

# Chapter 4

## Social Inclusion, Participation and Citizenship in Contexts of Neoliberalism: Examples of Adult Education Policy and Practice with Young People in the UK, The Netherlands and Ireland



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### Introduction

In this chapter, we discuss findings from EduMAP research involving adult education programmes in the UK, Ireland and the Netherlands. EduMAP's understanding of active participatory citizenship involves a multi-dimensional perspective, including a socio-economic, a socio-cultural and a politico-legal dimension (EduMAP Concept Note 2017, see also Chap. 1 of this book). In this chapter, we will consider the influence and impact which various discourses of social exclusion have had on the construction of understandings of active citizenship, particularly in contexts where skills for socio-economic participation are a dominant concern for post-16 education. We will examine some key conceptual frameworks and look at policy contexts in the UK, the Netherlands and Ireland, before considering how selected educational programmes and initiatives (researched as part of the EduMAP project) negotiate aims of promoting participation and inclusion in these contexts.

In all three countries, adult education policies, particularly for programmes aimed at young adults, have been influenced by concerns about skills gaps and youth unemployment, exacerbated by the impact of the economic crisis of 2008 onwards. In Ireland, for example, rising youth unemployment has propelled reforms of the further education system, while in the UK, funding for many programmes has been cut in the context of austerity policies. In the Netherlands, largely considered as an example for success in targeting issues such as early school leaving and youth unemployment through educational and welfare policies, there have been concerns

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that young people from ethnic minority backgrounds may be particularly at risk of social exclusion.

These contexts may lead to narrow conceptualisations of participation, inclusion and citizenship of young adults, which emphasise the responsibilities of the individual over the removal of structural barriers to participation. Discourse shifts as part of neoliberalism emphasise workfare over welfare and responsibilities over rights, leading to the framing of inclusion predominantly in terms of practices and discourses related to ‘activation’ and sometimes, assimilation. Key target groups for discourses of activation include young people not in education, employment or training (‘NEET’), while the inclusion of migrant and ethnic minority young people is often framed through the complex and contradictory interplay between discourses of assimilation and experiences of discrimination. These developments influence the adult education field for young people vulnerable to social exclusion, particularly in relation to whether and how programmes and initiatives promote active participatory citizenship.

## **The Framing of Adult Education and Active Citizenship Participation as Responses to Social Exclusion: Key Discourses**

Within the context of the European Union, as well as at national level in many countries, adult education, along with other forms of active citizenship participation, are often framed as responses to social exclusion and marginalisation (European Union 2015; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2015; Martin, 2003; Field and Schemmann 2017; Mikelatou and Arvanitis 2018). This is premised on the notion that adult education can be a means to promote social, economic and political participation and that in turn, active participation in these citizenship domains will mitigate against a range of life contexts associated with vulnerability and social exclusion. The EduMAP project has adopted this as a starting point for its research, considering how approaches to participation are framed and put into practice in a range of adult education programmes in different countries. A key finding early on in the review of adult education policies and practices, confirmed through the fieldwork research, is the diverse, contextual and relational character of concepts such as active participation, inclusion, and exclusion. However, this is contrasted by the generalised use of these terms in policy contexts, where their meanings are taken for granted and (as a result) remain ambiguous (Levitas 2004).

The diverse framings and discourses relating to active citizenship, participation and social inclusion are influenced by contexts of neoliberalism, an ideology and system of governance which has spread from its origins in economic theory to different spheres of life (Brown 2016). Based on paradigms of economic paramourcy, market self-regulation through competition, reduced levels of state intervention, and a focus on people as either human capital or consumers, neoliberalism has

wide-ranging implications for conceptualisations of adult education on the one hand, and of participation and active citizenship on the other. Education, in its framing of lifelong learning, becomes a tool for influencing national competitiveness and productivity, while also being conceived as a means to boost the positions of individuals within competitive job markets (Brown 2016; Biesta 2006; Desjardins 2013). For (adult) education policies this leads to a focus on programmes and qualifications which either have a high currency on job markets or provide remedies to perceived skill deficits. *Learning for earning* is thus privileged over *learning for learning* (Martin 2003), while adult education systems themselves are also subject to marketisation, functioning as de facto enterprises which have to bid and compete for both funding and learners-as-customers.

The application of neoliberalist principles and paradigms promotes a shift from viewing education as the collective responsibility of societies, based on a human right to education, towards constructing learners as competitive and enterprising individuals who are responsible for increasing their own human capital market value through acquiring more skills desired by employers. Such processes of responsibilisation and individualisation frame active participation as a citizen duty, and certain values, behaviours and personality traits become favoured (such as adaptability, flexibility and ambition) (Brown 2016). In this logic, the *worthy citizen* is one who by way of their participation in work or learning, contribution to economic productivity and a resulting reduction of welfare spending is ‘deserving’ and entitled to financial and quality of life rewards, while in the reverse, non-participation (in learning or in employment) becomes linked to self-exclusion that is ‘tantamount to non-citizenship’ (Walker 2009, p. 346).

