



# ***Subjective well-being and adult education policy: how to go beyond the human capital perspective***

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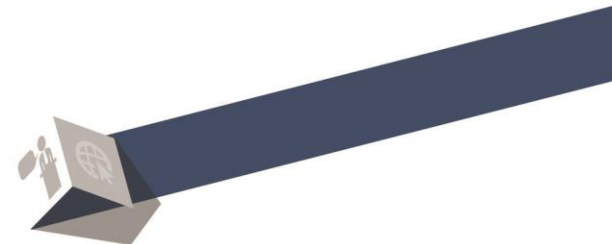
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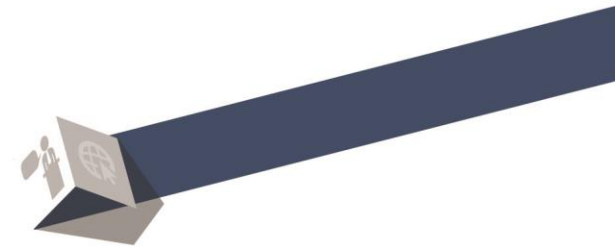




# Introduction (1)

## Background

- ❑ There is a longstanding trend in policy making that has tended to discuss adult education as a mere instrument of individuals' employability and economic benefits at both individual and societal levels.
- ❑ Since the outbreak of the pandemic, different trends seem to have emerged.
- ❑ Even though some authors warn that today's crisis will turn lifelong learning into a tool of biopolitical exploitation (Beighton 2021).





## Introduction (2)

### Aims:

- (1) defend the need to go beyond the human capital approach to adult learning and education policy (ALEP) by enriching it with a humanistic perspective based on the capabilities approach (Sen, Nussbaum) and recognition theory (Honneth, Fraser);*
- (2) adopt an understanding of individual subjective well-being which is not reduced to happiness and life satisfaction, but include dimensions of individual subjectivity, such as autonomy, sense of meaning, recognition, engagement, attachment to the environment (Boyadjieva & Ilieva-Trichkova, forthcoming);*
- (3) explore the relationship between ALEP and individual subjective well-being;*
- (4) reveal how ALEP moderate the association between individuals' level of education and their employment status, on the one hand, & subjective well-being, on the other.*





# Theoretical considerations (1)

## Rethinking the theoretical foundations of adult learning and education (policy)

- ❑ It is well documented that adult education and lifelong learning have been understood and practiced in considerably varying ways across different countries and organisations, even between different institutions in one and the same country (UNESCO, 2016).
  
- ❑ Mapping out different models of lifelong learning, Regmi (2015) identifies 2 foundational models on which the present discourses about lifelong learning are built:
  - ✓ the human capital model &
  - ✓ the humanistic model.





## Theoretical considerations (2)

### Capability approach

Two important ideas are crucial for building a humanistic model of lifelong and adult learning and education—and policies towards them:

- ❑ Sen's understanding of one of the main notions in the capability approach—capability and, more concretely, the importance of opportunities and freedom in its conceptualisation. Capability reflects the genuine opportunities that people have to achieve functionings which they “have reason to value”. This line of reasoning provides fertile ground for viewing adult learning and education and ALEP not only from the perspective of achieved outcomes (functionings) but from the viewpoint of created opportunities (capabilities), as well.
- ❑ The capability approach presents a much richer vision of human development and the role of education than human capital theory does.

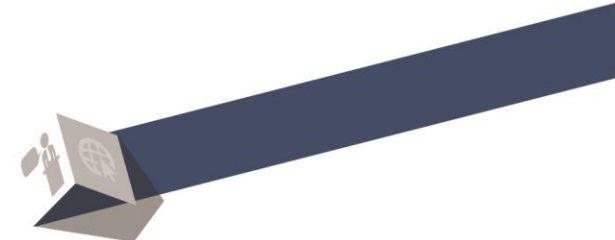




# Theoretical considerations (3)

## Recognition theory

It draws attention to the key role of recognition in social life:

