LIFELONG LEARNING AND THE ROMA MINORITY IN WESTERN AND SOUTHERN EUROPE

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EDITED BY

ANDREA ÓHIDY

University of Education in Freiburg, Germany

and

KATALIN R. FORRAY

University Pécs, Hungary

United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India – Malaysia – China

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About the Contributors

Jelen Amador-López (Spain) is a Community of Research on Excellence for All (CREA) member. She did her PhD in Sociology (University of Barcelona) focussed on the Roma women and how they are taking the lead to overcome social and gender inequalities. She is a Roma Researcher and Editorial Assistant of the *International Sociology Journal* since 2015.

Fernando Macías Aranda (Spain) is an Assistant Professor (School of Education, University of Barcelona, UB). He did his PhD in Education (UB). He is a Roma researcher, Member of the Integrated Plan for the Roma People in Catalonia (Catalan Government) and Spanish Representative in the 'Doctoral & Early Career Network' (World Educational Research Association).

Adriana Aubert Simon (Spain) is a Professor in the Department of Sociology (University of Barcelona, UB.). She did her PhD in Education (UB), is a Member of the Board of the European Sociological Association (ESA) Research Network of Sociology of Education and Co-editor of *International Journal of Sociology of Education* (Web of Science).

Pedro Calado (Portugal) is the High Commissioner for Migration and National Co-ordinator of `Choices' Program (Programa Escolhas) – a government programme. He did a BA (Honors) in Geography from the Classic University of Lisbon, specialisation in Education and received an MA in Geography from the Classic University of Lisbon/University of Sheffield, specialising in 'Exclusion, Society and Territory'.

Valeria Cavioni (Italy) is a Licenced Psychologist, Psychotherapist and Post-doctoral Researcher at the Department of Human Sciences for Education at the University of Milano-Bicocca, Milan. She is the Chair for the European Network for Social and Emotional Competence (ENSEC) and Member of the Network of Experts on Social Dimension of Education and Training (Neset II) for the European Commission.

Sónia Costa (Portugal) is a Graduate in Sociology and Planning (2006). She did an MA in Sociology (2010) by ISCTE and doctoral studies at ICS University of Lisbon, developing a doctoral thesis on the Romani law. She performed extensive research experience primarily in Social Policies Evaluation.

Katalin R. Forray (Hungary) is a Doctor of Hungarian Academy of Sciences and Founder of the Doctoral School for Education and the Department of Romani

Studies at the University Pécs. She is a Member of Hungarian and international organisations for Roma. Her research interests include integration of minorities, multiculturalism, social and regional factors of education, and women in education.

Margarida Gaspar de Matos (Portugal) is a Clinical and Health Psychologist, Full Professor (with Aggregation in International Health) at the Faculty of Human Kinetics, University of Lisbon. She is a Coordinator of G2 Group – Supportive Environments in the Research Centre of the Institute of Environmental Health, Faculty of Medicine of the University of Lisbon. She is the Convenor of the Board of Prevention and Intervention of European Federation of Psychologists' Associations and Member of the Steering Committee of European Public Health Association/Child and Adolescent Public Health.

Panagiota Gkofa (Greece) holds a PhD diploma in Education Research-Sociology of Education from King's College London (UK). Her doctoral study investigated the educational success of some Roma university students in Greece. Her research interest is in the sociology of education and education policy.

Kari Hagatun (Norway) is a PhD Candidate at the Department of Education, University of Bergen. Her research interest lies at the junction of minority issues, ethnography, critical theory and educational policy. Her research focusses on the educational situation for Norwegian Roma pupils through the perspectives of children, parents and teachers.

Natascha Hofmann (Germany) is a Lecturer at IES Abroad EU Centre and the University of Education in Freiburg. Her focusses are on the pedagogy of migration, mechanisms of discrimination and diversity. Furthermore, she is engaged in a qualification programme for Sinti and Roma educational advisors. She is currently writing her dissertation on Romnja educational biographies.

Liliana José Moreira (Portugal) is a Senior Technician of the Cabinet of Support to the Roma Communities/High Commission for Migrations. She is a Graduate and Doctoral Student in Sociology at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities/ University of Porto. Her MA is in Social Development and Social Inclusion at the School of Economics and Management/University of Porto.

