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**Vocational training and adult education**

# **Policies to improve the use of ICT and OER in adult learning**

**Summary prepared for the ET Working Group on Adult Learning**

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## 1. Introduction

Working Group members were asked to submit brief reports providing an overview of national/regional policies aimed at increasing the use of ICT and OER in adult learning, with a special focus on use of new devices (smart phones and tablets) and social media. 22 countries or regions submitted. This paper provides an overview of the country reports. In doing so, the paper looks at each policy issue in turn, providing a comparative summary of countries' responses. For a more in-depth look at each national/regional policy, please see Yammer, where each country report is available.

These reports addressed a range of policy issues, including:

- Policy contexts and objectives
- Target groups and policy mechanisms
- Policy owners and key partners
- Success factors and challenges.

It should also be noticed that the examples used are just that – examples. The lists of initiatives are not complete. Some country initiatives may have been left out. The examples are used to highlight or exemplify the analysis – in order to facilitate the discussions in the Working Group.

## 2. Policy objectives

In the provided materials three broad categories of policy objectives can be identified: A. to enhance ICT skills, B. to use ICT to reach out to new groups of learners, and C. to use ICT to improve efficiency in the adult learning sector. Sometimes an initiative or policy covers two or even all three of these objectives at the same time. But never-the-less it can be useful, in the analyses, to distinguish between them.

### A. ICT skills

The most commonly reported policy objective is to enhance adult learners ICT skills. Different kinds of e-inclusion policies or initiatives are reported from:

- Cyprus, ICT courses to adults offered by the Adult Education Centres
- Poland, Digital Poland Lighthouse Keepers: To Encourage the people from the 50+ generation to make a first step into the digital world

A particular instance of this category is initiatives targeting adult learners and improving their "learning to learn with ICT" skills:

- Austria: "Online learning free of charge" - To disseminate basic knowhow on how to learn with the internet – for everybody and for free
- Switzerland - e-inclusion information and communication technologies for an inclusive society

In some cases the initiatives are more specific, targeting particular groups such as:

- Estonia - "Come Along!" providing basic and advanced computer training to 100,000 people and connecting 50,000 more families to the Internet over period of three years
- Latvia - Active labour market policies: In vocational training to acquire vocational qualification. In advanced vocational training to reach vocational proficiency.

### B. Out-reach

Outreach – to reach new groups of learners through ICT – by learning anytime and anywhere, in remote areas or by offering education on odd hours.

- Belgium (fr): attract new people to long life learning qualification programs, and sustain motivation of trainees along the programs by flexibility and personalisation relying on e-learning approaches
- Ireland - NALA Distance Learning Service: To address barriers to participation in adult learning and help to provide learning opportunities for those people not currently engaged in lifelong learning.
- Latvia: public libraries are equipped with internet connected computers to become more modern and be augmented by technology solutions of contemporary information

Reaching out to low skilled workers is another policy objective:

- Netherlands: Reaching more low skilled adults with an online learning platform that can be easily accessed from home. Providing an online tool to prepare low skilled adults, for participation in formal language courses and to offer them additional work and practice materials to increase the learning effect of classroom teaching.

### C. Improve efficiency

A third kind of objectives relates to improving the rate of success of learners within the adult education sector. This might be done by improving ICT skills among adult learning teachers.

- Austria - “efit 21”-strategy, providing all basic skills teachers with a certain level of ICT skills
- Belgium (fr) - e-trainer/e-teacher training certification. The objective of the training program is to professionalise the e-teacher/e-trainer trade and to develop specific professional skills.
- Estonia - Programme VANKER: To raise the professional competence of VET teachers in the implementation and designing of e-learning tools and opportunities

Some countries aim at improving the efficiency in adult learning by targeting the adult education institutions.