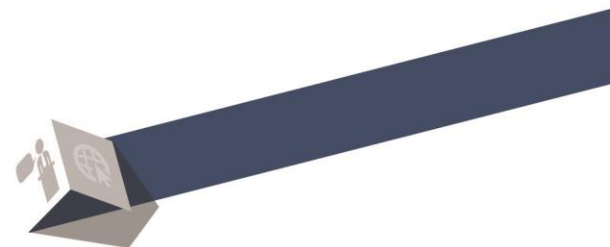
- ❑ Recognition is an important element in social interactions which plays a crucial role in the process of individual identity formation, self-realisation and well-being (Taylor, 1992; Honneth, 2014).
  - ❑ Fraser (2009) develops a three-dimensional conceptualisation of justice: redistribution, recognition, and representation. Thus, she emphasises that alongside struggles for overcoming wealth imbalances and inequalities in political decision-making processes, there is a need to struggle with the “institutionalized hierarchies of cultural value” (Fraser, 2005, p. 74) that deny people the requisite standing and thus impede them from full participation in social life.
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## Theoretical considerations (4)

Building on a synthetic analytical framework based on different theoretical approaches, the capability approach and recognition theory included, Boyadjieva & Ilieva-Trichkova (2021) present a holistic normative model of the missions and roles of adult learning and education which captures its instrumental, intrinsic, and transformative/empowerment missions and roles at both the individual and societal levels.

***In this paper, we argue that ALEP should be developed and should be evaluated against such a holistic model of the missions and roles of adult learning and education.***





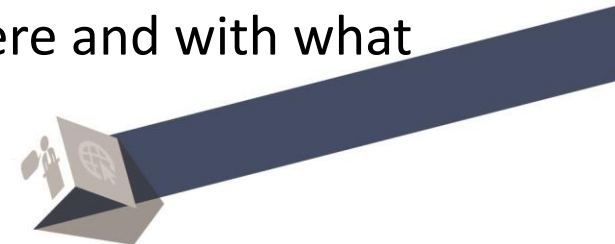


## Theoretical considerations (5)

### ***Different 'faces' of adult learning and education policy***

Ball (1993)—‘policy as text’, ‘policy as discourse’, and ‘policy effects’. We claim that it is worth applying these distinctions to ALEP, as well.

- ❑ ***ALEP as text*** relies on the assumption that these texts are a product of different actors and of compromises between them (Ball, 1993; Cort, 2014). Studying ALEP as text means decoding educational policy documents “in different ways depending upon the contexts in which they are read” (Codd, 1988, p. 236) and focusing “on the interests of the actors and how policy is contested, changed and reproduced” (Cort, 2014, p. 130).
- ❑ ***ALEP as discourse*** tries “to appreciate the way in which. . . policies, exercise power through a *production* of ‘truth’ and ‘knowledge’” (Ball, 1993, p. 14, emphasis in the original). ALEPs as discourse “are about what can be said, and thought, but also about who can speak, when, where and with what authority” (Ball 1993, p. 14).



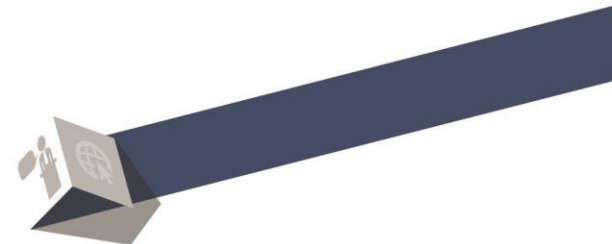


## Theoretical considerations (6)

- **ALEP effects** refer to the impact of policies on individuals and societies. Ball (1993, p. 15) distinguishes between the generalities and specifics of policy effects“. He further makes a distinction between first order and second order effects:

*First order effects are changes in practice or structure (which are evident in particular sites and across the system as a whole); and second order effects are the impact of these changes on patterns of social access and opportunity and social justice (Ball, 1993, p. 16).*