Discourses which exclusively frame participation as *responsibility* neglect or deny the role of social inequality and injustice. Levitas (1998) has captured different positions in the context of policy, academic and public discourses on social exclusion. Developed during the UK New Labour government years of the late 1990s and early 2000s, her framework distinguishes three discourses: firstly, a redistributionist discourse, focused on poverty and processes of *being excluded*, envisaging citizenship as a foundation of rights that lead to ‘a substantial redistribution of power and wealth’ (Levitas 1998, p. 7). This perspective emphasises the role of adult education as a catalyst for processes of social change and transformation, addressing not just individual but also community-related needs as well as critical and structural perspectives. The second, *social integrationist* discourse, prominent in New Labour policies in the UK, but also in European Union policy of recent decades, focuses above all on labour market participation, casting paid work not only as the most effective route out of material poverty but also as a form of social and cultural integration (Levitas 1998). By extension, participation in adult education or lifelong learning is seen as an important factor in fostering such socio-cultural integration, with the promise of social mobility. The third discourse focuses above all on individual responsibility, attributing exclusion to problematic or deficient behaviours and values of individuals or groups. This discourse problematises ‘dependency’ on welfare systems, while utilising gendered and racialised ‘*moral underclass*’ tropes (Levitas 1998), for example by focusing on young men involved in crime, single

(young) mothers, or immigrants and ethnic minorities. Integration is mostly conceived as assimilation to dominant values and behaviours, with (adult) education taking on a remedial role. Fergusson (2013) notes that discourses of social exclusion are increasingly being displaced by those of ‘disengagement’, describing acts of self-exclusion that emphasise individualised responsabilisation and personalise blame for non-participation.

Thus, framings of inclusion and participation are diverse, with both competing and overlapping discourses. In- and exclusion have also been described as limited concepts, focusing on dichotomist views of ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ and neglecting wider inequalities (Levitas 2004). Nevertheless, whether the focus is on exogenous (structural) or on endogenous (individualised) factors preventing participation (Fergusson 2013) has significant implications for adult education, setting contexts of complexity which programmes, practitioners and young adults have to negotiate. In the following, we take a closer look at different policy contexts for adult education and active participatory citizenship in the UK, the Netherlands and Ireland.

## **Policy Contexts for Adult Education and Active Participatory Citizenship in the UK, The Netherlands and Ireland**

### ***United Kingdom***

In the UK, adult education looks back on rich traditions and continues to be characterised by diverse strands. Arising from religious roots in some areas, along with self-help and labour movements (for example the Workers’ Educational Association), liberal adult education approaches were significant from around WW1 to the 1980s (Holford and Welikala 2013). Vocational and further education drew on the apprenticeship tradition (established through medieval guilds) as a key influence (Hopkins 2014). From the 1970s and 1980s onwards, concerns about economic competitiveness in the context of neoliberal policy environments weakened the position of community-based liberal adult education in favour of a lifelong learning paradigm which focused on employment-related skills (Bynner 2017; Holford and Welikala 2013). Major national policy documents in the first decade of the Millennium included *The Learning Age* (Department for Education and Employment – DFEE, 1998) and *The Leitch Review of Skills* (2006), both of which focused on the development of skills for employability in the context of retaining the UK’s position of global competitiveness.

Over recent years, the trend of focusing on economic objectives and employability has continued, particularly in the context of education for young people. In England and Northern Ireland, the Adult Skills Survey PIACC (OECD 2013) raised concerns about growing socio-economic disparities as well as the relatively poor performance of young people aged 16–24 for literacy and numeracy skills (both in comparison to older age group in same country and in international comparison).

Thus, the development of young people's employability skills has come to be viewed as a key factor for their social inclusion and integration. In contrast, young people who leave school with limited or no qualifications and do not participate in further education, training or employment (characterised as 'NEET') have increasingly become a policy concern. Originating in the context of re-categorisations of unemployed young people in the 1980s and 90s due to changes in welfare policy, the 'NEET' concept has been criticised for being both too broad (as it involves a very heterogeneous 'group' of young people) as well as too narrow in perspective. It focuses on what young people are not engaged in rather than considering what young people might be doing instead, which may range from short term unemployment, (mental) health difficulties or disabilities through to caring for children or other family members (Furlong 2006; Yates and Payne 2006). Despite a plethora of initiatives, the number of 16–24 year olds in England classified as 'NEET' has remained relatively constant since the turn of the Millennium, aside from a peak during the financial crisis years (Department for Education 2020; Thurlby-Campbell and Bell 2015).