- Belgium – InnoTice: - an infrastructure as well as informatics tools in order to integrate e-learning into their learning offer to improve quality, effectiveness and efficiency in the Education and Training systems, and enable the users (learners and trainers / teachers) to have access to innovative resources in order to increase their autonomy and their capacity to learn how to learn in the context of the LLL and the ET 2020 program could be through improve equipment and infrastructure, or better provision of OER
- Denmark – EMU educational portal: The portal is a unique constellation of virtual entries targeted at specific user groups such as teachers and students in basic school, upper secondary school, vocational education, and teacher training colleges
- Estonia – Programme VANKER: The development of modern and high quality e-learning study materials and making them available to all VET teachers and students.
- Serbia – Basic support for the development of quality teaching using ICT and training of all teachers in initial and continuing education with the use of ICT in teaching and learning
- Spain - Educalab’s Procomún Space of Open Educational Resources

### 3. Policy mechanisms

The policies, strategies or initiatives reported varies from changes in the legislation (the Education Act or equivalent legislation), thus improving the systemic coherence, to better cater for the use of ICT within the existing adult education, new initiatives across the existing ministerial structures

*Mechanisms* are general approaches, not specific for the educational sector. They include among others legislation, and policy guidelines or national strategies. These are the most commonly reported mechanisms. More rare mechanisms are to use public procurement or voucher systems – but again, they are mechanisms since they could be used in many different policy areas.

## A. Legislation

- Belgium (fr) – The Decree on E-learning for the Enseignement de Promotion sociale (Second chance Education) / 13.10.2014. To develop different kinds of projects in order to deliver on-line , blended course
- Iceland - The Adult Education Act, No. 27, 31 March 2010. To provide increased opportunities for active participation in society to individuals with short formal education...

## B. Policy guidelines or national strategies

- Romania - National Strategy on Digital Agenda for Romania: Field of action II – ICT in Education, Health, Culture and e-Inclusion/ Continuous professional training – Life Long Learning with the help of ICT
- Serbia - Education Strategy 2020 Republic of Serbia
- Slovenia - Adult Education Master Plan 2013-2020
- UK Scotland - Adult Literacies in Scotland 2020 (ALIS 2020)

## C. Public procurement

The Swedish system is one of the most decentralized in Europe. Municipalities are responsible for providing low skilled adults with learning opportunities. This can be done at municipal schools or by private providers, who has been chosen through public procurement. In this procurement process, the municipality may enter specific criteria.

- Sweden – Municipalities and Private educational providers. Highly specified criteria in public tenders

## D. Voucher system

Voucher or coupon systems can be used as a method to ensure that the training is more demand driven. Vouchers are handed out to the learner who can use the voucher to choose from a variety of programmes and providers.

- Latvia - Vocational training, requalification, qualification improvement and non-formal training organized in co-operation with educational institutions and employers. Since 2011, all the training programmes are implemented by applying a method of training vouchers.

## E. Policy instruments

Instruments are more sector or issue specific than mechanisms. They include online portals, MOOCS, public libraries, and a project where ICT equipment was loaned to people and much more.

- Online portal – Denmark: EMU: The portal is a unique constellation of virtual entries targeted at specific user groups such as teachers and students in basic school, upper secondary school, vocational education, and teacher training colleges.
- Online portal – Czech Rep. Mimoskola, a self-learning portal and contains educational resources
- Online portal – Spain, Educalab's Procomún: web site of reference for the access to a data repository of digital open educational resources (OER)
- MOOC – Austria: "Gratis Online Lernen" is a MOOC, directly addressed to learners
- MOOC – Switzerland: learning arrangements addressed to adults, including for instance MOOCS by Universities and other institutions of Higher Education
- MOOC – UK England – the Open University Platform for Future Learning developed with the British Council, the perception is that there is a shift in the FE sector to move towards the area of MOOCS
- Library – Latvia: Public libraries with free internet access. Also library for blind people.
- Loan of equipment – UK England: ICT@Home project which made ICT equipment such as laptops and printers available to loan to residents, in a bid to aid them in overcoming barriers such as access to equipment