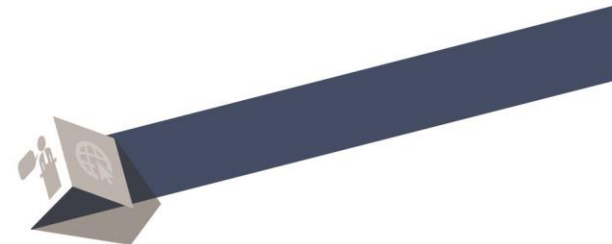
The present paper focuses on the so-called ***second order effects of ALEP. This means regarding ALEP as creating opportunities for individuals' participation in adult learning and education and assessing them based on their ability to create opportunities for all.***



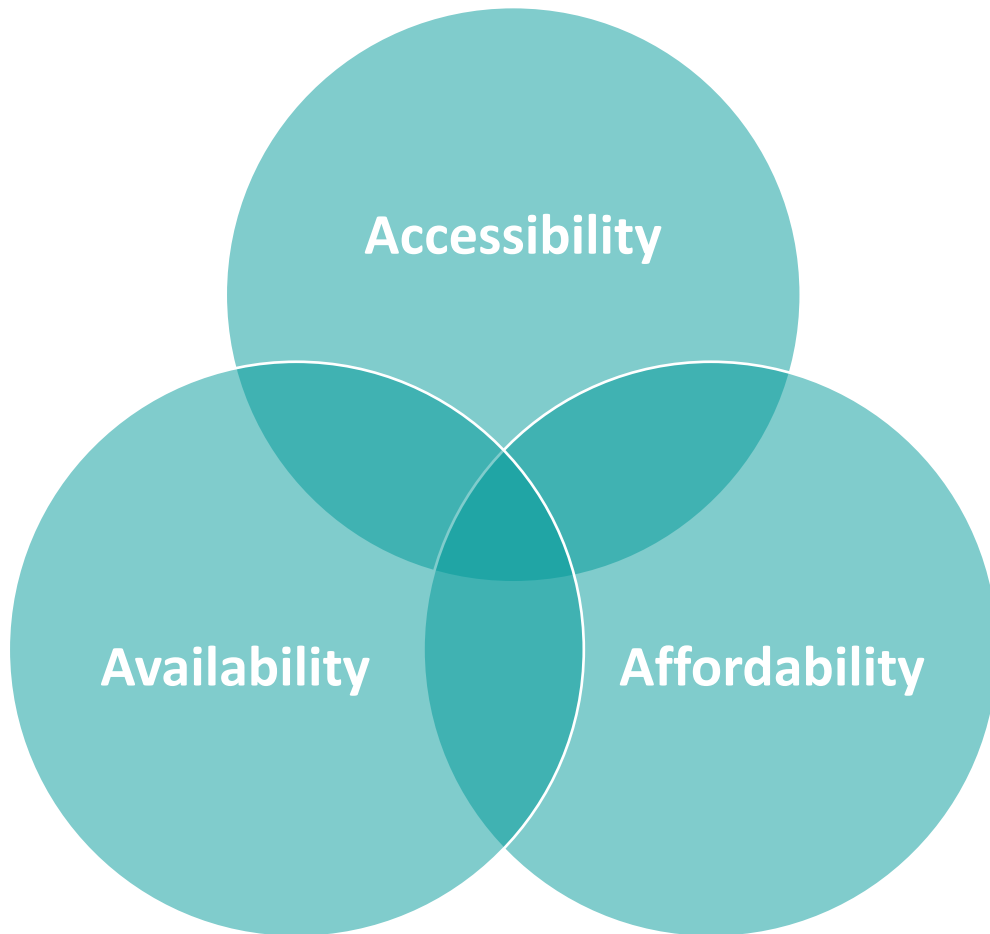


## Theoretical considerations (7)

- ❑ While acknowledging ALEP's role for increasing individual employability and national economic growth, we will pay special attention to its contribution to developing individual subjectivity and enhancing social justice by increasing opportunities for access to adult learning and education for all.
  
- ❑ We will do this in 2 ways.
  - ✓ First, we identify 3 important dimensions of ALEP which reveal its association with **accessibility**, **availability** and **affordability** of adult learning and education.
  - ✓ Second, we focus our analysis on the associations between these 3 dimensions of ALEP and individual subjective well-being.



