



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MAINSTREAMING OF METHODOLOGY INTO EUROPEAN ADULT EDUCATION SYSTEM AND GUIDANCE SERVICES

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Recommendations for mainstreaming of methodology is a document, that contributes to an Erasmus+ project called GLAS (Guidance for Low-skilled Adults towards Skills Assessment and Validation

The aim of this project is to develop methodology for assessment and validation of digital, numeracy and literacy skills for adult education and guidance services practitioners, compiled with implementation guidelines that will provide concrete measures and common principles for basic skills assessment and validation.

In the project, we have included low-skilled adults in the process of screening, assessment, and in the process of the validation of their basic skills. They then received an individual's skill record, which included the counsellor's opinion of the achieved level of skills in coherence with EQF, and recommendations for further education and training programs (e.g., strong areas, weak areas, recommendations for the future).

This document is composed of information related to the recommendations, targeting counsellors, providers and policy makers on the local, regional, national and international level.

Our focus is to develop innovative methodologies and implementation guidelines and train adult education and guidance service practitioners to use those methodologies while also through the practice developing a set of recommendations to be used and implemented in various areas.

IMPLEMENTATION OF ASSESSMENT AND VALIDATION

Adults should be able to assess their skills at any time in their lives, whether they provide a basis for self-improvement or are employment specific.

The European space is very diverse, also when it comes to the implementation of assessment and validation of basic skills. The methodologies differ, as countries try to establish systems that allow individuals to identify, document, assess and validate all forms of learning to use for their advancement, advancing their careers and further education and training.

Adult educational providers develop their own programmes, that suit their culture, approach and learners. On the next pages, we gathered some great examples of implementation in Slovenia and Spain, that were developed by our colleagues and tested thoroughly.

Regarding our own implementation, we gathered successes and challenges from the piloting process done in Scotland, Slovenia and Spain, which can be a learning opportunity for the future.

Slovenia



Project: Guidance for employees 2016-2022



The main purpose of the project is to:

develop effective information and guidance approaches to engage working adults and Identifying and evaluating employees' informal and non-formal skills, with a view to job retention, greater flexibility in employment and further career development linked to participation in further education and certification of skills already acquired.

Adult education providers involved in the project link up with companies and offer advice to their employees. They provide them with professional assistance in identifying the knowledge and competences acquired through different forms of lifelong learning and in systematically organising them either in paper-based or in an electronic portfolio. In the process of identification and evaluation, they help individuals to identify and validate the knowledge and skills acquired in different life situations. For the employees, evidence obtained in the evaluation process is motivating, helping to increase the self-confidence of employees and increasing their motivation for further development. For employers, the new insight into human resources potential helps to facilitate the planning of education and training of employees.

Adult education providers are constantly looking for innovative, different approaches to encourage employees to be even more competitive in the labour market and to be as accessible as possible. To this end, they have established partnerships with various companies and organisations (e.g. regional chambers of commerce and enterprise, trade unions, development agencies, etc.), conduct counselling directly in companies, present themselves at various local events, in the media, etc. They are also always open to individuals who want to take a step towards improving their own competence.

Lea Bašelj, employee at SVP AVIO d.o.o.

I decided to participate in the validation process out of curiosity. But after the first counselling session, I realised that there was actually a possibility for employers to get to know me in a different way. I had never written my hobbies and the activities I do in my spare time in my applications and CV. But with the help of the counsellor, I got a new lease of life, a new hope that I would not settle for the job I am doing now just because I need a job to survive. My experience, my credentials and my non-school-specific awards are more than perfect to apply for the job I want and can do. My experience gives me the opportunity to have confidence in myself and to show what I really am and what I can do in practice. Source: https://arhiv.acs.si/glasila/Info-ISIO_2018-2019.pdf



Jožef Brunec

After primary school, I got a job straight away and completed my professional qualification, or bricklayer's training. I was happy and successful in this job in a company that, among other things, built the Adult education center Murska Sobota. The company was very satisfied with my work, as is the current company, Elektro Maribor, d.d., Service Unit Ljutomer. I work in the field of construction here too, but of course only during the construction season or when investments are being made. In the past years, the director of the Ljutomer unit, Mr Andrej Sraka, has repeatedly encouraged me to obtain the appropriate education, which is also expected in the company. My HR colleague, Ms Cvetka Kolmanič, contacted the Guidance Centre Murska Sobota, and so, at the beginning of last year, I contacted the counsellor, Mr Lujz Sraka. (Of course, I have to say that they are not related). First of all, we checked whether the NVQ mason for bricklaying and plastering was sufficient for the requirements of the workplace at the company. I was a little disappointed that the NVQ was not sufficient, but the counsellor encouraged me and gave me an overview of how the training would work and how my work experience and skills would be recognised during my on-the-job training. We prepared evidence of my work experience and skills and prepared all the documents. I was also very well received at the Secondary Construction School Maribor (Ms Vlasta Ojstršek) and the training was well organised. So today I am proud to say that at the age of 47 I have successfully completed my education and acquired the profession of a bricklayer, thus also gaining proof of what I know and love to do. Source: https://arhiv.acs.si/glasila/Info-ISIO_2018-2019.pdf



Project: GOAL - Guidance for adults in education



The identification and evaluation processes have also been successfully put into practice in Slovenia in the GOAL project - Guidance for adults in education. The project ran from February 2015 to January 2018 and involved Belgium, the Czech Republic, Iceland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Turkey and Slovenia as silent observer partners.

