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**OPERATIONAL PROGRAM
EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING**

**PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY
ON LIFELONG LEARNING ISSUES
MAIN CONCLUSIONS**

**ATHENS
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INTRODUCTION

The 'Public Opinion Survey on Lifelong Learning Issues' was carried out on behalf of the Administrative Sector for the Management of CSF programs of the Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning & Religious Affairs, in the framework of the operational program 'EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING', with the aim of:

- A. Providing insight into the attitudes, knowledge and awareness of Greek citizens regarding the existing situation and outlook for Lifelong Learning (LLL), and
- B. Recording the respondents' experiences with Lifelong Learning, their intention to participate in LLL programs and their learning preferences.

The survey was carried out among the general population, aged 18 and over, nationwide. The sample size was 3,050 individuals. The (only available) 2001 census of the National Statistical Service of Greece was used as the sampling frame. The multi-stage stratified sampling method was used to select the sample. The survey data was collected by means of telephone interviews and the use of a structured questionnaire, at the homes of the respondents. The field survey was conducted from 23 December 2010 to 18 January 2011. The survey team comprised 46 researchers and 2 supervisors.

SUBJECT OF THE SURVEY

As already noted, the survey had a dual purpose: on the one hand, to provide insight into the Greek public's attitudes and views concerning Lifelong Learning¹, and on the other, to record the respondents' experiences with Lifelong Learning, their intention to participate in LLL programs and their learning preferences.

An effort has been made in the survey to identify the needs of all social groups and categories relating potentially to participation in and expansion of Lifelong Learning programs in Greek society.

In addition, the survey looks at: a) the relative importance and hierarchization of motivations for participating in a Lifelong Learning program, and b) the existence of impeding/constraining factors that act as obstacles to participation in such programs.

More specifically:

i) The motivation for participating in a Lifelong Learning program, as is clear from the relevant international bibliography, takes many forms: acquiring knowledge about issues of interest to the prospective participant, matters relating to everyday life, personal pleasure, or self-actualization. There are also important job-related factors, such as ensuring one's current employment, career advancement, finding a new job, gaining additional qualifications, as well as simply meeting new people.

ii) The impeding/constraining factors that may deter one from attending a Lifelong Learning Program are also numerous: age, health reasons, distance to teaching location, lack of time, family obligations, ineligibility, financial inability, unwillingness to 'return to the classroom', lack of support from one's employer (in the case of programs that clash with working hours).

¹ In this survey report, the term *Lifelong Learning* is defined as: all the learning activities in which one participates during one's entire life, with the aim of improving one's knowledge, skills and abilities at a personal, social or job-related level. The context of such activities may be: I. '**Formal**', i.e. in the framework of regular compulsory education, at state or private institutions (schools, colleges and universities, with diplomas recognized by the Ministry of Education). II. '**Non-formal**', i.e. outside the regular education system, but in an organized form, including teaching of short- or long-term duration, e.g. courses, seminars, conferences. III. '**Informal**', i.e. learning without a teacher, which includes activities that are not taught, or study programs without the involvement of any teacher, school or institution.

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At the same time, the survey examines the ways and the reasons why adults decide to embark on the path of acquiring new knowledge, after disengaging from the education process many years ago.

The large sample size enables the identification of any variations also in the comparative evaluation of conclusions in specific sub-groups of the population, e.g. those aged 55 and over, the unemployed, etc., as well as an investigation of the learning processes in the separate social categories.

The mapping of specific demographic and social characteristics of the respondents was deemed necessary in order to correlate these with their opinions concerning the LLL parameters under examination, and use them in the formulation of the final conclusions.

In cooperation with the commissioning party, the following topics comprised the main axes of the survey:

- General views about learning and more specific information about the level of education/training of respondents.
- Preferred methods of learning.
- Previous training and educational experience, e.g. participation, motivation and benefits.
- Intention for future participation, including motivations, obstacles, as well as possible incentives that may serve as a driving force for participation.
- Policy issues relating to basic skills and the funding of Lifelong Learning programs.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS

Citizens are overwhelmingly in favor of the strengthening of the institution of Lifelong Learning. Even though they do not feel fully informed about LLL, they are able to identify a number of practices through which it is implemented, they consider it to be very important in a person's life and they express high rates of personal interest.

Almost 6 in 10 respondents have participated in Lifelong Learning in either a non-formal or informal context at some point in their life. This participation in a non-formal context in the last year stands at 26%, while the corresponding rate for informal Lifelong Learning is 86%. The main obstacles to participating in Lifelong Learning processes, as reported by respondents, are lack of time and lack of interest/motivation.

In the survey, 1 in 2 respondents (50%) stated their intention to participate in some form of non-formal Lifelong Learning during the coming year.