## Theoretical considerations (8)



- ❑ *The **accessibility*** of ALEP refers to its ability to ensure that people from all backgrounds can access and benefit from adult learning and education on a reasonably equal basis.
- ❑ *The **availability*** of ALEP relates to its capacity to provide resources (both institutional and individual) which are suitable for adult learning and education and enable people's participation in it.
- ❑ *The **affordability*** of ALEP refers to the cost of adult education and the support adults receive to overcome obstacles to participation in adult learning.





# Theoretical considerations (9)

## **Individual subjective well-being as a multi-dimensional functioning**

- ❑ Happiness and life satisfaction are regarded and studied as the most important synthetic indicators of subjective well-being (eg. Diener et al., 2013; Högberg, 2019).
- ❑ In a recent article (Boyadjieva & Ilieva-Trichkova), we argue in favour of understanding individual well-being as a complex phenomenon which should not be reduced to happiness and life satisfaction.
- ❑ Viewing Nussbaum's ten capabilities as essential to the dignity of life for each person, we delineate several dimensions of subjective well-being: ***autonomy, sense of meaning, engagement, competence, recognition, affiliation, feeling of health, life enjoyment, and attachment to the environment.***





# Research questions

- ❑ **RQ1:** *How are the different dimensions of ALEP associated with individual subjective well-being as a positive functioning?*
- ❑ **RQ2:** *How do the different dimensions of ALEP moderate the association between individuals' level of education and their employment status, on the one hand, and subjective well-being, on the other?*



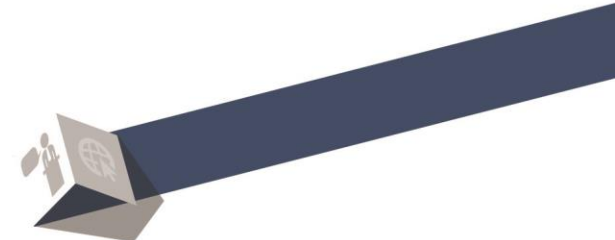


# Data and methodology (1)

## Data

- ❑ European Social Survey (ESS) Round 6, 2012;
- ❑ Macro-level data from the official statistics and the authors' own calculations based on the Adult Education Survey (AES) and the Labour Force Survey (LFS) as of 2011.

## Limitations

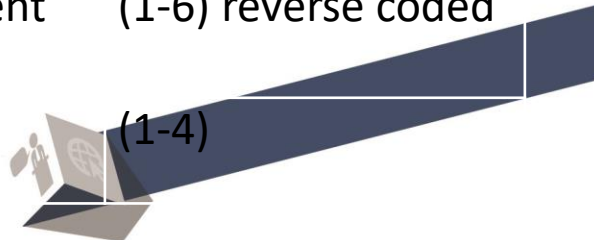
- ❑ 20 countries: Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, & Sweden.
  - ❑ Adults (25-64 years old).
  - ❑ Analytical sample - 22,740.
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## Data and methodology (2)

**Dependent variable: *Scale of subjective well-being* (Cronbach Alpha - .66)**

Item	Description/variable (ESS)	Value
1. Autonomy and control	Free to decide how to live my life (dclvlf)	(1-5) reverse coded
2. Competence	Little chance to show how capable I am (lchshcp)	(1-5)
3. Sense of meaning	Feel that what I do in life is valuable and worthwhile (dngval)	(1-5) reverse coded
4. Recognition	Feel people treat you with respect (trtrsp)	(1-6)
5. Engagement	Absorbed in what you are doing, how much of the time (tmabdng)	(1-10)
6. Feeling of health	Subjective general health (health)	(1-5) reverse coded
7. Affiliation	Important to help people and care for others well-being (iphlppl)	(1-6) reverse coded
8. Attachment to nature and environment	Important to care for nature and environment (impenv)	(1-6) reverse coded
9. Life enjoyment	Enjoyed life, how often past week (enjlif)	(1-4)







## Data and methodology (3)

### ***Independent variables at individual level***

- having low education*—1 for yes (ISCED 2011 0–2) and 0 for no (ISCED 2011 3–8)
- not having paid work in the last 7 days* (1 = Yes; 0 = No).