The project has developed approaches to guidance activities to support different groups of less educated adults: migrants, the employed, the unemployed and the over 50s. The main objective was to increase the inclusion of adults in all forms of learning and education in order to increase employability and improve quality of life. Key achievements are presented in the publication *Advising Adults in Education*.

Spain



The Canarian Institute of Professional Qualifications (ICCP)



launched a pilot test for the recognition of competences in professionals. Firstly, a collection of evidence was carried out to verify that the candidates possessed the competences included in the blocks and units of competences of the degree to be accredited, followed by a process of evaluation of the evidence presented, to finally propose a training itinerary (Cabrera Pérez, L. & Córdoba Mendoza, M. (2011). Evaluation of a procedure for validation and accreditation of professional competencies. *Revista de Investigación en Educación*, 9 (2), 51-75.



The Autonomous University of Barcelona



has worked on validating a tool for self-assessment of basic competencies for young people in second-chance training processes. After conducting a pilot test with 228 young people, it has been shown that this instrument is valid to self-assess the perception and identify the training needs that these young people possess (Olmos, P. and Mas, O. (2018). Validation of AUTOCOM: self-assessment of basic competencies of young people in the framework of second chance formative programs. *Revista Electrónica de Investigación Educativa*, 20(4), 49-61. <https://doi.org/10.24320/redie.2018.20.4.1674>

The piloting implementation was done by Center za izobraževanje in kulturo Trebnje from Slovenia, Scotland's Learning Partnership from UK and Universidad de Valladolid from Spain.

Successes

The consortium partners had various success with the piloting implementation of GLAS, however, they all agreed that a thorough initial interview and a comprehensive explanation of the process allowed them to gain trust and willingness of participants to finalise the process.

When it comes to the Scotland's Learning partnership, they were able to include 11 learners due to COVID regulations still in place. At the beginning there was little motivation to join the process, but all actively participated in the evaluation and assessment process and were surprised by the results they achieved. Adult learners were able to move on and become a part of the group, wanted to engage and as a result, some of them now want to become volunteers for further projects.

In Slovenia, our colleagues included immigrants and Roma people. In any introductory conversation, it was very important that they explained to the adults exactly why the evaluation of knowledge was important and what they would get out of it, as it has proven to be a more successful approach. The best results were achieved with assessments that took little to no time.

The University of Valladolid team discovered that the participants enjoyed solving the tests and using the tools, as they were able to demonstrate their skills and also learn something new, being supported by their counsellor.

Challenges

The partnership has also had to deal with some difficulties along the way. The piloting was planned to take place in 2021 and 2022 in person, however, due to various COVID-19 restrictions the implementation has proven to be more difficult as expected.

The main issue in Scotland, Slovenia and Spain was finding the participants and keeping them involved in the whole process, from start to finish. Adults were simply not engaging, as often they did not understand the benefits of the assessment and validation. The whole process together with the questionnaire has proven to be too time consuming for the learners, therefore it needed to be split in multiple sessions.

In Scotland, the colleagues emphasised that there is the lack of motivation of many adult learners to participate in the process. It is very important to publicise the process and the benefits that the adult learner has after participating. They also noticed, that oftentimes, life gets in the way of learners to actually be able to finalise everything that is necessary to obtain quality results.

Accordingly, Slovenian learners showcased that perhaps only one competence should be assessed at a time. In the case of language, only reading comprehension for example. If the assessment takes too long, their motivation drops and they do not solve the questionnaires as well as they could and they start leaving blank spaces or writing a generic response.

In Spain, on several occasions, it has been necessary to explain and clarify what the competence assessment process consisted of, as many people were unaware of the process. It also happened more than once, that the tools were simply too complicated for the learners to use, therefore they gave up on the tasks at hand.

Counsellors

Counsellors should be able to guide adult learners through the entire validation process and put adult learners at the centre of the process

I. Counselling support should be holistic, addressing different needs of adults: for education, labour market inclusion and personal growth

The needs of learners – especially those most in need of guidance processes and services – are not limited to learning needs in specific areas. They go far beyond learning and need to be considered at the start of each individual learning pathway:

- Language: Is the language of courses and learning content accessible? Do speakers of other languages and learners with general comprehension difficulties or low literacy skills need special support? Is the content accessible to people with audio-visual impairments?
- Learning history: What is the learner's learning history? Is learning characterised by difficulties and effort (from the learner's perspective)? Have there been any particular incidents in the learning history that have contributed to a negative attitude towards learning? Or does the learner have a positive approach to learning and "intrinsic" motivation?
- Motivation: What is the learner's motivation to participate in a learning programme? Does the learner want to participate on their own initiative to develop their skills? Is participation in the programme necessary to be able to progress professionally? Is participation an obligation imposed by the labour market service or another institution and is participation linked to the payment of social transfer benefits? What makes the learning programme relevant for the learner?
- Managing workloads: How is the learner managing their workload at home/at their work place/in their previous education career? Are learners used to working to a deadline? Can they manage their workload in a self-directed way, or do they need support, e.g. by splitting up tasks into small portions?