There have been a number of educational programmes in the UK aimed at young people considered at risk of social exclusion over the past decades. Shifting governmental positions, both within and across political divides, have shortened the lifespan of some of these initiatives. An example of this was the 'Connexions' strategy, initially a flagship initiative of the New Labour government, which was later disbanded at national level (Hutchinson et al. 2016). A financial support programme for young people aged 16–19 in further education, Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) fell victim to cuts through austerity policies in England from 2010 onwards. Overall, funding uncertainties have become a characteristic feature for many post-16 programmes, with an emphasis on a target- and profit-driven free market culture (Wrigley 2017). At the same time, informal youth education programmes have either been cut altogether or suffered from similar tendencies of marketisation affecting the formal sector, following competitive models of 'commissioning' through which multi-national corporations may be awarded contracts over existing providers at local level with trained and experienced staff (Davies 2013). Current policies focus on 'tracking' the pathways of young people aged 16–17, some targeted financial support through the 16–19 Bursary Fund, apprenticeship and traineeship initiatives, careers advice targeting young people aged 12–18, as well as supported internships for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities (Powell 2018). However, the success of some of these initiatives has been viewed as limited (Maguire 2015). Atkins (2013) highlights the marginal status of many programmes designed to increase the employability of young people who are considered at risk of becoming 'NEET' and argues that the socialisation of these young people into accepting the conditions of low-pay and low-skill employment runs counter to real social inclusion. This is due to a narrow focus on modifying individual behaviours and attitudes while governmental responsibility for lacking structural conditions is neglected. Hutchinson et al. (2016) observe that while Conservative-led governments of recent years have continued some trends introduced under the previous New Labour governments, responsibility

for participation has been placed firstly on young people themselves, secondly on businesses and local governments (whose funding has been severely cut) and only as a last resort on central government, despite the latter being in charge of setting the structural conditions for participation.

Similar trends can be observed with regards to policy discourses regarding active citizenship in the UK. Burls and Recknagel (2013, p. 5) observe that under the Conservative-led governments since 2010 the philosophical roots of policies have moved away from participation in civic and civil society towards ideas of '*social action*' and '*community self-help*', developments which have been accompanied by extensive welfare benefits reform, a rhetorical shift from '*equality*' to '*fairness*' and policies of austerity with deep impacts on publicly funded community services. In this context, socio-economic pressures and cuts are considered to have diverted attention from political participation to meeting immediate individual needs. However, Bee and Pachi (2014) argue that even though active citizenship agendas had been prominent during the New Labour governments (1997–2010), the reality of policy implementation was marred by the dominance of top-down approaches giving priority to institutional agendas over local social needs, as well as by exclusionary and assimilationist policies towards ethnic minority groups in the context of growing concerns about extremism and terrorism. These concerns also provided the backdrop for further policies that have cast a more restrictive frame on notions of citizenship, as part of the so-called 'Prevent' duties on schools and further education colleges in England and Wales. Under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 educational institutions have a duty to prevent learners from being drawn into violent and non-violent forms of extremism which create an atmosphere conducive to terrorism; as part of this duty they also have to promote British values, namely '*democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance for those with different faiths and beliefs*' (HM Government 2015, p. 5). McGhee and Zhang (2017) suggest that this requirement, which has been controversial since its inception, has raised concerns about a retreat from previous policies of multiculturalism towards a more 'muscular' and securitised policy approach aimed at producing liberal citizens and thus remedying perceived previous failures of the education system. They argue that despite this muscular top-down approach to defining citizenship in the British education system, at local levels, implementing schools and colleges have managed to integrate this requirement into existing and inclusive classroom discussions about citizenship. However, the specific framing of the requirement as *British fundamental values* is also considered to bear increased risks of perpetuating existing patterns and discourses of exclusion and otherness, drawing on assimilationist approaches to integration (Lockley-Scott 2019).

## *The Netherlands*

Adult education and lifelong learning in the Netherlands have been characterised as policy priorities in recent years and linked to concepts of self-reliance, autonomy and personal achievement based on employability (EAEA 2011). Historically, government involvement was mostly residual, emphasising the role of voluntary initiative. Agendas of emancipation, equality and pluralism came into focus from the late 1960s onwards, leading to a rise in programmes of second chance and second way adult education (Cedefop 2002). From the mid-1980s radical policy shifts took place in the context of high levels of unemployment and public expenditure cuts and subsequently adult education policy became increasingly focused on economic perspectives, emphasising vocational education and training as well as basic skills development aspects. Following from this, adult general education and adult basic education were developed and eventually integrated in a common structure with vocational education and training through the 1996 Adult Education and Vocational Training Act (Cedefop 2002). Decentralisation, along with deregulation, have been strong themes in Dutch education and welfare policies, leading to diverse regional and local delivery of education and training programmes particularly for unemployed young people (van Berkel 2013). The Netherlands are considered to have adopted neoliberalist principles in welfare, adult education and citizenship policies early in comparison to many other continental European countries, with an emphasis on individual responsibility. This has implications in adult education and active citizenship contexts both for young people considered 'NEET' and – through changes from paradigms of multiculturalism to civic and cultural integration – for migrant and ethnic minority communities (Schinkel and van Houdt 2010; Mattei and Broeks 2018).