### ***Control variables at individual level***

- age (continuous);
- gender (dummy ref.: 0 = male; 1 = female);
- parents' educational status (dummy ref.: 0 = no parents had higher education [low]; 1 = at least one parent had higher education [high]) &
- participation in non-formal, job-related adult education and training (reference period 12 months) (0 = no; 1 = yes), data from the ESS.

### **Method**

- Multilevel modelling technique





## Data and methodology (4)

**Accessibility** is measured with 2 indicators:

- 1) **Participation rate in education and training** (last 4 weeks) among adults aged 25–64 (<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>, Data code: TRNG\_LFSE [Extracted on: 18.10.2021]);
- 2) **Index of equality of participation**—calculated as the ratio between the predicted probabilities of adults (25–64) with low and medium-level educational degrees (ISCED 0–4) and those of adults (25–64) with higher education, multiplied by 100. It ranges from 0 to 100, where 0 means absolutely no equality of participation in adult education, and 100 corresponds to complete equality at the country level—authors' own calculations based on data from the LFS wave in 2011.



Accessibility





## Data and methodology (5)

**Availability** is measured through the following indicators:

- 1) **Suitable offers**—percentage of adults (25–64) who did not mark ‘No suitable education or training activity (offer)’ as an obstacle to participation in lifelong learning—from the authors’ own calculations based on data from the AES wave in 2011;
- 2) **Access to information**—percentage of adults who reported they had access to information about learning possibilities (<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>, Data code: TRNG\_AES\_182 [Extracted on: 20.10.2021]);
- 3) **Engagement of various institutions with provision**—percentage of adults (25–64) who reported institutions other than formal education or non-formal education and training institutions as providers of their first randomly selected non-formal education and training activity during the last 12 months—from the authors’ own calculations based on data from the AES wave in 2011.



Availability





## Data and methodology (6)

**Affordability** is measured with the following indicators:

- 1) **Active labour market policies**—LMP expenditure for categories 2–7 as of 2012  
(<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>, Data code: LMP\_IND\_EXP [Extracted on: 18.10.2021]);
- 2) **Enterprise expenditure on continuing and vocational training (CVT) courses—cost** of CVT courses as percentage of total labour costs (all enterprises) as of 2010 (<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>, Data code: TRNG\_CVT\_16 [Extracted on: 20.10.2020]);
- 3) **Engagement of various institutions with payment**—percent of adults (25–64) who had the first randomly selected non-formal education and training activity during the last 12 months paid partially or in full by their employer, public employment services, or other public institutions—from authors' own calculations based on data from the AES wave in 2011.



Affordability





## Data and methodology (7)

In calculating the indexes for each ALEP dimension, we followed the methodology used in the report *Don't Panic: Findings of the European Catch-Up Index 2015* (Lessenski, 2016), prepared by the Open Society Institute—Sofia.

- ❑ More specifically, we standardised the values of the above-discussed indicators according to a statistical procedure, recalculating them on one and the same scale.
- ❑ Then we transformed these standardised values into scores ranging from 0 to 100. Values smaller than 0 and bigger than 100 ('extreme values') received scores of 0 and 100, respectively.
- ❑ We assigned equal weight to each indicator within a given dimension.
- ❑ The three indexes range between 0 and 100, where a value of 0 means that adult education was not at all accessible, available, or affordable in a given country, and a value of 100 means that adult education was accessible, available, or affordable to the fullest extent.