- Health and wellbeing: Are learners resilient to stress? Is the motivation of the learner “healthy” or is there anything pointing to more negative emotions? How is their general level of well-being and health? Is mental health support available to the learner? Does the learner identify any current or previous need for mental health support?
- Family care work and household: Do learners have caring responsibilities towards other, possibly underage or senior, family members? How can learning times be reconciled with these caring responsibilities? Are there any family/household obligations that the learner may have to meet and that may (severely) limit the time available for learning?
- Work: Does the learner have one or more jobs and what are their working hours? Does the work require some flexibility in terms of time, which needs to be taken into account when creating learning programmes?
- Financing: Who finances the participation? Is the course fully funded by ministries or other national, regional or local authorities? Do learners have to pay for participation in the programme themselves, or is participation (partly) paid for by a social or labour market institution? Does the employer (partly) pay for participation?



Jane was referred to the adult learning service via the school's attainment team after taking part in The Summer of Fun family sessions. She was a lone parent with primary school age children looking to get back into work and needed help with her CV. Jane is bilingual, English is not her first language, but she has lived in Scotland for over 10 years and has a good command of both written and spoken English.

After the first session it became clear that Jane had many competing priorities and a very busy life looking after her family. However, on talking to her we found out that there were a few vacancies advertised through a local jobs fair that she wanted to apply for. We worked with her to compile four different personal statements to use with the applications, making sure that Jane was able to talk through her abilities herself. We had to make sure that her CV reflected the words she might use especially as English is not her first language. We worked on this through role-play to give her time to practice and make sure she was confident in making her presentations.

After her first two interviews she was disappointed that whilst she had received very positive feedback, she was not successful in getting the job. Jane remained determined and kept hopeful she would be offered a suitable job. After a month of applying for new jobs, she was offered a post in a local primary school.

Scotland's Learning Partnership

Every learner has a personal life story and a personal learning story. Many of these questions are very sensitive in terms of confidentiality and, if asked directly, learners might feel that their private space is invaded. These are, therefore, rather questions for reflection of adult learners and practitioners working with target groups from disadvantaged backgrounds and/or low formal education.

Self-reflection methods and guiding learners in using them are crucial in the early stages of guidance programmes (and, of course, continue to be during the entire process). During intake sessions, biographical narrative interviews can be a useful method to learn more about the learners and their learning history and needs, and learners can choose how much information they want to share.

II. Know and understand the ways and the environments in which adults gain skills/competences/knowledge through informal learning: Be aware of tacit knowledge of adults with low formal qualifications

Adults bring with them a wealth of knowledge, skills and abilities, and only a small proportion of this usually comes from formal education. Informal learning plays a central role in any learning history; however, it is particularly important for learners with low formal qualifications. Within the formal education system, these informally acquired knowledge, skills and abilities are still too little understood and built upon. This is, perhaps, also due to the fact that they are very much related to the respective biography of the learner, where they have worked, what care work they have done in the family/household, what voluntary commitments they have, etc. Guidance processes, therefore, offer the great advantage that they can build on prior knowledge and prior learning experiences and develop individual trajectories.



The Platform for Volunteering in Spain (PVE) is developing a program for the validation of competencies within volunteering. This program aims to recognize the impact of volunteering in developing skills, to make visible that volunteer practice promotes learning and the development of professional skills and improves volunteers' employability. The entities are in charge of registering volunteers in this process. The competence validation process consists of the following steps:

- a. Training, both for the volunteers and the competence evaluators.*
- b. Assignment, each person is assigned a tutor.*
- c. Initial interview, a common work agenda is agreed upon between the volunteer and the mentor.*
- d. Completion of forms and provision of evidence, volunteers are to complete the required forms and provide evidence of the learning achieved in volunteering.*
- e. Review, the mentors review the forms and convene a meeting.*
- f. Contrast interview, all the information is evaluated and doubts are resolved.*
- g. Certification proposal, the mentor sends the PVE a proposal for the identification of competencies.*
- h. Issuance of the certificate, the PVE reviews all the information and issues the VOL+ certificate.*

Guidance professionals need to bear in mind that many of these informally acquired competences are not always obvious to the learners themselves, especially where an exceptionally high level of competence or formal qualification has not been acquired. Examples of this would be, for instance, where a person has learned foreign languages in the past but does not use them: this person has nevertheless acquired learning competences that they can apply to other areas. If a person cooks very often for a larger family or group, but does not describe themselves as an exceptionally good cook, this person has nevertheless acquired important competences, such as correctly estimating quantities for a certain number of people, working under pressure, etc. Managing a household budget (sustainably) is also a key competence that many adults are not aware of that they possess. Many of these competences are, therefore, personal, social and learning-to-learn (PSL) competences. In addition, there is a large amount of factual knowledge that people acquire without being aware of it. Most adults, including high-skilled and highly educated adults, are not aware of their informally acquired knowledge, skills and abilities as they would usually consider them as “intrinsic” and “natural”.

