

Editorial

Dear Readers,

We are glad to present you the final Newsletter of the project YOUNG_ADULLLT, with which we want to inform you about the latest events and outcomes of our project.

YOUNG_ADULLLT aimed at critically analysing current developments of LLL policies in Europe in order to prevent ill-fitted policies from further exacerbating existing imbalances and disparities as well as at identifying best practices and patterns of coordinating policy-making at local/regional level.

Currently, many young adults face difficulties in their transition from schooling to working life and a large number of them leave formal education either too early or lacking the necessary and adequate qualifications and skills to enter the labour market successfully. Against this background, YOUNG_ADULLLT has focused on Lifelong Learning (LLL) policies across Europe as they are aimed at creating economic growth and social inclusion especially for those groups in vulnerable positions. In particular, the main objective of the project was to yield insights into their implications as well as intended and unintended effects on young adult life courses.

Within the project's 36 months, we have implemented our plans by successfully completing the fieldwork research and conducting subsequent cross-case and cross-national comparative analyses. Fifteen partner institutions from nine European countries, representing a variety of institutional and national contexts, have worked together to complete the project's three phases. It has been challenging and enjoyable to work together and we have happily created a strong research and operational alliance. During our research project, we have collected and analysed a great variety of quantitative and qualitative data and produced manifold reports, deliverables, working papers and journal articles. The project has officially ended up on February 28, 2019. For this reason, we would like to share with you some of our overall results and most relevant findings.

You can find more information about our consortium, findings, impact and dissemination activities at the project's website.

Best regards from the YOUNG_ADULLLT dissemination and coordination team

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Summary of Insights from the Final Report to Research, Policy and Practice (WP8)

Work Package 8 has focused on comparative analyses of selected cases from our previous studies. Its main task was not only to bring together the variety of preliminary results from quantitative and qualitative research, but also to reach the project's objectives and discuss the findings against the background of its central hypotheses and research questions.

Thus, the Final Report to Research, Policy and Practice, completed by Marcelo Parreira do Amaral, Jozef Zelinka (University of Münster), Michele Schweisfurth (University of Glasgow), Hans-Georg Kotthoff, Juan Felipe (University of Education Freiburg) and Tiago Neves (University of Porto) was organised according to project's three central objectives:

- The goal of the first objective was to comprehend the relationship and complementarity of LLL policies in terms of orientations and objectives to their specific target groups.
- The second objective examined how effective policies are and whether the targeted groups (young adults) benefited or were negatively impacted by such policies.
- The third objective involved researching LLL policies and their embeddedness in the regional economy, the labour market, and individual life projects of young adults.

The Report's findings could be best discussed in relation to these objectives.

Regarding the first objective, there is a number of interesting results

First, the policy analyses have shown similarities in terms of the identification of target groups in different Functional Regions. This was very often based on varying conceptions of lifelong learning. In this respect, two notions had a significant impact on the definition of lifelong learning: *employability* and *vulnerability*.

The notion of *employability* was commonly referenced in the policies under study, either explicitly as a principal objective, or implicitly as a rationale that framed policy agendas and practice. Enquiring further, we identified four underlying logics of intervention (*Prevention, Compensation, Activation* and *Empowerment*).

In addition, the notion of *vulnerability* has substantially framed the way in which policies target their addressees. Once officially designated as vulnerable, young adults may unconsciously accept this ascription and behave according to predefined expectations of normality/deviance, thereby re-producing the socially established conditions that first produced their vulnerability. Moreover, expectations of a linear life course frame the interpretation of young adults' achievements or deficiencies. When policy-makers orient their work according to linear or 'normal' understandings of life courses, they risk

producing stigmatising and pernicious effects for those young adults who – for whatever reason – do not fit the mould.

This study has also revealed the discrepancies or mismatches between *how policies perceive local problems and how they devise appropriate solutions*. A vast majority of the policies under study highlighted structural deficits and inconsistencies in their regions, yet proposed policy solutions based on individual interventions. This, in turn, makes it hard for young adults to reach their desired or even socially expected outcomes, which often leads to demotivation, frustration and disinterest in participation in lifelong learning programmes.

When comparing young adults' and experts' perspectives, it became clear that there are very few examples of young adults being included in the design, implementation and enactment of policies, leading to ambivalences and misunderstandings. In contrast to this, in-depth comparative analyses have revealed that *young adults are active learners and are willing to take up new challenges*. Moreover, since many of them have had negative experiences that provide a reference for interpreting new learning programmes, they actively seek support and recognition in the generation of LLL policies.