Over half the respondents (54%) expressed their desire to learn "something". The reasons for their interest are primarily personal as opposed to job-related. The methods for which they show a stronger preference for participating in LLL are outside classical taught activities (e.g. teaching in a classroom setting or private lessons from a tutor) and of a more alternative nature, such as participation in a group of people with the same interests, the Internet, or a less formal seminar or workshop.

OPINIONS ABOUT LIFELONG LEARNING

- For roughly 1 in 4 respondents (24%), their **subjective opinion about the phrase Lifelong Learning** is correctly associated with the basic concept underlying LLL, namely the continuous enhancement of knowledge, skills and abilities throughout the life of an individual. Some 24% of respondents know nothing about Lifelong Learning, or cannot spontaneously identify it with some opinion. The remaining respondents use words such as “Education”/”Knowledge”/”Learning”/”Development” (8%), or associate Lifelong Learning with the experience that one acquires from life (6%). Solon’s famous quote “I grow old ever learning”, worded either in puristic Greek or in the popular spoken language (“I live and learn”), is the response of 8%.
- Almost 1 in 3 respondents (34%) has recently **heard, seen or read** something about Lifelong Learning. This percentage may be considered quite satisfactory as an index of visibility.
Greater awareness of Lifelong Learning is evident among salaried public servants (46%), those with higher education (44%) and single people living alone (42%). In contrast, the lowest awareness is among housewives and inhabitants of rural districts (with recorded rates of unawareness of 79% and 71% respectively, compared to 65% of the total).
- Almost 3 in 10 respondents (28%) state that they are “**well**” or “**quite well**” informed about issues relating to Lifelong Learning.
Salaried public servants (46%), those with higher education (41%) and single people living alone (36%) appear to be better informed about Lifelong Learning.
- The vast majority of respondents – 9 out of 10 (93%) – believe that Lifelong Learning in Greece **needs strengthening**.
- Also universal (93%) is the conviction that Lifelong Learning **is very or quite important in a person’s life**.
- **Personal interest** in Lifelong Learning is expressed by 8 out of 10 respondents (very or quite interested: 79%).

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Greater interest is recorded among younger age groups up to 44 years old (85%), students (92%), salaried employees of the public and private sectors (87% and 83% respectively), the economically active population in general (83%) and those reporting satisfaction with their life (84%). In contrast, lesser interest is expressed by older persons – aged 55 and over (29%), pensioners (31%) and the economically inactive population in general (26%, against 20% of the total).

- With the help of appropriate 5-point Likert scales for gauging social attitudes (agree/disagree) a number of opinions were investigated which relate to the **basic concept underlying Lifelong Learning**², namely that: Everyone should have equal and open access to high quality learning opportunities, **throughout** their entire life. These opportunities should be provided in a variety of ways, so that they respond to different situations, needs and preferences. It should be possible to provide Lifelong Learning to all citizens and especially to those who need it most (e.g. the unemployed or older-age workers) as well as to those with the most restricted access to it (such as excluded social groups, e.g. immigrants and Roma).

According to the responses given, respondents **associate Lifelong Learning more** with the pleasure deriving from learning new things (91%) and self-actualization (84%), while at the same time they view it as a means of dealing with the rapid changes taking place in society (84%).

² The opinions examined were the following:

- i. "Lifelong learning promotes self-actualization"
- ii. "Lifelong learning improves the lives of people facing difficulties"
- iii. "Lifelong learning helps one guard against unemployment"
- iv. "Lifelong learning helps people deal with the rapid changes taking place in society"
- v. "Lifelong learning is mainly for those who did not do well at school"
- vi. "Lifelong learning is necessary for a successful career"
- vii. "Lifelong learning is important because these days nobody expects to do the same job all their life"
- viii. "Lifelong learning is pointless if it does not have practical benefits for one's career"
- ix. "In Greece's current economic situation, lifelong learning is a luxury"
- x. "Lifelong learning is mainly for people over the age of 50"
- xi. "Lifelong learning is a solution only for the unemployed"
- xii. "Lifelong learning should be availed of only when you are young"
- xiii. "Whoever takes part in lifelong learning feel satisfaction because s/he is learning something new"
- xiv. "Lifelong learning is a way to fill the gaps a person may have from school"

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In contrast, **they disagree more with those views identifying Lifelong Learning with specific social groups**, i.e. the unemployed (83%), those over 50 years of age (82%), or young people (78%). Moreover, the social categories expressing stronger agreement with the above views are, in general, older respondents (over 55) and the less educated.

- To ascertain the **actual knowledge** of respondents with respect to the content of Lifelong Learning, they were asked to designate a total of 12 practices (6 in each version of the questionnaire) as being Lifelong Learning practices or not³. Six in 10 respondents (60%) **correctly identified** all or most of the practices (5-6 out of the 6 practices designated by each respondent) as Lifelong Learning practices. The average recognition of the 6 practices is estimated at 4.6.

