate a well establish need for LLL. Competent action and commitment of all stakeholders is an area that needs to be re-examined and improved. It is also important to valorise informal learning, invest in individuals, recognise prior learning, empower learners and encouraging all EU citizens in their skill development. Further, there is a need to coordinate policy and actions both horizontally (i.e. bring together social and digital inclusion) and vertically (i.e. bring together all stakeholders in a new dialogue of innovation through e-learning). The question is how can e-learning contribute to this? How can it be a learning experience that can help individuals to discover things unknown to them now, acquire skills that can prove to be useful in the future, learn things that may think that are of no interest to them now? Linking learning, quality and innovation may be a good starting point.