Starting from the individual learners’ competences through a sensitive intake process, adult learning providers and organisations can make learners aware of the competences that they already have and how they can use it, but also, where they would need further learning and training.

Learners – and especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds – may not have experience of reflecting on their own competences and learning needs. Self-assessment methods that match the profile of the learners can help them become aware of their competences and learning needs and can raise their motivation for learning and upskilling. It should be taken into consideration, however, that a raised awareness of their own “competence gaps” might feel demotivating to some learners. A confidential relationship between the learners and educators or other adult learning staff is key in creating an enabling and positive atmosphere for learning, where the potential of learning is highlighted rather than “competence gaps”.

A tailored approach, based on individual modules that make learning interesting and relevant, combined with an open, inclusive and safe learning environment, contributes to a greater intrinsic motivation of learners to participate in guidance programmes. At the same time, however, counsellors need to be aware that extrinsic motivation plays an important role in incentivising people to participate in guidance programmes: The desire and need to better manage their own careers and to acquire skills that will enable them to find a better job in their sector or in another sector is understandable and respectable in the rapidly changing professional world. This is, therefore, not necessarily a “worse” kind of motivation. A key task for guidance professionals is to make adult learners aware of the additional benefits that adult learning offers – the broadening of knowledge and horizons, an increase in personal well-being and health, and better opportunities to participate in society.

III. Be able to give constructive and holistic feedback to adults with low formal qualifications to enable them to make steps forward

IV. Be able to identify knowledge, skills and competences using appropriate methods and tools

All methods and tools used for learner (self-)assessment and feedback on learning progress should be as inclusive as possible, i.e. they should take into account possible difficulties learners, especially those with no or little prior formal education experience, may have in understanding the process itself.

Appropriate methods and tools promote and strengthen training content and didactic resources and scenarios that tackle equality, diversity and inclusion. However, even though guidance practitioners can select from a wide range of tools and methods available, these tools and methods require continuous adaptation to new target groups and new approaches to guidance. Adapting (and developing) new tools and methods is key for successful guidance of people with low formal education attainment. The catalogue of tools and methods should be adapted and expanded according to the needs of the provider and organisation and their respective target groups.



Obtaining a national vocational qualification – NVQ

For adults:

- who do not have a publicly valid professional or vocational qualification,*
- who have professional competences (experience, knowledge, skills),*
- for those who want to advance their career without having to obtain a higher level of vocational training.*

The system is based on the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Its fundamental purpose is to take into account all those competences acquired outside the school environment and to recognise their economic and social value. The system provides for the acquisition of a formal vocational qualification, namely a public document (an NQF certificate), which is transferable to different working environments.

The process of obtaining an NVQ certificate is broadly divided into three steps:

- 1. submitting an application for an NQF to an NQF examiner and validator;*
 - 2. advising the candidate for the NQF and compiling a summary folder (certificates, supporting documents, reference letters, articles, awards, etc.)*
 - 3. Assessment, verification and validation of knowledge, skills and competences.*
- The procedures for the verification and certification of vocational qualifications may be carried out by inter-enterprise training centres, schools, adult education organisations and chambers of commerce providing publicly valid educational programmes, as well as by other organisations which meet the material and human resources conditions laid down in the Catalogue of Standards of Professional Skills and other acts, if so provided for by special regulations.*

Where the monitoring of the learning progress of learners shows that a particular programme is not working as it should, the programme needs to be revisited and adapted according to the needs of the learners. External circumstances can also force providers to change learning programmes – a good example is the Covid-19 pandemic where most learning and guidance programmes had to be moved online from one day to the other. These changes can mean a great challenge to institutions, educators and other practitioners, especially when working with learners from disadvantaged backgrounds that may also be digitally excluded. Working with alternative means of communication, such as social media, WhatsApp groups and similar tools can help (to a certain degree) to continue learning pathways and to monitor progress. However, these methods are generally more suitable for learners with good basic skills, including digital skills.

Not least, it needs to be stressed that there is no one-size-fits-all in terms of competences that participants of guidance programmes might need to acquire. In general, personal, social and learning-to-learn competences are at the centre of learning across all target groups. A systemic look at learning – including individual learning needs of the learners – is essential.