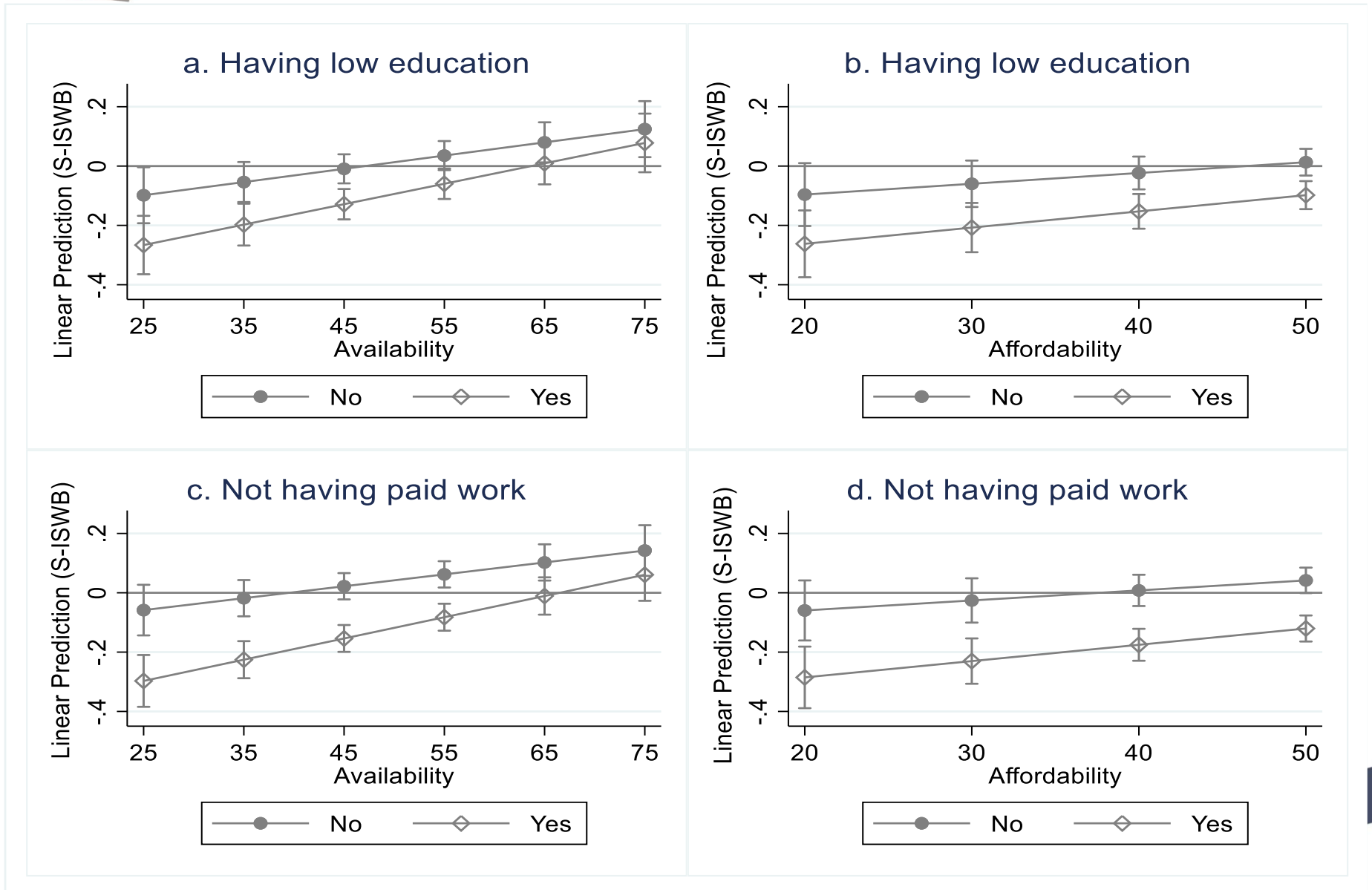


**Multilevel linear models showing associations between participation in adult NFE and individual subjective well-being and the 3 dimensions of ALEP, regression coefficients.**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Level 1 variables</i>				
Having low education: Ref. No				
Yes	-.109***	-.109***	-.109***	-.109***
Not having paid work: Ref. No				
Yes	-.163***	-.163***	-.163***	-.163***
<i>Level 2 variables</i>				
Accessibility		.003*		
Availability			.005**	
Affordability				.004*
Constant	.008	-.157*	-.236**	-.189*
Intraclass correlation	.048	.047	.047	.052