A higher awareness of practices was shown by older respondents (aged 55 and over), those with a lower level of education and the economically inactive population.

The Lifelong Learning practices with the highest recognition were **attending a job-related seminar** (93%) and **being taught how to use a computer** (88%). In contrast, almost 1 in 3 does not consider **obtaining a driving license** (34%) and **teaching oneself to play a musical instrument** (32%) to be Lifelong Learning activities.

³ Regarding the practices examined, an effort was made to cover not only all of the different methods but also the thematic content of non-formal and informal Lifelong Learning processes. The practices presented to respondents were the following:

- i. "Going to a private tutoring center to learn a foreign language"
- ii. "Being shown by some relative or friend how to do something such as knitting or home repairs"
- iii. "Being taught how to use a computer"
- iv. "Attending a job-related seminar"
- v. "Reading a book or magazine to learn how to look after the garden or cook"
- vi. "Going to a museum and participating in a guided tour"
- vii. "Watching a lecture on the Internet"
- viii. "Taking dance or painting lessons"
- ix. "Teaching myself to play a musical instrument"
- x. "Obtaining a driving license"
- xi. "Being shown how some device or machine works by a colleague or supervisor at work"
- xii. "Learning about animals threatened with extinction in Greece by participating in some volunteer organization"

PARTICIPATION IN LIFELONG LEARNING PROGRAMS

- According to the responses given in the survey, the rate of **participation in any non-formal or informal Lifelong Learning program**, at any time, is estimated at **57%**.

A higher participation rate was recorded among the age group up to 34 years old (64%), those with higher education (72%), salaried employees of the public and private sectors (71% and 64% respectively), the economically active population (63%), those placing themselves, ideologically, on the Left (63%) or the Center Left (66%), the residents of urban districts (61%) and those who positively assess their personal income (61%).

- **Participation** in some **non-formal⁴** Lifelong Learning process, **in the past year**, stands at **26%**.

Higher rates of participation are evident among the 18-24 age group (48%), those with higher education (39%), salaried employees of the public and private sectors (41% and 34% respectively), the economically active population (34%), those placing themselves, ideologically, on the Left (33%), the residents of urban districts (31%) and those reporting satisfaction with their life (35%).

- As for **subjects**, the programs they attended in the past year was mainly courses, seminars or conferences relating to **social sciences** (25%), **economy and business** (19%) and **new technologies** (18%). These were followed by subjects such as **health** (13%) and **arts & crafts** (11%).

⁴ Some course, seminar, conference or private lesson outside the regular education system.

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Gender is a key factor that has a bearing on the subject of the programs attended. A higher percentage of females attend programs relating to the social sciences, culture and the arts, while males show a higher attendance in programs on the economy, construction and natural sciences. Another important factor vis-à-vis the subject of Lifelong Learning is **age**, e.g. the oldest respondents (65+) participate more in programs focusing on culture and the arts, while those aged 25-34 attend programs in new technologies or foreign languages.

- The average total time spent participating in a Lifelong Learning program, in the past year, was **83 hours**.
- Of those who participated in an LLL program, 44% state that their attendance was **mainly for job-related reasons**.

In contrast, the social groups citing personal as opposed to job-related reasons are females, older individuals (aged 55 and over), individuals with a lower level of education, foreigners, the unemployed, pensioners, housewives, the economically inactive population and residents of rural districts. In addition, the subject of the LLL program and the reasons for attending are directly correlated. Programs focusing on the economy and business, health and construction were attended primarily for job-related reasons, participation in those pertaining to arts/crafts, foreign languages, culture and sport/hobbies was chiefly for personal reasons, while the reasons for taking part in programs in social sciences and new technologies were either job-related or personal in roughly equal measure.

- More than half the respondents (54%) attended their program **outside working hours**.
- Almost 4 in 10 (39%) attended **free** programs, while 1 in 3 (33%) paid for their participation (**self-funded**).

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- The vast majority (91%) were “**very**” or “**quite satisfied**” by their participation in the respective program.
- The **main reasons** reported by respondents for participating in an LLL program were the following: to improve their job skills (35%) and to expand their general knowledge (35%). Other reasons cited with a high percentage were personal pleasure (27%) and possible advancement/promotion at work (19%).

Gender plays an important role in the reasons for participation. Females cite personal pleasure (34%) in a much higher percentage compared to males (18%).

- The **main reasons for not participating** in some non-formal Lifelong Learning process were lack of time (25%), lack of interest or motivation (17%) and no knowledge about the availability of such programs (17%).

Family reasons are quite high in the hierarchy of reasons why females do not participate. Age is the most important reason for those who are 65-years-old and over.

- Participation in some **informal**⁵ Lifelong Learning process **in the past year** reached **86%**.

Lower participation rates are seen among individuals with only basic education (56%).