Andrea Óhidy (Germany), Dipl. Päd. Dr. Andrea Óhidy, is a Professor and Head of the Institute of Education Sciences at the University of Education in Freiburg. Her research interests include educational policy in the European Union, Lifelong Learning and educational participation of Roma. She has published in these areas in German, Hungarian and English.

Christina Rodell Olgaç (Sweden) is a PhD, Associate Professor in Education at Södertörn University. Her research focusses specifically on higher education and social mobility among Roma. In tandem with Angelina Dimiter-Taikon, MA in Education, she has developed courses for Romani mediators in schools and social work, for and mother tongue teachers.

Celeste Simões (Portugal) is a PhD, Assistant Professor with Aggregation at Faculdade de Motricidade Humana, University of Lisbon. She holds a BA in

Special Education and Rehabilitation, an MA in Social Psychology at Faculty of Psychology, University of Porto and a PhD in Special Education – Risk Behaviour in Adolescence, Aggregation in Education Sciences – Resilience at Faculdade de Motricidade Humana, University of Lisbon. She is a member of the Instituto de Saúde Ambiental (ISAMB) (Institute of Environmental Health, Faculty of Medicine, University of Lisbon).

Teresa Sordé-Martí (Spain) is a Professor (department of Sociology, Autonomous University of Barcelona, UAB), is a Harvard doctorate holder. She has published in the world's highest impact journal Nature, among others (Web of Science). She is part of the editorial board of the European Commission launched Toolkit for Schools, part of the School Education Gateway portal.

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Introduction: Lifelong Learning and the Roma Minority in Western and Southern Europe

Katalin R. Forray and Andrea Óhidy

Abstract

This introduction from Katalin R. Forray and Andrea Óhidy provides a brief overview of the social and education situation of European Roma and also about the structure of this book. Roma are here described as a 'hidden minority' (see the country study about Italy from Valeria Cavioni), because – although they are the largest minority group living in Europe for more than a hundred years – we still know very little about them. Although most of the Roma people have been living for centuries in European countries, their situation is still different from the non-Roma population; they often suffered from poverty and exclusion. There is a host of Roma, especially in Southern and in Eastern Europe, who is considered to be the most disadvantaged group in European societies, for example, regarding their (1) health situation, (2) on the labour and (3) on the housing market and (4) also in education. Questions of education are the central elements of politics making the situation of Roma better. To fulfil these requirements some European countries have taken determined steps. As Natascha Hofmann in the country study about Germany wrote, we are in the phase of the 'dawn of learning' because there are more and more policies and programs to develop attainment and success of Roma in European education and lifelong learning. This book gives an overview about retrospective and prospective tendencies in the situation of European Roma in education and lifelong learning.

Keywords: Roma; Southern Europe; Western Europe; policy; lifelong learning; education

Access, attainment and success of Roma people in education and lifelong learning is one of the most urgent public policy issues in Europe. According to

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empirical data Roma people are the most underrepresented group in schools and other educational institutions. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) found in its survey about the situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States (2014) that although the situation has been improved for younger age groups – there are still considerable differences between Roma and non-Roma students at all levels of the education system (EU-FRA, 2014a). This book takes a look at the education situation of Roma across Western and Southern Europe. In the following section we provide a brief overview about their social and education situation.

Roma: A 'Hidden Minority'

Although Roma people are the largest minority group living in Europe for more than a hundred years, we still know very little about them.[1] There is a general lack of information and knowledge about Roma in public awareness. Therefore, Valeria Cavioni calls Roma a 'hidden minority' (see page 67 onwards in this book). Traditionally there is a repugnance against getting to know Roma people better, because they are often described stereotypically. Prejudice has accompanied the European Roma through their history since they arrived at the continent. Antiziganism can be seen as a part of European history (Agarin, 2014; Kóczé & Rövid 2017; Selling, End, Kyuchukov, Laskar, & Templer, 2015; Tosi Cambini & Beluschi Fabeni, 2017), which is not very often reflected in public discussion or taught in schools. There are also a host of blind spots in scientific research regarding Roma, which precludes thorough discussion of their (education) situation. This book wants to change this and gives an overview about retrospective and prospective tendencies in the situation of European Roma in education and lifelong learning.