## 4. Target groups

Ultimately all efforts would be directed to improve adult learning. But this goal can be approached either direct – through efforts directed towards adult learners, older people, etc. But the goal might

also be approached indirectly, by trying to improve skills among inspectors of adult learning or librarians acting as user support in public libraries. In some cases the goal can be approached both directly and indirectly – as in the case of teachers, or providers of adult learning. Another interesting group is parents and grandparents who through a website are given ideas, tips and practices on how to help build their child’s literacy and numeracy. At the same time the grown-ups are introduced to using ICT, online materials etc.

<b>Direct</b>	<b>Countries</b>
Adult learners	All
Unemployed, low skilled workers	All
Older people (+45 --)	Estonia, Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia, Switzerland
Employees (excl. the self-employed and the civ. serv)	Cyprus
Migrants, immigrants, minorities	Estonia, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland
Rural population	Estonia
Parents, Grandparents	Ireland
<b>Indirect</b>	<b>Countries</b>
Teachers	Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Latvia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden
Librarians	Latvia
Inspectors of adult education	UK England
Providers of adult learning (public and/or private)	Belgium

## 5. Policy owner and key partners

The most commonly listed policy owners are Ministries of Education. In some cases it is the ministry responsible for labour market or welfare issues, or the ministry responsible for ICT issues which has the overall responsibility. Sometimes (as in the case of Slovenia) several ministries are working together.

In some countries with a more devolved or decentralized educational system, government agencies or regional authorities within the education sector are responsible. In some cases a city or municipality is listed as the policy owner. Some countries have also listed different kinds of higher education institutions (universities, etc).

Estonia has also reported a group private companies, together with a foundation, as policy owner and the Netherlands a foundation.

<b>Policy owner</b>	<b>Countries</b>
Ministry of Education	Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain
Ministry of ICT	Estonia
Ministry of Labour	Poland
Other ministry	Belgium (fr)
Government agency	Cyprus, Serbia, Switzerland
Regional authority	Belgium (fr)
Local authority (municipality)	Sweden, UK England
Higher ed. inst.	Austria, Belgium (fr), Ireland
Private sector	Estonia, Netherlands

Since many countries have reported several policies or strategies, they might have listed several different policy owners.

Looking at key partners, there are many possibilities. But in essence they might be grouped in two categories – partners that are vertically related or horizontally related.

**A. Vertically related** means that there is a hierarchy, most often with a ministry at the top and regional or local partners carrying out most of the work, i.e. a top-down relation.

But there might also be a bottom-up relation, where the initiative is coming from local level, from a higher educational institution or a foundation, but financed by the ministry. The Czech Republic and Poland describes how different NGO’s are involved as key partners. This might be viewed as a bottom-up relation.

**B. Horizontally related** means that the key partners are on the same level. This is the case when several ministries cooperate or government agencies from different sectors, such as from the education sector and the labour market sector.

There is sometimes a partnership between public and private sector (Public Private Partnerships), which might be seen as a kind of horizontal partnership.

6. Smartphones, tablets and/or social media

Not all countries have answered the question whether the use of smartphones, tablet PCs and/or social media was including in the policy or strategy. Among those that have answered five different answers emerge.

Smartphones, tablets and/or social media	Country
Yes, as part of the policy or strategy	Ireland, Poland, Serbia, Spain
Yes, but not specifically mentioned in the policy or strategy	Austria, Belgium (fr), Denmark (general BYOD policy), Slovakia, Sweden
Yes, as a market communication channel	Ireland, Latvia, Poland
No and no reason given	Belgium (fr), Cyprus, Iceland, Romania
No, for a specific reason (no evidence for efficiency)	Netherlands

Slovakia answers that the use of smartphones is not a requirement in all of the projects, but some do use them. Sweden says that such devices are used to some extent.