With regard to target group construction and policy formulation, the research has shown that target group construction is based on rather broad criteria, such as age, level of education, sex, immigration status, and educational/training qualifications among others. However, such categorization does not provide accurate information on the context-specific conditions, living standards and actual needs of young adults. In addition, *since the policies often focus on lack of skills or personal deficits, they may indirectly promote stigmatisation and foster negative experiences*.

There is a tendency in LLL policy-making to help young adults to pursue or restore a 'normal' life course ('process of re-standardisation'). However, young adults tend to experience the opposite in their life course trajectories and do not necessarily follow a linear life-course ('process of de-standardisation'). *It was observed that many LLL policies have institutionalized the vision of a standard life-course, which creates additional demands on young adults and diminishes their chances of establishing a sustainable life trajectory*.

With regard to the second objective, the analyses have provided a number of notable findings:

Analyses showed that *significant differences exist between the living standards of young adults across and within regions* (both at national as well as at Functional Region level). In general, although not in the case of all countries, the least economically developed nation states hardest hit by the economic crisis also face the greatest regional disparities. There was evidence that the ongoing impact of economic recession on the living conditions of young adults is most pronounced in the less developed regions, or regions more exposed to economic shocks. When accounting for the contextual living conditions of

young adults and devising policy responses, attention needs to be paid to the mismatch between administrative boundaries and the dynamics of the regional setting.

The complexity and dynamics of Functional Regions produce manifold inequalities and disparities. For example, there are regions dependent on one economic sector, which frames labour market demands. Also, there are many regions with a high economic dependency on current market developments and changes. Such distinctive regional characteristics impact the ability to find permanent employment, develop more creative aspirations, or build lasting social and support networks. Against this background, *it is vital to account for the dynamic nature of Functional Regions, their changing administrative and territorial borders, their temporal developments and intersections with other regions and smaller units, as well as their expanding functional relationships.* In addition, intensified efforts to expand the data set at the level of Functional Regions are much needed to design and formulate responsive policy measures.

Every Functional Region has its unique pattern of governance of skills production and use, involving different actors, institutions and structural settings. Common to the majority of the Functional Regions was the presence of national institutions. Also, within each country, similar actors were often involved in the policies of different regions. Our comparative studies suggest that *all the regions experience a varying range of skills (mis)matches. Some regions are faced with skills shortages, while others are affected by skills surpluses. In this respect, skills equilibriums are predominantly found in urban areas (e.g. Bremen, Glasgow, Milan and Vienna).* Differing skills ecologies are, in turn, affecting the educational trajectories and possible job opportunities of young adults. Again, local dependencies, national structures and global economic development heavily influence unsteady skills equilibriums and raise new questions regarding the importance of local and regional economic, educational and labour market environments.

Finally, regarding the third objective, the examination of coordinated policy-making, including contextual and institutional analyses, has offered interesting insights into metagovernance constellations, parameters of the planning, implementation and provision of LLL policies and has led to the deliberation on reflexive tools for policy-making.

Departing from the observation that policy-making at local level can be best understood and assessed by accounting for its diverse elements, and that local LLL policy-making is highly context-specific, the researchers have adopted the approach of storytelling as policy analysis. This analytical procedure was helpful in establishing ‘relations between sets of relationships’. As such, *storytelling showed that the relationships between the designers’, implementers’ and addressees’ points of view are sometimes divergent and that often the ‘right’ choice is made by the addressees for the ‘wrong’ reason.*

The contextual analysis identified three distinct forms of metagovernance constellations that occur in mixed forms in the regions under study. *If hierarchical governance prevails, the main emphasis of policy-makers is on accountability, strict procedures, and process management. If market governance*

prevails, the emphasis is on competition, output and decentralization of structures. Finally, if network governance is the main governmental style, the policy-makers emphasize interdependence, interactive cooperation and more or less informal networks. In reality, none of these governance structures occurs in a pure form, but rather as a mixture of the above with an emphasis on one approach. On the basis of these metagovernance constellations, three particular configurations have been observed and further analyzed, focusing on interactions regarding target group construction, policy implementation, and pedagogical interactions. Tracing these various constellations has revealed the importance of reflecting on how metagovernance influences policy-making and contributes to its formation and design.