Rates of youth unemployment, 'NEET' status and early school leaving are low in the Netherlands in comparison with other European countries while participation in adult learning and adult skill levels are high and above the EU average. However, young people with low qualification levels and young people from migrant and ethnic minority communities face higher risks of unemployment (OECD 2014; European Commission 2018). In the context of the European Youth Guarantee initiative, policy initiatives to mitigate against youth unemployment as a result of the financial crisis, the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan (Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan 2014), the Youth Unemployment Action Plan (2013) and subsequent policy documents led to initiatives such as the creation of training schemes and jobs for young people; training and job coaching programmes in specific regions; financial incentives and support for employers providing training opportunities; cooperation between government agencies and social partners on employment and job security for young people, targeting particularly groups considered vulnerable – such as young people with low qualification levels and young migrants (OECD 2014; Cedefop 2016; Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan 2014). However, flexibilisation with the aim of job creation also promoted temporary contracts offering limited security (Chung et al. 2012). Young migrants born outside the



EU are considered to be at particularly high risk of unemployment compared to young people born in the Netherlands (12.1% versus 5.4% for 15–24 year olds; European Commission 2018).

In 2009, legislation was introduced which changed access to the benefit system fundamentally for young people aged 18–27 (through the ‘Investment in Youth Act’, later incorporated into the Work and Social Assistance Act), placing an onus on young people to accept offers of work or education and introducing waiting periods before they can access social assistance (Chung et al. 2012). After this period, it is up to local municipalities to determine whether young people have made sufficient efforts to find work, education or training. ‘Activation’ measures include compulsory work activity programmes alongside different forms of coaching and support, however, there are concerns about support for young people who do not register and therefore are not ‘visible’ to local authorities (Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan 2014; van Berkel 2013). The Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan (2014) foresees a role in local youth work schemes to reach those identified ‘*problem groups*’ including those suspected of involvement in crime, while the scheme ‘City Deal’ targets young people particularly from migrant backgrounds (European Commission 2018).

Civic integration of migrant populations, in particular through language learning, has become a central aspect of policy in the Netherlands involving the adult education sector (Mattei and Broeks 2018). However, concerns have been raised about the quality of some integration courses and low success rates in language courses, combined with the fact that the financial burden for these courses (as well as the burden of integration more generally) has been placed on migrants themselves (European Commission 2018). Legislation introduced in the late 1990s made language skills and basic knowledge of Dutch society a precondition to citizenship for non-EU immigrants, aimed at promoting self-sufficiency and economic productivity (Mosher 2015). While socio-economic integration and employability have been important considerations, over time the emphasis has shifted to concerns about remedying the perceived failures of multicultural policies (Mattei and Broeks 2018; Schinkel and van Houdt 2010).

In line with educational policies, citizenship discourse over recent years has emphasised the idea of a *participation society*, based on individuals’ responsibility for their own life and environment (Hoekman et al, 2018). Self-sufficiency is linked with reducing burdens on the welfare state and has been described as neo-liberal communitarianism, requiring the activation of citizens to support government (Schinkel and van Houdt 2010; Mosher 2015). However, there are concerns that expectations on citizenship not only include responsibility for socio-economic participation and integration, but that some ethnic minority groups, particularly Muslims and others classed as ‘non Western’ in official discourse, are considered predominantly through the prisms of cultural difference and otherness (Long 2015). Linked to concerns about crime and more recently, radicalisation, these young people have become a target of culturally based citizenship education while society overall (including in educational contexts) has failed to challenge prejudices linked to cultural essentialism and nationalised concepts of belonging (Long 2015; Turcatti



2018). Thus, the situation of ethnic minority young people in the ‘participation society’ is particularly complex, with Schinkel and de Houdt (2010, p. 711) describing an ‘*ethnically selective form of governing*’ which is supportive of community when it relates to the majority population, but problematises it as preventing integration where migrants and minorities are concerned. Adult education as a means of social integration has been largely perceived in terms of broadly interlinked purposes: preparation and activation programmes linked to employability; language and integration programmes aimed at preventing the perceived dangers of multicultural segregation; and remedial approaches (e.g. through youth work) for youth considered at risk. However, each of these strands is set in complex discourses surrounding citizenship, inclusion and belonging.

## *Ireland*

Adult education in Ireland has a tradition of community-based approaches involving high levels of volunteerism and a focus on personal development and social inclusion, with economic drivers taking a more explicit roles in policy developments since the global economic crisis (Maunsell et al. 2008; McGuinness et al. 2014). In the first decades after the establishment of the Irish state (1922) government involvement in (adult) education was fairly low, with church-based organisations focusing on academic education. The development of vocational education was influential for Irish adult education but took hold later than in some other countries, linked to a later emergence of industrialisation (McGuinness et al., 2014). From the late 1950s, the need for an educated labour force in the wake of economic difficulties and high levels of emigration led to a stronger emphasis on second level and third level (university) education, albeit mostly available on a full-time basis, with limited fee-paying evening class provision organised by local vocational education committees. Non-formal provisions through voluntary adult literacy tutors, as well as women’s self-help groups were significant in establishing alternatives that enabled wider participation levels, especially for working class adults. From the 1970s and 80s onwards, many vocational education committees (more recently re-established as further education and training boards) moved towards coordinating adult education provision and providing funding for literacy schemes, however, they retained a significant role as adult education providers (Maunsell et al. 2008).

The White Paper on Adult Education, ‘*Learning for Life*’ (2000) emphasised the role of adult education in promoting community development and active citizenship, through principles that were based on a life-course approach, reflecting the different settings of learning in Ireland (i.e. rural and urban), acknowledging the role of formal and informal learning, as well as of supportive services such as guidance, counselling and childcare. Principles of equality in relation to access, participation and outcome, as well as a framework of interculturalism in the context of growing diversity were recognised as important in the White Paper.