- Mainly this is offered as extra services from the educational providers in their bids for the tender but is also taken in consideration at the evaluation of the bid. Specified requests for smartphones and/or tablets are more common in tenders from large municipalities and in the context of Swedish for Immigrants. The reason for this is that the target group more common is in possession of advanced smartphones than computers and that internet access is provided through the telephone.

## 7. Policy coherence

Policy coherence was not an issue in the reporting template. Still, it was highlighted as a key success factor in the Working Groups' workshop in Stuttgart in October 2014, and the theme deserves some discussion also in relation to ICT policies.

What does policy coherence mean regarding the use of ICT and OER in adult learning? The same aspects of policy coherence as were listed in the Stuttgart workshop are relevant also regarding policies and initiatives in the ICT area.

**Systemic coherence**, i.e. to ensure that action lines between different actors are interrelated and integrated, is of utmost importance. If not, valuable resources might be spent on activities going in different directions, thus lowering the impact of the activities. Another aspect of systemic coherence is that actors in power are in line and pushing things in the same direction. In other words, there must be a coherent vision of where to go and how to get there.

One example of an approach to ensure systemic coherence is the Dutch model "Four in Balance".<sup>1</sup> The name of the model alludes to the metaphor of a table with four legs that need to be in balance if the table is not to swing. The four "legs" or basic elements are:

- Vision: what the school believes good teaching is and how it intends to achieve it. Vision refers to the school's objectives, the role of the teachers, learners and management, the actual content to be taught, and the materials that the school uses.
- Digital learning materials: all digital educational content, whether formal or informal. Formal learning materials are materials produced especially for educational purposes. Digital learning materials include computer programs.
- Expertise: teachers' and trainers' knowledge and skills, which must be good enough to utilize ICT to achieve educational objectives. This involves not only technical skills, but also the ability to link these skills to pedagogical knowledge and knowledge of the subject matter.
- ICT infrastructure: the availability and quality of computers, networks, and internet connections. Electronic learning environments and the management and maintenance of the school's ICT facilities are also considered to be part of the ICT infrastructure.

One example of lack of systemic coherence might be that education providers invest in hardware and infrastructure for teachers and learners, but not in digital learning materials. In the view of the provider – teachers can use OER, thus saving money from not buying commercial digital textbooks. But teachers may find it too time consuming or difficult to find materials and therefore they are not using the ICT equipment in their teaching as much as expected.

**Chronological coherence** is also important. Otherwise there might be mismatches, lowering the efficiency and impact of the efforts. If there are large investments in hardware and infrastructure, but not in teacher training, the teachers and trainers might not be able to make the best use of the equipment until after they have received training. By then the equipment might be broken or out of date. If learners are trained to use ICT tools, but not all the teachers, the teachers might not allow learners to use them in class. If teachers are trained but the education providers are unaware of the opportunities that ICT provides, the teachers might find themselves without up-to-date equipment, again lowering the efficiency of the original efforts.

**Vertical coherence** is also important in the area of ICT and OER – if local or regional projects or initiatives to increase the use of ICT and OER are not in line with national policies (for example by allowing learners to use smart phones in class or use other forms of BYOD at the same time as the

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<sup>1</sup> ten Brummelhuis & van Amerongen (2010): Four in Balance Monitor 2010. ICT at Dutch schools, Kennisnet 2010.

Ministry of Education says that this is not allowed), there is a lack of vertical coherence. Again, lack of coherence in this respect might lower the overall efficiency of the policy and adhering investments.

The different partnerships that have been presented by countries show a number of excellent examples of **cross-organisational coherence**. In the earlier section cross-organisational coherence is rephrased as horizontal partnerships. If different partners have different views or priorities, the cooperation will suffer, as will the outcomes of the strategy.

## 8. Success factors and challenges

### A. Success factors

When asked how successful different strategies or policies have been, most countries have not indicated the rate of success at all – sometimes due to on-going programmes.