CertiCyL: is a digital skills certification tool for the citizens of the community of Castilla y León promoted by the Junta de Castilla y León. Its objective is to accredit the knowledge and skills that a citizen has to motivate citizens in the learning and management of ICT by obtaining a certificate that certifies their knowledge and improves their employability and, on the other hand, provide public and private entities that provide employment with a mechanism to evaluate the digital skills of people who join their entities. These digital competences are linked to the European Digital Competences Framework DigComp. At this moment, the certification of basic-level competences and medium-level competences is available.

V. Ensure inclusion

- Provision of adequate and appropriate access to on-site learning activities for people with disabilities, as well as a digital environment for people with special educational needs.
- Support for people who do not have sufficient language skills to participate in the courses by providing an additional staff member to assist them.
- Provision of intergenerational learning methods/tools to reinforce the inclusion of people of different age groups in the same learning environment to take advantage of different learning styles and backgrounds, and to facilitate the creation of small communities where individuals can grow and benefit from each other's support and expertise.
- Paying special attention to gender aspects of learning: Learning materials and programmes need to be reviewed for their gender sensitivity and, if necessary, revised to actively promote inclusion. If education providers do not have the internal capacity or knowledge to do this, partnerships with organisations that specifically address this issue are useful

- Making guidance programmes a safe space for learning for everyone, regardless of their sex, gender identity and sexual orientation, and adequately train counsellors, educators and other staff.
- When setting the timetable for guidance programmes, ensuring a good work-life balance of participants, especially of women who are generally the main carers in families.
- Gender differences, stereotypes and prejudices should be taken into account when conducting training and collecting assessment data, especially in relation to access to the world of work.
- Giving special attention to the inclusion of persons with disabilities, mental health or other health issues and ensure that course materials are accessible to all participants.

Enable counsellors to participate in further training and education opportunities about new developments in their field of work

The initial training or study programme to become a guidance professional varies widely across the EU from country to country and sometimes even region to region. At the same time, the field of guidance (including validation of prior learning, bridging between informal, non-formal and formal learning, bridging between the labour market and education sector, etc.) has developed and expanded enormously in recent years. In order to reach certain quality criteria for guidance processes, further education and training – i.e. in-service training – about new methods and approaches as well as policy and legal innovations play a key role. This enables guidance professionals to accompany learners well through the whole process.

These further training and education programmes for guidance practitioners should be developed in a multi-stakeholder way, including university departments and research institutes specialised in guidance and lifelong learning, career counselling services, public providers, adult learning organisations and other key stakeholders.

Network with other counsellors to develop good practices and share new ideas

The systematic exchange between practitioners on good practices and new approaches and ideas is very beneficial to build capacity within organisations and providers. Exchange is, generally, easiest at the local and regional levels; however, programmes such as Erasmus+ also offer opportunities for transnational exchange and mutual learning.

A better exchange between practitioners can also help to develop new tools and methodologies for guidance processes. At the same time, with the emergence of new research and technologies as well as new insights into how adult learning works, updating existing tools and methodologies is pivotal. Exchange networks for practitioners enable them to share information and collaborate on the joint development of new tools and materials.

Peer learning can also help guidance professionals to gain clarity about how programmes are developed and the stakeholders involved. This includes learning about how different stakeholders in other regions and countries work together (including local/regional/ national governments and public institutions; public employment services; social services; adult learning providers; charities; community groups and associations).

Providers

Reach out actively to learners who are furthest away from learning

To reach those who are furthest from learning, tailored lifelong guidance and learning opportunities that are interesting and relevant to the groups concerned are needed. Underrepresented groups and target groups in particular may need personalised interventions to guide them into learning. There are already many innovative ways to do this, specifically used by non-formal adult learning and education providers, but financial support for providers is also needed to scale up such interventions. Implementation is the responsibility of guidance providers, but policy has a crucial role to play in making outreach a policy priority and making real progress. (see https://www.oed-network.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/oed_policy_recommendations_en.pdf, p. 5)

Local environments and new targets might require new approaches to outreach or new methods and tools. Cooperation with all stakeholders involved can help identify how the targets groups could be brought into learning, and especially university departments and research institutes working on outreach could help pilot new programmes, evaluate them and promote their wider application. Local networks with social services, migration services etc. can help establish contact to the new target groups and help identify potential barriers to participation on guidance programmes.

Create an enabling environment for guidance practitioners in order to help them in their professional growth and development

Create a professional environment where guidance practitioners feel that their experience and expertise is valued and put to good use in the work with the target groups. Ideally, the infrastructure and financing of the provider should foresee adequate administration staff so that guidance practitioners can focus on their main task, namely guiding participants through all steps of the programmes. Furthermore, the working and learning areas, including the technological and digital infrastructure, should be accommodating the needs of guidance practitioners.

Furthermore, continuous further education and training is extremely important in a sector as rapidly changing as guidance. Counsellors should be given the opportunity to participate in training on a regular basis (within working hours). These trainings should be provided by suitable providers and offer high quality. Training should always be planned in consultation with staff to meet their learning needs.