According to current estimates there are about 10–12 million Roma living in Europe, among them about 6–7 million in the European Union (European Commission, 2011). Despite the increasing public interest in statistical information on Roma, there are a number of reasons why it is impossible to collect and distribute exact data on this minority group: Firstly, in official statistics the category 'ethnicity' is mostly not recorded because in many European countries ethnic registration is forbidden. Secondly, even if there are empirical data about them, it is often not clear, how is the identification with the category 'Roma' operationalised. Are we speaking about 'nationality', 'ethnicity' or 'mother tongue'? Thirdly, a host of Roma attempt to conceal their membership to this minority because of the negative experiences they have had and the resulting stigmatisation and discrimination which they face.[2] Hence there are big differences regarding the number of Roma according to their internal terms and based on external designation.

[1]For example, most European people do not know anything about the Roma-Holocaust (see the country study from Hofmann in this book).

[2]The attitude of Roma organisations to official statistics is different: Some of them refuse any kind of data collection because they are concerned that such statistics could

In scientific research the principle of self-designation is usually rejected as unreliable (Janka, Vincze, Ádány, & Sándor, 2018; Kemény, 1997). According to external designation persons are defined as 'Roma' when their social environment recognises and handles them as Roma. János Ladányi differentiates between two main forms of external designation: In the first case the researcher ask so called experts (i. e. teachers, social workers or police people), who know the persons, which should be categorised very well, who are Roma in their opinion. The problem with this categorisation method is that it convolutes poverty with Roma ethnicity and with problematic behaviour (from the point of view of the major society). In the second case people who conduct the survey determine who is defined as Roma. This method is considered to be very useful for research studies about assimilated Roma, but a disadvantage of this method is that the interviewees can meet the persons to be categorised only during the survey and therefore their attribution is based only on very limited information (Ladányi, 2009, p. 44ff).

In everyday understanding the external description of 'Roma' is neither based on their ethnicity nor on their mother tongue, rather people are defined as 'Roma' who 'live like the gypsies': in poverty, in bad living conditions, in segregation and unemployment. This means, on the one hand, that people who could be described as 'Roma' by the characteristic of their ethnicity, but do not live segregated, are not unemployed or poor, were not defined as 'Roma' from their social environment. On the other hand, people who are not Roma by the trait of ethnicity but live in poverty are considered as 'Roma' (Ladányi, 2009; Ligeti, 2002). The term 'Roma' is thus strongly associated with deprivation and burdened with strong prejudices. The Roma culture is often equated with poverty in everyday life (Farkas, 2002 in Szoboszlai, 2006). The current public discussion – both on national as well as on the international level – mostly focuses on their difficult socio-economic situation. János Ladányi therefore states that 'being Roma is nothing else but ethicized poverty' (Ladányi, 2009, p. 11).

Another problem is that the inner diversity of the Roma minority is seldom recognised in statistical and empirical data or in scientific studies.[3] Roma in Europe are a very heterogeneous minority group regarding their cultural, linguistic and religious diversity or settlement forms. Roma communities – not having any mother country – have always lived scattered in countries with different historical traditions and social-cultural background, so they can be found almost in every European country. As a result of this, the European Roma minority is especially colourful. Despite this diversity there is a 'Roma identity', which is

be the first step of government action against them. Others tend to accept the need of central registers if the data collection involves government guarantees against Roma discrimination and antiziganism. On the other hand, there are some Roma politicians who prefer setting up statistics which help to get real information about the situation of Roma and to create policy measures to deal with them (Forray, 2009).

[3]These problems are characteristic not only for data of the European Union but also for national and regional surveys and studies.