The development of the Irish adult education sector, characterised by a variety of influences often at local levels, led to criticisms of fragmentation and lack of centralised governance and planning structures (McGuinness et al. 2014). Since 2013, the adult education sector has undergone significant reforms, particularly with the establishment of a new Further Education and Training agency (SOLAS), charged with coordinating, overseeing and delivering a strategy that emphasises employability and skills development. The focus of active inclusion is on full participation in society, with high-quality, accessible and flexible education, training and skills development considered as key aspects of the strategy. Young people under the age of 25 are identified as a key target group for education and training interventions, including through youth work provisions. An example of provision aimed particularly at early school leavers is the Youthreach programme, combining vocational learning with a focus on transition from education to employment and adult life (SOLAS 2014).

The stronger alignment of educational policies with economic objectives was set in the context of the economic crisis, which hit Ireland particularly hard, resulting in a bailout from the Troika and subsequent austerity policies. As in other countries, public expenditure cuts affected those already marginalised disproportionately (O'Brien 2018). At the height of the crisis, youth unemployment rose more than threefold, most significantly affecting young people with low qualification levels and those with migrant backgrounds (Kelly et al. 2013; Kelly and McGuinness 2013). Although figures have decreased since then, large gaps remain between young people with the highest and the lowest qualification levels (European Commission 2018). O'Brien (2018) suggests that in the context of austerity, adult education providers and advocacy organisations alike came under pressure to conform and align with state policies, leading to top-down approaches including for citizenship. For young people, cuts in benefit provision were imposed at the same time as training scheme funding also became more limited (Papadopoulos 2016).

A key demographic development in Ireland since the late 1990s has been increasing diversity through immigration, including asylum seekers and refugees seeking protection after the tightening of asylum systems in other European countries and 'economic' migrants considered crucial for boosting the booming Irish economy (Lentin 2016). However, despite this diversity, issues of integration and interculturalism (as officially endorsed paradigms) have remained complex. Examples are experiences of racism reported by ethnic minority young people (often in gendered forms, for example against wearing the hijab), while the system of dispersal Direct Provision for asylum seekers has been criticised as an example of institutionalised racism, reminiscent of the treatment of other repressed groups such as unmarried mothers in Ireland's past (Walsh 2017; Lentin 2012; Lentin 2016). However, Lentin (2012) argues that the language of interculturalism can euphemistically mask racism that remains unacknowledged, leading to a reproduction rather than abolishment of inequality.

Active citizenship and participation featured prominently in policy discourse before the years of economic crisis, when the Taskforce on Active Citizenship (2007) provided a report on the challenge, vision and values (including liberty,

equality and solidarity) associated with the concept, considering active citizenship to involve critical awareness of and care for the welfare of fellow citizens. Participation in democratic processes as well as respect for ethnic and cultural diversity are emphasised, while links to adult education and learning emphasise both formal and non-formal contexts. Language learning, mentoring as well as support for community and voluntary organisations are among the report's recommendations. However, in the context of the economic crisis that followed, a high number of civil society and community organisations were forced to close or significantly reduce their work, among them the independent expert advice agency National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism, while many migrant-led organisations were threatened in their existence, partly because they struggled to compete for funding with other community organisations (Ejorh 2015).

Marking the centenary of the 1916 Irish Rising that had led to the establishment of the Republic, the report 'Citizens Rising' (The People's Conversation 2015) published findings from a series of citizens conversations in a range of community settings, as well as prisons, about influences shaping Ireland's future as well as expectations by and from citizens in this context. Acknowledging the break in public trust as a consequence of the economic crisis, the report identifies education as having a key role in active citizenship, along with rights and responsibilities. The report also calls for community-level action (alongside government-level strategies) to address anti-racism and support integration. Of particular contextual significance in the context of EduMAP field work research in Ireland is its tradition of youth work and a rich landscape of youth services, with a dedicated youth participation strategy (DCYA, 2015) which emphasises cross-sectoral policy approaches such as strengthening links between youth services, formal and non-formal learning providers, businesses and employment agencies.

## **Framing Active Participation and Social Inclusion in Different Contexts: Examples from EduMAP Field Research in the UK, The Netherlands and Ireland**

### ***EduMAP Research on Adult Education Practices in the UK, The Netherlands and Ireland***

In this section, we consider selected examples from programmes researched as part of the EduMAP fieldwork<sup>1</sup> in the UK, the Netherlands and Ireland. Our research followed a case study approach, considering what might be examples of 'good practice' in relation to promoting active participatory citizenship among young adults at risk of social exclusion. Based on our review of policy contexts and preliminary

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<sup>1</sup>We wish to acknowledge the invaluable field work and data analysis contributions of our co-researchers Dr. Helen Lawson, Dr. Andrea Laczik and Dr. Mai Abu Moghli.

desk-based research into a variety of programmes, we selected four programmes in the UK (three in England and one in Scotland), two in Ireland and one in the Netherlands and carried out individual and focus group interviews both at the sites and in some cases, via telephone (Huegler et al. 2018a, b; Huegler 2018a, b; Lawson 2018). At one site, we also conducted separate interviews with young adult participants which focused on communication practices, platforms, means and networks (as aspects of communicative ‘ecologies’) in relation to adult education and in everyday life. Furthermore, we interviewed several policy makers who were either affiliated with the programmes or provided relevant thematic expertise.