Looking at the various stages of the policy-making process, three particular phases – planning, regulation, and provision – have been focused on, offering the possibility of *developing a reflexive tool for policy-makers and other stakeholders involved in local and regional policy-making.* Using such a tool, during the first phase of planning a particular measure, policy practitioners could consider the frames of reference for target group construction, the various actors involved and their mutual relationships, as well as the perspectives and visions of young adults as active shapers of LLL policy-making. During the second phase, regulation, they have the opportunity to question the aims and objectives of policy measures, to think about the contextual factors that affect implementation, as well as the existing implementation arrangements and young adults' acceptance and expectations. In the last phase of provision, stakeholders can reflect on the organisational forms of pedagogical interactions, their strategic educational goals and targets, as well as the chosen styles of communication and the way young adults participate in learning processes.

Furthermore, our interest has been to analyse the embedding of policies in regional/local landscapes and the interactive patterns of policy-making across the selected research sites. In doing so, we have identified parameters that can inform reflexive LLL policy-making.

Visualised as a sequence of steps, the figure below suggests a reflexive tool for coordinated LLL policy-making. Based on the project's results, it shows three distinct phases of policy-making as discussed above. The sequence of steps – or windows – starts in the upper left corner and follows a set of questions facing those involved in policy-design, formulation and implementation. Each window includes a number of questions that serve to initiate discussions and that can be amended to best represent the local context and needs. Presented in multiple options, they call for deepened reflexion and deliberation on the issues mentioned.

The reflexive tool proposed here does not aim to account for all possible contexts and cannot foresee all aspects and features in the policy-making process. Rather it aims to spark a deliberative process – ideally involving the various stakeholders at different levels.