based on a Sanskrit rooted common language Romani/Chib (with a broad variety of dialects), on recognition of a common origin from India, on similar norms, values and traditions, but also on common historical and current experiences of stigmatisation, discrimination and exclusion. Roma have proclaimed themselves as a unified non-territorial transnational nation,[4] which includes different subgroups. Although the Council of Europe recognises five main Roma groups (Council of Europe, 2012), these can be further divided into various subgroups whose exact number is uncertain. There are a host of different names (both internal and external) for them, which can diverge in different countries, like Roma, Romani people, Sinti, Gypsy, Kaale Roma/Kale/Kalo, Kelderash/Kaldashari, Polska Roma, Lovara, Manuš, Caminanti, Vlach/Vlah/Vlax, Vlachike or Walachian Roma, Boyasch, Romungro/Rumungro, Servike Roma, Ungrike Roma, Bergitka Roma, Carpathian Roma, Zigeuner, Tsigganoi, Cigány, Žuže, Degeša, Bougešti, Ferkosi, Drizari, Kalaidzhii, Gradesh, Laho, Fichiri, Yerlii, Burgudzhii, Gitano, Turkish Roma, Horahane Roma. In this book we use the term 'Roma' or 'Roma people' because the first World Romani Congress (1971)[5] and the Council of Europe (2012)[6] have a current consensus accepting and using this term, but the different country studies might use other terms according to their national and/or regional traditions.

The Roma Minority in Selected Western and Southern European Countries

This book discusses the education situation of Roma in seven Western and Southern European countries: Germany, Greece, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and Spain. Six of them are members of the European Union,[7] all of them are members of the Schengen agreement. Almost 70% of the European Roma live in the middle- and eastern parts of the continent as well as in the countries of the former Soviet Union. The most significant presence of Roma can be found, among others, in Bulgaria, Romania and in Slovakia where they form about 9–11% of the whole population. Regarding the absolute numbers, Romania has the largest Roma population, estimated between 1.5 and 2 million people or more. Another 400,000 to one million Roma live in Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovakia, *Spain* and there are more than 100,000 in *Greece*, *Germany* and *Italy* as well.

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[4]Delegation for Roma Issues Fact Sheet, JU 2006:10.

[5]The first World Romani Congress was organized in Orpington near London in 1971. It was attended by representatives from nine nations (Czechoslovakia, Finland, *Norway*, France, Great Britain, *Germany*, Hungary, Ireland, *Spain* and Yugoslavia) and observers from Belgium, Canada, India and the United States. For further information see: https://www.revolvy.com/main/index.php?s=World+Romani+Congress

[6]Council of Europe. (2012). Descriptive Glossary of terms relating to Roma issues. Version dated 18 May 2012. http://a.cs.coe.int/team20/cahrom/documents/Glossary%20Roma%20EN%20version%2018%20May%202012.pdf

[7]Norway is no Member State of the European Union.

The here discussed Southern European countries – *Greece*, *Italy*, *Portugal* and *Spain* – are often called Mediterranean states and characterised on the one hand through their climate: hot dry summers and wet cool winters. On the other hand, there are also concepts since the period of the Enlightenment to describe this region as a political-cultural-economical unit.[8] Although – as the member of an international scientific conference 'The South in Postwar Europe: Italy, Greece, Spain, and Portugal'[9] stated – it is very difficult to speak of a Southern European exceptionalism because the similarities with Western and Eastern Europe are more characteristic than the differences (Del Pero and Torcal in Trautsch, 2013, p. 6ff). Most of the so-called Mediterranean states are member of the European Union and Southern European countries are very heterogeneous. Nevertheless, the above mentioned four states are often characterised through their common economic situation. This is described as vulnerable – especially after adopting the common European currency Euro – through big state-debt, deficits in public sector accountability and deep-rooted problems of inefficiency and corruption.[10] Therefore in economical journals they are often referred to as 'PIGS'.[11] Another common characteristic seems to be the role of the family in providing social security[12] (Martin in Trautsch, 2013, p. 7), which is also true for their relatively large Roma population. On the one hand Roma are usually full citizens and have been living in the region for centuries. On the other hand, there were migration waves in the mid-1990s, for example, to Italy after the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern European countries, Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, but also after the Eastern enlargement of the European Union from Albania, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Kosovo and Montenegro. These people

[8]To coordinate the regional cooperation in the area in 2008 the "Union for the Mediterranean" was founded. For more details see: https://ufmsecretariat.org/

[9]'The South in Postwar Europe: Italy, Greece, Spain, and Portugal'. Internationale Tagung, veranstaltet vom Deutschen Historischen Institut Rom und der Universität Basel, 27–28 Juni 2013.Tagungsbericht von Jasper M. Trautsch. http://dhi-roma.it/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf-dateien/Tagungsberichte/2013/TB_South_in_Postwar_Europe_20130627_28.pdf

[10]Historically Nützenadel characterises the Southern European states through their 'late industrial development, the persistence of agriculture, low labor productivity, balance of payment deficits, high public debts, and state institutions comparatively weak in collecting taxes and providing infrastructure and social welfare' (Nützenadel inTrautsch, 2013, pp. 7).