Our definition for including programmes under the framework of ‘adult education’ was deliberately broad and included a range of contexts, as outlined in Chap. 1. We sought to both reflect the diversity of adult education contexts (such as vocationally focused and other formal education and training, as well as informal programmes), while also seeking to capture initiatives which focused on socio-economic, socio-cultural and politico-legal dimensions of citizenship. Table 4.1 sets out the seven programmes covered by the research in the three countries:

Overall, interviews were conducted with 129 participants across the three countries, including 80 young adults and 49 professionals. Data collection took place from June 2017 until February 2018. Ethical approval for the research was provided by the UCL Institute of Education research committee.

The focus of our field research was on identifying the views of professionals (educational practitioners and policy makers) and of young adults in relation to their conceptualisation and operationalisation of active participatory citizenship and related concepts, barriers preventing participation and inclusion, as well as examples of how educational programmes facilitated relevant skills. The life contexts of

**Table 4.1** Overview of programmes considered as part of EduMAP research in the UK, Ireland and the Netherlands

UK	Netherlands	Ireland
A mentoring programme focusing on care experienced and other vulnerable young people in a Scottish city A vocationally focused programme at a small further education college in London An English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) programme at an adult and further education college in London <b>A ‘gateway’ programme for unemployed young people aged 16–29 in a local authority area in Southeast Englandz</b>	<b>A coding skills programme for young adults at risk of social exclusion, targeting specifically refugees and migrants</b>	<b>A small youth participation project at an education service for ethnic minority young people in Ireland</b> A sports-based socio-cultural programme promoting equality and anti-racism in Ireland

(the programmes highlighted in bold are discussed in this chapter)

young people and young adults taking part in the programmes were diverse, ranging from experiences in public care; unemployment; previous negative experiences in education; experiences of migration; as well as belonging to an ethnic minority group. From the perspective of most professionals, through not necessarily young people themselves, they were potentially vulnerable or at risk of social exclusion. Interviews with young people and young adults focused on exploring their life situations and experiences, not least because few of them directly related to abstract terms such as ‘active citizenship’.

Overall, it is important to stress that the full findings of the research were rich and wide-ranging, indicating diversity across contexts as well as some common themes, and it is far beyond the scope of this chapter to report on these in any detail.<sup>2</sup> Instead, the following discussion focuses on specific examples from three programmes which provide insight into how participation and social inclusion may be framed in different contexts. Our findings are not representative of each programme’s overall aims, objectives or functioning, not least because active participatory citizenship often was not the explicit focus or learning outcome of the programme). In the same vein, we do not purport to represent the perspectives of professionals and young adults involved with the programmes.

### ***‘Activating’ Unemployed Young People Through Personalised Support: A Programme in England***

This programme, aimed at unemployed young people aged 16–29 in a certain local authority area who are not in training or education, is focused on personalised support through advisors who help participants consider their educational, training or employment plans and options. Priding itself on its tailored approach, there is no set curriculum or route and some learners might only attend one-to-one sessions with their advisor, while others take part in a range of classes, volunteering opportunities or embark on other courses. Support can last up to 12 months, with a further 6 months ongoing support for those who enter education, training or employment. Recruitment to the programme is diverse, with some young people being referred by professionals. A strong emphasis within the programme is on supporting young people to develop positive attitudes and confidence about their strengths and capabilities. Many participants have had negative experiences in previous education contexts, and the relationship and communications with their advisors are contrasted as being respectful, based on empathy, flexibility and reliability. While the focus of the programme overall is clearly on employability and socio-economic participation and integration, some of the competences (such as confidence, self-esteem,

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<sup>2</sup>The EduMAP website contains a range of publications which provide more detail on research findings across the project and for specific country and programme contexts (<https://blogs.uta.fi/edumap/>)

communication skills and learning in diverse group contexts) have wider relevance to participation.