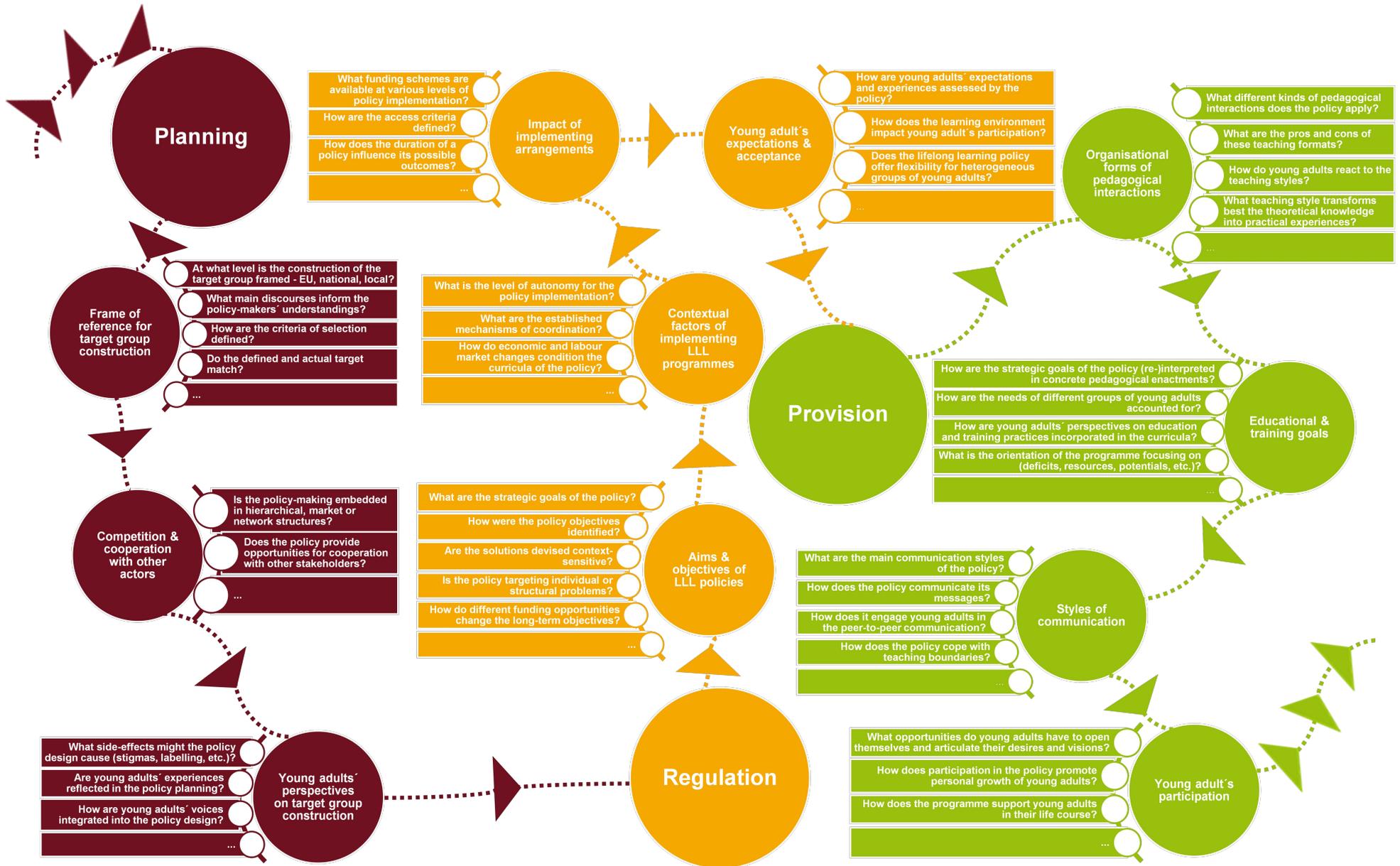


Figure 1: Windows of reflexivity for coordinated LLL policy-making

Presenting our European Policy Brief (WP9)

The goal of Work Package 9 was to report on the results of the YOUNG_ADULLLT project's findings to various audiences, including research, policy-making and the public.



The European Policy Brief edited by Tiago Neves (University of Porto), Siyka Kovacheva (University of Plovdiv) and Natália Alves (University of Lisbon), draws on the results from the National Policy Briefs, which summarised the results from the Policy Roundtables conducted in each of the 18 Functional Regions. It seeks to provide policy-makers and agencies with evidence-based analysis and recommendations to assist them in deciding over future courses of action, thus helping them in the creation of sustainable solutions for the issues involved in lifelong learning for young people.

The following policy messages refer to the five most important results:

- The alignment of LLL policies with the *dominant, European-wide employability discourse*, together with the fact that they are often designed at the European/national levels, hinders their ability to respond to specific local/regional challenges.
- The definition of target groups of LLL policies emphasizes notions of vulnerability rather than focusing individuals/groups at-risk of social exclusion due to structural barriers. *This practice risks 'blaming the victim' by assuming a standardised life course trajectory*, which individuals are able to follow (or not).
- Young adults are most often *not included in processes of policy formulation and implementation*, narrowing down the ability of policies to recognize and respond to their needs.
- Centralised processes of formulation, implementation, and monitoring of policies makes their adaptability to the different regions *highly dependent on the performance of local actors to translate them adequately to sub-national conditions and needs*.



- A key policy issue in LLL – namely devising policies that both address the needs of the labour market and economy and tackle issues of social exclusion – *is possible and feasible through a more fine-grained understanding of regional variations in skills ecologies and through the coordination of LLL policies.*

From these observations, we could derive several policy implications:

- ***Questioning the dominant representations of young adults put forward in policies requires recognising their active role not only as learners, but also as shapers of their own lives.***

Considering young adults ‘vulnerable’ because they do not follow a standard life course locates



the responsibility for their vulnerable situation on their individual behaviour, disregarding structural economic and socio-demographic conditions. Characterising LLL target groups in negative undertones risks generating social stigma against, for

instance, VET, regarded as a second – or even a last – choice for underachievers.

- ***Taking a wider perspective when defining LLL policy goals and orientations requires avowing a narrow view of ‘employability’ as simply intervening in individual’s preparedness for work.*** Eliding goals related to distinct sectors (labour market, social and youth welfare and education) creates ambivalences and contradictions in the functions of LLL policies. Recognizing that promoting employability does not fully or necessarily equals promoting equity, the empowerment of individuals and tackling poverty and social exclusion.
- ***Acknowledging that lifelong learning policy-making and its implementation are extremely context-specific, and accounting for the observation that each Functional Region has its unique pattern of governance of skills production and use, involving different actors, institutions and structural settings.*** Coordinating LLL policy-making requires increasing our understanding of the contexts within which measures are implemented – in particular by enhancing and improving data availability at regional and local levels. It is necessary to tap into new data sources not restricted to education and labour market status. The availability of information related to dimensions such as housing, social and political participation, individual well-being, relational and vital space and skills are needed for the construction of a more fine-grained analysis of the indicators of contextual living conditions.

The European Policy Brief was debated with members of the National Advisory Board and the European Advisory Board, which have provided several comments and observations from their respective points of view. As such, the wide audience is invited to make use from the findings presented in the European Policy Brief, which will be soon made accessible on the project's website (<http://www.young-adullt.eu/>), including the national language versions of the participating countries.