[11]The acronym 'PIGS' was first mentioned in the 1990s und regularly used, for example, by the magazine *Financial Times* to describe Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain as the European Union states with the weakest economies. In 2008, after its banking crisis, Ireland has been added to them and the acronym became 'PIIGS'. See for example: N. N. (2008): Pigs in muck. In *Financial Times*, 1. September 2008. https://www.ft.com/content/5faf0b0a-778a-11dd-be24-0000779fd18c

[12]However, there is no empirical proof, whether this strong family solidarity exists because of the limited public welfare or the other way around.

have mostly an uncertain legal status. One of Europe's largest Roma populations lives in *Spain*. According to *Fernando Macías-Aranda, Teresa Sordé-Martí, Jelen Amador-López and Adriana Aubert Simon*, the family is the pillar on which most Romani values rest – such as solidarity, closeness, collaboration and reciprocal support – which are very strong, also because of their common experience of discrimination and exclusion (see page 139 in this book). *Panagiota Gkofa* also describes collectivity and familiar supports as a significant value in the *Greek* Roma community, where the majority of people are poor, highly marginalised and frequently live in extreme conditions at the edges of urban areas (Kostouli & Mitakidou, 2009, see page 45 in this book). *Valeria Cavioni* stressed that from the Roma point of view, the *Italian* school system is a symbol of a hostile society that forces cultural assimilation instead of valuing a plurality of ethnic identities (Senato della Republica, 2011, see page 79 in this book). *Pedro Calado, Liliana Moreira, Sónia Costa, Celeste Simões and Margarida Gaspar de Matos* state about the situation of Roma in *Portugal* that 'the theme which is essential to approach is ethnic discrimination' (see page 127 in this book). This problem is characteristic not only for the other Southern European countries but for the whole of Europe.

The here discussed Western European countries – such as *Germany*, *Norway* and *Sweden* – are with the exception of Norway, EU Member States and part of the Schengen agreement. These countries, especially in comparison with Eastern and Southern Europe, have smaller Roma minorities. These are on the one hand more disadvantaged than the non-Roma but have a much better social situation than Roma in Southern or Eastern Europe. For example in *Sweden* – although the social situation of the Roma minority is still characterised by social, economic and political exclusion and marginalisation and their life expectancy and living standards are comparatively lower than that of the average Swede – 'the level of exclusion may be different though, since the welfare systems assure that no-one, including marginalized Roma families, falls below a certain poverty line' (SOU, 2010: 55, p. 35–36, see page 163 in this book). In *Norway* Roma people often depend on social welfare benefits but they also have difficulties claiming their rights because they are often unable to require information, fill out forms and answer letters. Therefore, they usually receive limited understanding and assistance from public services (see page 95 in this book). In *Germany* there are also negative sentiments against Roma, but they also are recognised as a national minority.

There is a constant Roma migration from Southern and Eastern Europe to Western Europe because of their better living conditions, especially since the 1990s: After the Fall of the Iron Curtain, the Romanian Revolution and the disintegration of Yugoslavia, a host of Roma has moved from Romania, Bosnia and Kosovo, applying for asylum, for example, in *Germany*. According to *Natascha Hofmann*, some of them have received an unlimited residence permit or have become German citizens. Others were forcibly sent back on the basis of return policies and treaties with their country of origin (see page 30 in this book). After the Eastern enlargement of the European Union (2004–2007) a host of Roma migrated from the new Member States, for example, Romania and

Bulgaria, to Western Europe, because the Schengen agreement allows them as EU citizens to live in all Member States.