*'Moving forward'* and *'changing mindsets'* are key metaphors used by practitioners in the programme, contrasting this with perceived passivity in states of unemployment. There is also an emphasis from the perspective of programme leaders on avoiding *'a dependency culture'* and *'taking responsibility'*. Thus, the programme is strongly aligned with social integrationist discourses focusing on labour market integration and economic participation and productivity, while reflecting framings of *'disengaged'* young people as requiring activation. Rather than emphasising structural dimensions leading to situations of inequality, for example lacking support for children and young people with mental health needs or learning disabilities, as well as macro-economic conditions of poverty, the context of the programme addresses issues related to mitigating against individual *'chaotic lifestyles'* and community-based and generational *'entrenched worklessness'*. The onus is on young people to participate and adapt to given circumstances, but limitations in their capability to do so are addressed through the supportive and flexible structure and pace of the programme, based on *small steps* if needed. On the other hand, learners appreciate this personalised approach, commenting that they feel respected, welcome and treated *'as adults'*. For some participants, a sense of solidarity also develops in group contexts, providing safe spaces for testing out ideas (for example through supporting entrepreneurship) and for experiencing diversity that may challenge their previous frames of experience. Group participation can also mitigate against the isolation of unemployment, while the relationships and personalised support of advisors provide a contact line to the outside world for those young people for whom mental health difficulties make leaving their bedroom a challenge. In times of funding constraints leading to short term interventions, the programme offers a much longer and well-integrated support framework than is usual, allowing practitioners and young people to develop meaningful relationships in which advice is not only limited to employability, but includes wider access to networks and resources, alongside practical help. Being able to sustain both the support provided individually and the continuation of the programme as a whole are key concerns of practitioners and local programme leaders. At the time of the research work was under way to secure longer term funding beyond the project-based grant that had started the programme off.

### ***Enhancing Socio-Economic Integration and Contributing to the Community through Specific Industry Skills: A Case from The Netherlands***

This programme focuses on developing computer coding skills aimed at young adults at risk of social exclusion, specifically refugees and migrants, as well as those under-represented in the technology industry (including women). The programme

lasts for 12 months and involves a highly immersive coding ‘boot camp’ based on intensive learning of various coding languages through a *learning by doing* approach, supported through master classes by prominent technology companies. After this phase, learners become mentors for new starters and learn more advanced programming languages. The final 6 months involve an internship with a company as a developer, which may involve a scholarship. Overall, the programme is intensive and demanding from the outset, relying on self-directed learning, peer- and self-assessment. The initiative is based on a start-up social enterprise setting, with co-founders describing it as an ‘experiment’ intended to challenge national policies and practices towards refugees and asylum seekers, characterised as denying agency (e.g. of working) while people wait for immigration status decisions in holding centres and receiving welfare payments. In contrast, the programme (supported by the local municipality) promotes early integration into educational and work contexts. A key part of the programme are community *impact weeks* during which learners work on real world problems with community organisations and NGOs (e.g. optimising systems in a social restaurant chain, connecting international organisations with local experts, or language and translation apps for refugees). The programme uses business professionals and developers from companies, based on the idea that this contact will support participants in making networks that may lead to employment. According to the co-founders, the programme is meant to be based on hard work, passion and perseverance. At the same time, access to technological skills is also conceived as a form of democratisation.

The programme emphasises self-motivation and commitment, while aiming to promote confidence, team work skills and resilience, not least through the *cloud* of a supportive community (through peer learning and mentoring, as well as technology master classes). This sense of community is in itself seen as a mitigating factor against exclusion and isolation experienced particularly by more recently arrived refugees. Participants contrast this approach and the recognition of their prior skills with disempowering experiences in other context, for example for Syrian refugees their time in limbo contexts in Turkey. A sense of needing to be proactive in networking, seize opportunities and ‘stand up’ is key element from the programme from early on, with the aim that this will support confidence as well as socio-economic and socio-cultural integration.

The wider context of the programme reflects some of the previously mentioned complexities surrounding diversity. On the one hand, the programme itself is very diverse in terms of ethnicity and nationality, and while it targets refugees as a key group, anyone at risk of social exclusion, on a low income or underrepresented within the technology sector is able to become involved in the scheme. At the same time, an organisational board member pointed towards a certain *tolerance policy* that prevailed at local level towards refugees and immigrations, involving pressures ‘*to function*’, to work and ‘*be quiet*’. This was linked to distinctions made by local people between ‘*the good Arab – the bad Arab, the good Muslim – the bad Muslim*’, involving expectations on integration, specifically through learning the Dutch language (even though many learners on the programme spoke good English which bears relevance in the technology-driven environment of the scheme). There was



concern that public anxieties about immigration and diversity combined with the rise of right-wing populist parties could lead to a sense of hostility against the initiative itself, although this was addressed through its open recruitment policy (rather than being a designated ‘refugee support’ scheme). Interestingly, despite the pressures on integration through language learning, the programme itself does not consider limited language skills (including in English) a criteria of exclusion at the point where learners apply to join the programme; instead, the system of peer mentorship (which may involve others from the same background) and an immersive approach to language alongside coding skills are seen as key solutions to overcome such barriers. In this way the programme represents a highly pragmatic approach to integration through work-related learning with a high skills-level ‘currency’. While there is awareness about structural issues of discrimination, exclusion and resulting isolation affecting the refugee and migrant participants in the programme, the fast-moving, open, innovative and experimental approach seems to firmly prioritise a forward-looking and optimistic outlook, in which sought-after skills and access to networks will provide sufficient social and cultural capital in the *participation society* to enhance the social integration of ethnic minority participants.