Validate non-formal and informal prior learning



The Public Employment Service in Spain is carrying out a process of accreditation of experience for those people who do not have an official certification. People with experience can accredit units of competence included in the National Catalog of Professional Qualifications, which include Vocational Training degrees and Certificates of Professionalism. This process consists of 3 phases:

- a. Counseling, where the user must complete a self-assessment form, analyze his or her background, configure his or her competence dossier and issue a report on the convenience of proceeding to the assessment phase.
- b. Evaluation, the evaluation committee analyzes and assesses the competence dossier submitted by the user, this person demonstrates that he/she possesses these competencies and is informed about the results of this. If the person does not obtain the accreditation, he/she is informed of the possible training itineraries to achieve it.
- c. Accreditation, a partial or total accreditation is certified depending on the results of the evaluation.

- Start the guidance process by validating prior learning of adults with low formal qualifications by default.
- Develop new tools for their assessment and self-assessment of learners.
- Include micro-credentials in strategies to recognise prior learning.

Look for opportunities where participation in non-formal learning might assist the learner progress into/onto other learning

Embed basic skills training in non-formal courses to remove participation barriers and make learning more relevant and evident



Michael is 57 years old and attends the adult learning ICT class after hearing about it whilst visiting his local library. He initially wanted to learn how to work a laptop a family member had donated to him. However, after spending some time with Michael we got to know him better and found out he has a range of physical and mental health issues which made him largely housebound for several years. We found out that his anxiety and stress were the main cause of him staying at home. He talked to his tutor and said that coming to the class made him more comfortable around others again.

By now Michael was progressing his IT skills and we agreed to support him. As everything was completed online, we supported John to register for sites and email his doctor's surgery to confirm his conditions to ensure that they helped Michael's confidence was growing and soon he was feeling more positive about life in general'. He began to practice his ICT skills at home and before long was helping the new learners around him in the class. At this stage we spoke to him about volunteering within the service.

Michael took some convincing as he didn't believe he could be a volunteer. However, after some time he agreed to participate in the volunteer training and Michael is now helping others and more recently has begun to talk about perhaps taking the next step to make sure he's ready to get into paid work.

Scotland's Learning Partnership

Create marketing campaigns to show the added value of informal and non-formal learning and validation of prior learning, targeting the wider public, but specifically employers

Engage in advocacy to policy makers to raise awareness about guidance and basic skills learning

This is a point that seems self-evident. Yet, advocacy and “lobbying” for guidance and basic skills learning is not a given, especially where providers are dependent on public funding structures and have to follow certain frameworks and programmes to get funding.

The importance of advocacy at the local, regional and national level cannot be underestimated in order to give lifelong guidance for learning and career a space in the political debate and to point out necessary improvements in support and financing structures. These relate primarily to the need for structural financial support to enable guidance providers and organisations to build the necessary infrastructure and invest in staff training to deliver high quality programmes. Especially when working with learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, guidance programmes should come at no costs for learners.

For their advocacy work, guidance providers can

- Raise awareness of how guidance programmes complement existing formal and non-formal education and training programmes in a meaningful way and prepare learners for further education and the labour market through infographics, letters, social media campaigns etc.
- Raise awareness about relevant policy strategies and initiatives existing at the European, and potentially also the national, regional and local levels, that support the implementation of guidance programmes
- Reach out to key stakeholders, such as public employment services, social services, local/regional/national authorities, employers and social partners – and, if possible, bring them together to discuss opportunities and requirements of the sector

- Find allies among these key stakeholders who support your message: The awareness of such programmes could be enhanced by closely cooperating with governmental institutions – better cooperation is needed in general between adult education centres (especially if they are not public) and public entities
- Use testimonials, i.e. (former) learners, who can explain why guidance programmes work and which benefits they have brought to them (this could be done through videos, podcasts, blog texts, social media posts, etc.)
- Any evidence on how and why guidance programmes work, should ideally be shared through adult learning and education networks so that other providers and organisations can use it for their own advocacy work. Evidence is not limited to scientific research; it also includes feedback from learners that has been analysed and systematised, and it includes, as mentioned above, testimonials from individual learners.

Guidance Portal (available at <https://svetovanje.acs.si/>)

The portal provides expert support to all stakeholders involved in the evaluation and recognition of non-formally acquired competences. The portal was developed in the framework of the Literacy Development and Identification and Recognition of Non-formal Learning 2011-2014 project. The project activity, Identification and Recognition of Non-formal Adult Learning 2011-2014, aimed to further develop and implement models and tools for the identification and recognition of non-formal and informal adult learning. Further developments were made and the existing knowledge base can now be found at <https://svetovanje.acs.si/>.

The portal contains strategic and expert documents from the European Union and Slovenia, including legislation. It presents the tools for implementing the procedures developed under the project, an inventory of operators, links to current events and links to expert materials.