Final Conference & Policy Seminar took place in Lisbon

Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon, Portugal, has hosted the Final Conference & Policy Seminar of YOUNG_ADULLLT research project. The Consortium members together with guests active in research, policy-making and policy practice from nine EU countries have visited the Conference on February 11, 2019.



The Final Conference was the last event of YOUNG_ADULLLT, in which we have presented the overall results of our three-year research studies on manifold sites across Europe's Functional Regions. Prof. Dr. António Nóvoa, Portugal Ambassador to the UNESCO has opened the event with his key speech titled "How much long life is there in lifelong learning?" During his speech, Prof.

Nóvoa has reflected on various developments that affect lifelong learning in Europe and worldwide, in particular the changing meaning of education and lifelong learning in the light of the non-stop expanding market processes of the late capitalism.

During the afternoon Policy Seminar sessions, the project members, together with the invited guests from our European Advisory Board, have debated the impact of the project according to three central themes – "The meaning of lifelong learning in young adults' life courses. The extension of youth, lifelong learning, and vulnerability"; "Lifelong learning policies tackling vulnerability in the Europe's regions"; and "Coordinated Policy-Making in LLL? Dilemmas of articulation and fragmentation at the regional level". The sessions have highlighted the importance of a context-sensitive scope of analysing local and regional policy-making processes in lifelong learning.

As conference participants reported, for them, YOUNG_ADULLLT has brought new light into the concept of social vulnerability. Moreover, they have highly appreciated how the complexity of LLL policy-making was addressed in this project:



“What I also enjoyed quite a lot in YOUNG_ADULLLT is this institutional, organizational point of view, the way YOUNG_ADULLLT looks at all this different layers, all this multiple dimensions that are there. This is quite unique in my opinion.”

The Final Conference was closed by cultural act of "Tuna Acadêmica do Instituto de Educação" of the University of Lisbon, which presented social life of young adults in Portugal.

6th Consortium Meeting of YOUNG_ADULLLT

After the Final Conference & Policy Seminar, the Consortium members of YOUNG_ADULLLT have met for their sixth and last time on February 12 and 13, 2019, in Lisbon.



During the first day, the Consortium has focused on the last steps to take in the final phase of the project. This included drafting the final versions and submitting the Final Report to Research, Policy and Practice as well as the European Policy Brief.

In accordance with the project’s main questions and objectives, the Final Report aimed at responding to the

most pressing issues that traverse lifelong learning in Europe, such as social and youth vulnerability, mismatches in identifying policy problems and devising solutions, or attempts to develop a better-coordinated policy-making. The authors of the Final Report have successfully coped with the high

amount of knowledge generated during the project's lifetime and have captured the most relevant information for further research, policy-implementation and practice.

The authors of the European Policy Brief have summarised the results of national Policy Roundtables, which took place on eighteen sites across Europe, and have developed a number of policy implications and policy recommendations for European policy-makers. Within the Consortium Meeting, the members have discussed the possibility of further disseminating the project's results and collaborating in common activities and highlighted the importance of a free and open-access of project's findings.

During the second day, Early Career Researchers have met to agree upon further research plans and have shared their interests on topics studied in YOUNG_ADULLLT and possible topics for further collaboration. As a result, they have established a network – "RYOT-Network: Research on Youth's Opportunities in Transition" – for future cooperation and coordination of their research studies. Within the RYOT-Network, the young researchers have decided on their responsibilities, middle-term plans, meetings and joint activities.

Words of Appreciation

Since the beginning of the project, the partners have collaborated with passion, hard work and commitment on reaching the project's objectives. For their high engagement, the project could successfully proceed and reach its targets.

The Coordination of YOUNG_ADULLLT would like to express a deep gratitude to all partners involved in planning, designing and launching of the project, who have laid down the ground for a sound, coherent and feasible research. Many thanks go also to a number of researchers active in empirical phase of the project, which included fieldwork, interviewing young adults and policy experts, collecting of data and investigating policy documents. We appreciate all partners, who have conducted the analyses of case studies as well as final comparative analyses for summing up the preliminary results and delivering the final reports and policy briefs.

Apart for the project's partners, we would like to thank all members of National Advisory Board and European Advisory Board for their invaluable recommendations, comments and feedback during various stages of the project.

Finally, by opening up the complex relationships that the lifelong learning policy-making in Europe entails, we hope to have inspired you to study the challenges that Europe's youth is currently facing.



The YOUNG_ADULLLT Research Consortium



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