The highest rates of participation in informal Lifelong Learning were for **reading specialized books or magazines** (59%) and **using the Internet**, e.g. watching online lectures or visiting websites with educational content (53%).

⁵ For the purpose of enhancing their knowledge and/or skills: reading specialized books or magazines / using the Internet (watching online lectures or visiting websites with educational content) / using educational software (e.g. cd, dvd), videos, cassettes, or watching educational programs on the television / visiting libraries or other learning centers where information is available (e.g. museums) / learning something by experience (e.g. working next to someone more experienced or knowledgeable).

INTENTION TO PARTICIPATE IN LIFELONG LEARNING PROGRAMS

- One in 2 respondents (50%) stated their **intention to participate, in the coming year**, in some **non-formal** Lifelong Learning process. The percentage of those intending to participate increases as the age of the respondents decreases and their education level rises.
- The **main reasons for respondents' intention to participate in an LLL program** are: to expand their general knowledge (52%), personal pleasure (26%) and to improve their job skills (26%).

Gender, as in the case of respondents who attended an LLL program in the last 12 months, was an important factor in the reasons for participation. More specifically, a much higher percentage of females cite personal pleasure (32%) compared to males (19%). In addition, a higher percentage of respondents in the economically productive age group (25-54) intend to participate in some LLL program for the purpose of improving their job skills.

- The **main reasons cited for a lack of intention to participate** in some non-formal Lifelong Learning process in the coming year were: lack of time (28%), lack of interest/motivation (22%) and age (20%).

As in the case of respondents who did not participate in the last 12 months, family reasons were quite high in the relevant ranking by females. Unsurprisingly, age is the main reason reported by older respondents (65 and over).

- The biggest **obstacle** facing people who wish to participate in some Lifelong Learning program is distance, that is, the fact that such programs are not available near where they live: 79%. In contrast, factors such as advanced age, unwillingness to return to the classroom and bad/poor learning performance in the past are **not viewed as serious obstacles** to participation in LLL programs. Almost 3 out of 4 respondents stated that these factors are not obstacles.

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Obstacles relating to one's personal situation or job were reported in higher percentages among specific social categories. For example, the economically active population considers the fact that their job-related obligations take up all their available time acts more as an obstacle (74%, against 66% among the general population). Similarly, those who are married with children under the age of 18 who consider the fact that their family obligations take up all their available time to be an obstacle (73% against 63%). In addition, older respondents (65 and over) view age as an obstacle to their participation in Lifelong Learning programs (36% against 23%). Poor performance at school is cited as an obstacle more by respondents with only a basic education (40% against 22%). Residents of semi-urban and rural districts consider the lack of programs nearby to be an obstacle (86% and 84% respectively, against 79% of the total).

PREFERRED SUBJECT AND LEARNING METHODS

- No desire for learning was reported by 46% of respondents. Among the others, who expressed some desire for learning, the subjects that were named in order of preference were: **new technologies** (17%), a **foreign language** (14%) and some **art or craft** (11%).

Females expressed greater desire for learning than males, in almost all areas of learning. Specific subjects generate a stronger desire in certain social categories, e.g. foreign languages, which are preferred by younger age groups (18-44), and new technologies by the unemployed.

- The reasons why respondents express a desire to learn are also mainly personal rather than job-related. More specifically, 45% of respondents stated that it **would help them more in their personal life**, compared to just 16% who believe it will help them in their job.
- The preferred methods of learning something of interest are **outside traditional learning environments** (being taught in a class or private lessons with a tutor), and correspond to more **alternative processes**, such as participation in a group with the same interests (39%), the Internet (23%), or a less formal seminar or workshop (22%).

As a method of learning, the use of the Internet is more popular among males and younger age groups, while the traditional method of teaching is preferred more by females. Private lessons with a tutor is the favored method for young people aged 18-24.

THE STATE AND FUNDING

OF LIFELONG LEARNING PROGRAMS

- Almost 3 out of 4 respondents (72%) agree with the view that **it is the state's responsibility** to enable citizens to improve their skills and qualifications.
- As for the funding of Lifelong Learning programs, three different opinions were investigated with regard to the participation of the state, citizens and companies⁶. From the segmentation of the population carried out on the basis of the combination of respondents' replies to the respective questions, it emerges that 4 in 10 citizens (41%) believe Lifelong Learning programs should be funded **jointly by the state and companies**. Only 11% agree that LLL programs should be wholly funded by state, while just 9% agree that they should be funded exclusively by companies. At the same time, only 4% of respondents believe that citizens themselves should improve their skills and qualifications at their own expense.

⁶ The opinions examined were the following:

- i. "The state should provide 100% funding for Lifelong Learning programs"
- ii. "Citizens themselves should take the necessary steps and at their own expense to improve their skills and qualifications"
- iii. "It is the obligation of companies to provide 100% funding for the Lifelong Learning programs of their employees"