Policy makers

Promote networks including providers, educators/counsellors, learners, public employment services, social services, academia, and other stakeholders - at the local level and at the national/regional level (decision-making level)

Evidence from previous projects, for instance the Erasmus+ funded project MASTER (Measures for Adults to Support Transition to further Education and Re-skilling opportunities) has demonstrated the effectiveness of a coordinated, diverse and complementary network of actors for the advancement of new programmes and approaches to guidance for learning and career. Building on these positive results, policy makers should strive to create strategic alliances and partnerships at all levels of governance, while empowering adult learners to share their input and provide feedback.

National, regional and local policy makers have a central role to play in bringing together public institutions, non-formal ALE providers, civil society, social partners, adult learners community leaders and other stakeholders. These processes prevent the development of a silo mentality, guaranteeing permeability and exchange between different strands of adult learning, that is, from non-formal to formal adult learning, such as from community learning, to vocational education and training, to give learners the possibility to build on their competences and to strengthen motivation for further learning by providing perspectives along the learning pathway.

Online hubs can host such exchanges: policy makers should sustain the creation of free online learning environments for bridging programmes, exchange of views, data sharing and feedback, prioritising accessibility in the design of these features.



There are 35 ISIO guidance centres in Slovenia, operating within public adult education organisations. They offer guidance and professional support to adults for three main purposes:

- *integration into and continuation of education;*
- *identifying and documenting adults' knowledge and skills;*
- *self-directed learning.*

The guidance process for adults is available for free.

In order to involve academic and research institutions, policy makers should make the data that they possess open and public, facilitating longitudinal studies and providing administrative data (e.g. from tax, labour and social authorities, educational institutions, national health systems) to assess the impact of the initiative, while implementing the adequate guarantees for the protection of personal data, including the consent of the learners, anonymization and pseudonymization practices, etc.

Especially at the regional and local level, policy makers should gather and exchange qualitative and quantitative feedback from learners, trainers, ALE institutions and relevant stakeholders.

Link to other EU policies and strategies and promote policy coherence

Although there is currently no unified EU policy on guidance, several strategies, initiatives and recommendations provide direction, aiming to streamline them and promoting policy coherence. More recent initiatives mostly draw on two Council Resolutions from 2004 and 2008: the Draft Resolution of the Council and of the representatives of the Member States meeting within the Council on Strengthening Policies, Systems and Practices in the field of Guidance throughout life in Europe, adopted in 2004, and the Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies from 2008.

- ELGPN Guidelines for Policies and Systems Development for Lifelong Guidance

The Guidelines highlight developments at national level in the field of lifelong guidance, and call on the EU level to act in a more coordinating way. As at the regional and national level, lifelong guidance is a common policy task at the EU level in the fields of education, training, youth, employment and social affairs. Policy coherence and the active cooperation of all institutions and expert groups play a central role.

- Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults

This is a landmark document that new policies and strategies in the area of skills, lifelong learning and guidance have since drawn upon. The Council recommends that Member States develop upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults in line with national legislation, circumstances and available resources, and in close cooperation with social partners and learning providers. Three steps should lead to successful upskilling: Skills assessment, provision of tailored, flexible and high quality learning, and validation and recognition of acquired skills through prior and informal learning. Guidance plays a crucial role throughout the entire process.

- Conclusions of the EU Presidency conference of Estonia in 2017 on Lifelong Guidance Policy and Practice

The conclusions of the EU Presidency conference of Estonia in 2017 on Lifelong Guidance Policy and Practice is another key document. The conclusions argue that building and maintaining lifelong guidance provision with universal access for citizens is a major

challenge for national administrations in policy and systemic terms, but that widening access is key and, therefore, needs to be repositioned in all policy areas at national and EU level, in particular taking into account the future of work and preparing citizens for scenarios of employment, underemployment or no employment in a segmented labour market. They recommend that the role of the European Commission in repositioning guidance systems be greatly enhanced, taking into account the 2004 and 2008 Council Resolutions, the six recommendations of the Estonian Presidency Conference in 2017 and the EU Guidelines for Policies and Systems Development for Lifelong Guidance.

- New Skills Agenda

The New Skills Agenda for Europe launches a number of actions to ensure that the right training, the right skills and the right support is available to people in the European Union. It aims to strengthen and streamline several initiatives to better assist Member States in their national policy reforms. The New Skills Agenda is centred around three key work strands: improving the quality and relevance of skills formation; making skills and qualifications more visible and comparable with advancing skills intelligence, documentation and informed career choices

- Life Skills

Life skills are building blocks of independence and self-efficacy. They are combinations of different capabilities that enable adults to become lifelong learners and to solve problems in order to live an independent life and participate in society. To learn more about life skills, the Life skills for Europe project discussed the topic in depth.

- New European Agenda for Adult Learning (NEAAL)

The new agenda defines the political framework for the further development of Adult Learning and Education (ALE) up to 2030. Its goals and objectives guide the work of the European Commission. Fortunately, the EAAL—in contrast to the agenda of 2011—is based on a holistic understanding of ALE. This applies, for example, to the equal value placed on formal, non-formal and informal educational opportunities, as well as to the statement that ALE not only makes decisive contributions in the areas of vocational qualification and basic education, but also nurtures social cohesion, helps individuals cope with pandemics and climate crises, and enhances personal development.