### ***Facilitating Participation as ‘Activism’ to Address Structural Barriers and Discrimination: An Informal Programme in Ireland***

This programme in Ireland involved a short-term one-off informal education project, run at an education service for ethnic minority young people for approximately 4 months. The project was funded by a government grant linked specifically to themes of education and employment. Through a series of workshops and meetings supported by youth workers and educational practitioners as facilitators, including a residential trip, a group of young people from migrant and ethnic minority backgrounds explored issues related to discrimination and barriers in education and employment settings. The project culminated in the production of a video resource in which the young people enacted scenes related to their own or other ethnic minority young people’s experiences of prejudice, pressures and discrimination. The video provided an outlet for young people allowing them to express themselves while also conveying their messages to a wider audience. The reaction to it was described by the young people as overwhelming, both because many other young people confirmed that they had experienced very similar issues, and because the reactions of professionals and organisations led to some ongoing dialogue involving awareness raising among practitioners and policy makers.

A key message from young people was that while participation should be based on *an even playing field for everyone*, this is not the case for migrant and ethnic minority young people. The reasons for this are manifold, but include: a lacking awareness of the diversity of young people’s situations and needs on the part of

(educational) professionals; lacking networks and social capital which in Irish (majority) society is deeply embedded and forms the basis of many day-to-day interactions (including for finding employment); sometimes contradictory expectations from within ethnic minority communities and families and from wider society (e.g. regarding educational achievements); regular experiences of prejudice through to outright racism. These experiences disadvantage migrant and ethnic minority young people particularly in post economic crisis contexts where competition and youth unemployment are high.

For the young people involved in the programme, *not shying away* from naming *ugly truths* about discrimination and racism is a key way of addressing structurally embedded issues. Through their role in giving voice to inequalities, they are also acutely aware of how this might lead to improving conditions for the next generation of young people, to whom they feel a sense of responsibility. Educational and youth work practitioners involved in the programme held a facilitative role, creating safe spaces in which young people could express and name experiences and feelings, moving from a sense of powerlessness and resignation to thinking about possible actions. Thus, the project involved strategies of activism and solidarity rather than being based on paradigms of individualised ‘activation’. The young people refer to a range of skills they consider they gained or developed through the course of the programme, but the context for this was informal and participatory, following an agenda young people set themselves. Rather than preparing young people for active citizenship participation, the programme utilises participation to create platforms for and experiences of critical expression and mutual solidarity, along with a sense of their efforts making an impact (particularly through the video resource and reactions towards it). Therefore, despite running only for a short time on a one-off basis, the programme provided opportunities for participation and dialogue with practitioners and policy makers which at the time of the research were ongoing. The young people involved in the project describe feelings of empowerment and hope through a sense of *other people also fighting for it* [equal rights and opportunities].

## Discussion and Conclusions

This chapter has considered how active citizenship, participation and social inclusion for young adults are framed and promoted in different adult education contexts (and countries). As part of that, we have considered the influence of neoliberalism and discourses which focus on the perceived need for excluded young people to be ‘activated’ to participate socio-economically and socio-culturally. While policy contexts are diverse across the three countries (particularly in the aftermath of the economic crisis and austerity measures), government approaches tend to focus on the responsabilisation of young people, particularly those experiencing unemployment or being classified as ‘NEET’. For migrant and ethnic minority young people, this often intersects with assimilationist discourses of integration. For both cohorts, social exclusion becomes framed less in terms of structural or situational barriers to

participation but rather as a problem to be managed through the acquisition and development of skills or through the modification of values, attitudes or behaviours.

The findings from our field research are complex and contextualised, with local professionals often perceiving national policy frameworks as constraining (for example in terms of funding insecurity or lacking support for initiatives). Similarly, the young people and young adults involved in the programmes had diverse life situations and needs and their perspectives on active participatory citizenship varied. In contexts which focus on 'activating' young people to engage in education, training or employment, our case example from England shows that personalised, flexible and empathetic support based on relationships of respect and trust enhances the confidence, skills and capabilities of young adult participants. While the purpose of programmes like this is clearly oriented towards facilitating the socio-economic participation of individual young people, group settings and access to networks and resources can also support experiences of solidarity and mitigate against the isolation of unemployment. In our example from the Netherlands, the opportunity for participants to develop coding skills that may be very desirable to future employers, with access to networks and a supportive community, represents an approach that is innovative and distinct from more standard skills-based integration programmes. The pragmatic focus on socio-economic participation and on coding skills as a new common 'language' also works to distance this programme from some of the complex debates regarding cultural integration or assimilation that have arisen in the context of migration and refugee movements across Europe. Finally, the case from Ireland marks one of the most explicit examples of informal education programmes facilitating processes of activism, challenging discrimination and racism. Rather than targeting the individual skills levels and / or employability of participating young people, the programme started from their own experiences and concerns, while the main role of professionals was to support young people in voicing these concerns. Thus, the programme not only provided skills for participation, but constituted an example of active citizenship 'in action', establishing contexts of mutual support and solidarity.

At the time of writing (2020), the parameters of adult education and societies overall have been radically challenged through the Covid-19 pandemic. At the same time, there has also been a rise in youth activism, including against structural forms of racism, boosted through the Black Lives Matter movement. In this situation, while future developments seem as unpredictable as never before, questions about what constitutes active participatory citizenship become more relevant than ever, with young adults likely to remain at the centre of policy attention in the field education and beyond.

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