Disadvantages and Multiple Deprivations

Roma in Europe are not only the biggest minority but also the most disadvantaged (European Commission, 2004; EU-FRA, 2012, 2014b). Although most of the Roma people have been living for centuries in European countries, their situation is still different from the non-Roma population; they often suffered from poverty and exclusion. There is a host of Roma, especially in Southern and in Eastern Europe, who are considered as the most disadvantaged group in European societies, for example, regarding their (1) health situation, (2) on the labour, (3) on the housing market and (4) also in education:

1. According to research findings on a national and international level, the European Roma minority usually has a less healthy lifestyle and its *health situation* is much worse than of the non-Roma population. Roma people regularly suffer from higher rates of chronic diseases and infant mortality and have lower life expectancies than the rest of European societies. For example in *Sweden*, according to a Government Report

   > health problems start earlier, there are life style related health problems dating back from the times before Roma were resident and life expectancy is judged to be clearly below average. (SOU, 2010: 55, see page 165 in this book)

2. There is also a significant gap in employment opportunities on the *labour market* between Roma and non-Roma: For example, in *Portugal* a representative survey from 2014 showed that 18% of the Roma respondents were active with profession/work and 57% of them were unemployed (see page 123 in this book). In *Spain* 36.4% of the active Roma population was unemployed in 2011, while only 20.9% of the majority society was in the same situation. According to the research findings of *Fernando Macías-Aranda, Teresa Sordé-Martí, Jelen Amador-López and Adriana Aubert Simon* Spanish Roma often find themselves caught in a cycle of poverty, which is associated with low levels of education and which negatively influences their access to the labour market. Researcher also identified a longstanding trend of ethnic discrimination practices regarding employment of Roma which have a high level of social acceptance (see page 143 in this book).
   These tendencies are also characteristic for most of the European Roma. It is therefore no wonder that Roma, for example, in *Germany,* often don't reveal their ethnic affiliation to facilitate social mobility and participation and to prevent institutional discrimination (Jonuz, 2009, p. 290; Strauß, 2011, see page 31 in this book).
3. Disadvantageous *housing conditions* – dwelling status and available infrastructure – represent a major problem for most of the Roma people in

Western and Southern Europe. Not only substandard living conditions but also residential segregation and barriers to the subsidised and free housing market are characteristic for them. For example in *Spain* the Ministry of Health, Social Policy and Equality noted that in 2011 more than 60% of the Roma households experienced at least one of four difficulties relating to living conditions: (1) overcrowding; (2) leaks or damp in walls, floors, ceilings or foundations; rot in floors, windows or door frames; (3) lack of basic services or facilities (running water, hot water, toilets, showers or electrical installations) and (4) lack of public urban services (sewerage, public transport in the neighbourhood, rubbish collection, pavements, asphalted roads and public lighting) (see page 144 in this book). In *Italy* spatial isolation has been turned into social isolation fostering spatial segregation of its inhabitants from the rest of the population (Tarnovschi, 2012; see page 74 in this book). Even in *Norway* Roma people are living segregated from the Norwegian society (AID, 2009; Engebrigtsen, 2015; see page 97 in this book).

4. The disadvantaged social situation of the European Roma minority is considered to come from their low level of participation and success in *education and lifelong learning* (EU-FRA, 2014a). This impedes their chances for employment and income prospects, but also for getting better housing conditions and having a good health status. These problems in turn have a negative impact on their access to, and attainment and success in, education.

'Dawn of Learning' for Roma in Europe

Questions of education are the central elements of politics making the situation of Roma better. To fulfil these requirements some European countries have taken determined steps. As *Natascha Hofmann* wrote, we are in the phase of the 'dawn of learning' (see page 27 in this book) because there are more and more policies and programs to develop attainment and success of Roma in European education and lifelong learning.

The idea of lifelong learning has become the most important educational paradigm of our times and also an umbrella term for educational political reform ambitions in the European Union over the last decades. Since, at the very latest, the proclamation of the *European Year of Lifelong Learning* in 1996, lifelong learning has been considered the only possible answer to the political and economic changes in modern times in Europe. According to the interpretation of different organisations of the European Union lifelong learning shall be the precondition for the sensitive, peaceful and democratic solution to the difficulties arising from political, social, and economic changes. As an educational policy concept, lifelong learning, through the extension of the socially mandatory learning period throughout one's whole life, aims at changes in the individuals' subjective biographies on the one side, and at political and structural changes in the whole society on the other (Óhidy, 2008). For individual learners lifelong learning is

> a cognitive process which starts in early childhood, ends in late old age, and includes formal or school education, non-formal learning