In addition, the Agenda draws attention to the central role of well-equipped and professional guidance services, especially for educationally disadvantaged groups. The (further) development of certification systems for non-formal knowledge is also explicitly emphasised. This is the only way to strengthen the transitions between different educational offers.

- Micro-credentials

Micro-credentials are achieved through short learning experiences leading to certification of skills. This initiative aims to improve the quality, recognition and take-up of micro-credentials bringing new opportunities to a more diverse group of learners to broaden their skillsets; encourage people to move across the EU for education, training or work, to achieve a European Education Area by 2025 and involve European Universities alliances and Centres of Vocational Excellence as role models.

- Individual learning accounts

The Council is recommending that member states consider establishing individual learning accounts as a means for enabling and empowering individuals to participate in labour-market relevant training and facilitate their access to or retention in employment. And it recommends - if member states decide to establish individual learning accounts - to put in place an enabling framework.

Individual learning accounts would provide working-age people with a budget for training to improve their skills and employability throughout their lives, regardless of whether they are actually employed or not.

Be sensitive to the use of language: use inclusive language

Example: “low skilled adults” vs “adults with low formal qualifications”.

Enhance the visibility of basic skills and their recognition through campaigns focused on specific target groups

Example: adult early school leavers, immigrants, unemployed people, minorities, people in risk situations, ...

Provide structural and financial support to the development of guidance eco-systems that promote the inclusion of all stakeholders

Whereas a few years ago guidance was seen primarily as a labour market tool to guide job seekers into sectors with a high demand for labour, the concept has now been greatly expanded to include more and more the education and lifelong learning sectors. National and regional guidance strategies play a central role in helping learners find the learning opportunities that suit them, as well as opportunities for validation and recognition of their skills and knowledge.

To guarantee the sustainability, accessibility and quality of guidance programmes, policy makers should allocate targeted long-term and structural funding for projects and initiatives in this area, also by investing in high-quality and accessible infrastructures of non-formal providers. Additional funding should be provided at the European level for cross-border bridging programs, empowering learners to complete their guidance programme partly or fully in physical and/or virtual mobility.

Give a voice to guidance experts: Recognise the specialist support required to enhance the learning experience

Give a voice to learners: Put their needs at the centre of political decision-making

Provide structural and financial support to the implementation of programmes that focus on initial guidance

Provide funds to promote individual learning accounts



Initial integration of immigrants (Začetna integracija priseljencev) is a free programme to enable immigrants to learn the Slovenian language and obtain information about Slovenian society. Courses include around 180 hours of tuition (EURYDICE, 2021).

Promote outreach programmes and the active inclusion of those furthest away from learning

The barriers that prevent people, especially from disadvantaged groups, from participating in adult learning need to be examined in depth. This also means examining legal and financial frameworks to see if they structurally hinder the participation of disadvantaged vulnerable groups.



Simon was first introduced to the local men's shed and woodland project as a way to rehabilitate learners affected by addiction and mental health issues and integrate them into the local community. Formerly homeless and a rough sleeper for a period of a year and a half, Simon had recently taken on the tenancy of a flat just around the corner from the shed. Suffering from extremely low confidence and self-esteem, he rarely ventured outside to engage with neighbours and services. Simon soon found himself under the tutelage of a retired joiner, who introduced him to woodwork. Very quickly, Simon applied himself to building and restoring wooden garden planters and raised flower beds.

Simon has benefitted hugely from volunteering. He has become a key player, not only in his own rehabilitation, but in the increasing the capacity of the local

community and volunteering nationally has helped him make new friends across the country. As a result of this, and realising how much his fellow shedders valued him, Martin's confidence grew, to the point where he stood out as a candidate to take on key holding responsibilities, eventually leading to his appointment as Assistant Shed Manager.

Throughout this journey, he found himself being mentored by the shed manager, where, working evenings and weekends he has assisted in the fitting of a new kitchen, model room and toilet, learning a huge variety of new skills in the process.

Scotland's Learning Partnership

This includes, for example, funding instruments: how are guidance providers funded? According to the number of participants? By project funding? By courses for specific individual target groups? Is this type of funding sustainable and does it help to bring hard-to-reach target groups into learning? Do participants in guidance programmes have to pay some of the costs themselves, e.g. for validation of prior learning, and are these sums affordable for people from disadvantaged backgrounds?

The legal basis of the education system also needs analysis: how is prior learning validated, and what is the value of any validation in the labour market and formal education system? What is the reputation of validation systems?

Give value to non-formal and in-formal learning, and be aware that validation of prior learning is one of the main factors of success of educational interventions

Promote quality assurance systems to ensure that guidance programmes are linked to organisational, national and EU policy initiatives and good practices

EUROPEAN BRAIN TRUST

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