# Average marginal effects with 95% CIs of the significant cross-level interactions

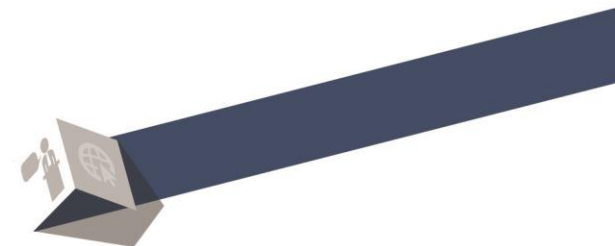




# Discussion (1)

## Contributions to previous research

- ❑ It is a pioneering study on the associations between ALEP and individual subjective well-being. There are very few studies (e.g., Field, 2009; Schmidt-Hertha et al., 2019; Boeren, 2021) on the relationship between adult learning and education and subjective well-being, but to the best of our knowledge, there are no studies on the associations between ALEP and individual subjective well-being.
- ❑ It defines—both theoretically and empirically—three crucial dimensions of ALEP that capture its influence on the accessibility, availability, and affordability of adult learning and education.
- ❑ The analyses carried out reveal some important findings about the role of ALEP for individual subjective well-being.







## Discussion (2)

### Findings

- ❑ Individual subjective well-being is higher in countries where national ALEPs are targeted at ensuring better accessibility, availability, and affordability of adult learning.
- ❑ ALEP has the power to reshape the relationship between individuals' level of education and their employment status, on the one hand, and subjective well-being, on the other.
- ❑ The influence of ALEP on individual subjective well-being is greater among people with low levels of education and those who do not have paid work—i.e., ALEPs are more favourable and provide more benefits to the most vulnerable groups.





# Conclusion (1)

## Directions for further studies

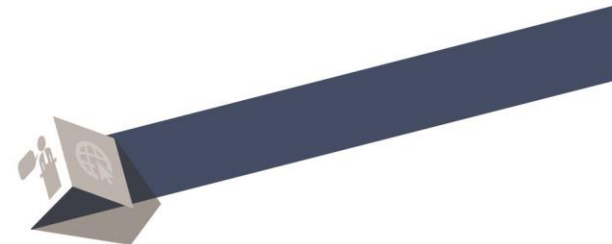
- ❑ The scope of research needs to be broadened by the conceptualisation and empirical survey of other dimensions of well-being—e.g., individual objective well-being and societal objective or subjective well-being.
- ❑ Special attention must be paid to providing differentiated analyses of the role of policies targeted at different forms of adult learning and education—for example, job-related or non-job related, formal, non-formal, or informal education—in individual and societal well-being, using both qualitative and quantitative data.
- ❑ It is worth studying how the association between different dimensions of ALEP and individual well-being is embedded in country-specific social environments, defined by differences in levels of GDP, social inequality, and dominant cultural values.





## Conclusion (2)

- ❑ By revealing the potential of ALEP to relate positively to individual subjective well-being, our paper provides arguments for the need to re-think both the theoretical foundations and the essence of European and national policies in the sphere of adult learning.
- ❑ Nussbaum calls for “a society of citizens who admit that they are needy and vulnerable” (Nussbaum, 2006: 17). If vulnerability is an enduring aspect of the human condition, this puts stress on both individual and institutional responsibilities for dealing with the fragility of human reality.
- ❑ In times when it becomes clear that “vulnerability is – and should be understood to be – universal and constant, inherent in the human condition” (Fineman, 2008, p. 1), ALEP is called to create opportunities for all and to contribute to ensuring social justice in the sharing of public goods.



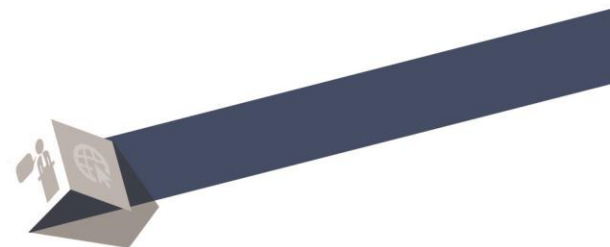


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[Just Education – Project “Dynamics of Inequalities in Participation in Higher and Adult Education: A Comparative Social Justice Perspective” \(justedu2020.eu\)](http://justedu2020.eu)

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