About half of the reported initiatives have been subject to formal evaluations, many of which have received funding from the European Social Funds. It is more common with monitoring by the use of statistical indicators.

Those that have given an indication of success, mostly rank their policies or initiatives as 3 or 4 on the five grade scale, which indicates that they are perceived as fairly successful. There are some initiatives that have received the highest mark, 5. These are:

Country	Initiative	Evaluation
Estonia	Project "Come Along!". The project aimed at providing basic and advanced computer training to 100,000 people and connecting 50,000 more families to the Internet over period of three years.	The target group was reached and the indicators achieved. No formal evaluation took place.
Ireland	Help My Kid Learn. Content is accessible and helpful.	No. Two TV series were broadcast on family literacy development and featured the website. Each six-part series followed families working together to overcome educational issues affecting their lives and ran on RTE 1 Television, the main national broadcast TV station.
Latvia	Active labour market policies: Acquisition of informal education with coupon method; Vocational continuing education and vocational improvement education programmes for the unemployed with coupon method; Measures to increase competitiveness.	ALMP were evaluated by World Bank. Around 7 000 (33% of total number of involved persons in non-formal education) SEA clients are taking part of ICT courses every single year. Another education programs are state and foreign language courses and truck drivers' courses.
Poland	Digital Poland Lighthouse Keepers – actions in respect to Lighthouse Keepers themselves. Volunteers who wish to receive certified training and become Digital Poland Lighthouse Keepers.	Subject to random evaluation visits by experts. Started in November 2011. So far Lighthouse Keepers have organized over 31 000 workshops for close to 232 000 participants

One common factor seems to be that all these highly appreciated initiatives have reached large numbers of people. But the underlying success factors are not described or explained in the reporting templates.

Looking at “What works” in the reporting template again, large number of participants are seen as successes and the reasons why programmes are successful seem to be that they are timely, flexible and attractive to different groups of people. But there seems also to be programmes that are successful since the cross-organisational coherence or the systemic coherence is good.

What works
<p>The policy objective of coordinating actions and priorities regarding digital learning was realized by this strategy. The main projects in the field of AE (see “policy mechanisms”) are successful in terms of their particular objectives.</p>
<p>“Online learning free of charge” (“Gratis Online Lernen”) had about 850 participants when running for three weeks, and in the beginning of Feb it is almost 1000. This is a large number for a MOOC in the German speaking area which is running without any obligation or official validation.</p> <p>We can assume this was due to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-local PR campaigns</li> <li>-the distribution of workbooks</li> <li>-internet calls for trainers working as multipliers</li> <li>-open license of all materials</li> </ul> <p>In general, the feedback was very positive.</p> <p>We assume this was due to the combination of workbook, films, quizzes, forum and sometimes also face-to-face groups.</p> <p>For learners, it turned out to be valuable to provide instructions on learning competences together with instructions on internet competences.</p> <p>The MOOC is under a creative commons licence, that means it can be shared as well as adapted for any purpose, even commercially, if appropriate citation is used and changes are indicated.</p>
<p>Correction are faster and learners receive their homework faster, some tutors are providing group tasks and activities, learners help each another via forums, new propositions are implemented in new units (past help to improve the future). 10 000 people are already online and using the service</p>
<p>Concerning the accomplished steps, the approach has worked so far. Yet, some questions have still to be addressed like :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•the agreement terms of the exploitation of the course contents in other training contexts by the partners and/or by external institutions of the original partnership,</li> <li>•the formal measurement of skills transfer to the trainers/teachers,</li> <li>•The measurement of the informal skills developed by the trainees and directly linked to the e-learning approach.</li> </ul>
<p>Although the system is very user friendly, it only works when adults are familiar with using PCs and web browsing. Because of the above it initially worked for a small part of the trainees. We had to educate all others in order to increase the percentage of actual users</p>
<p>The EMU portal has a number of targeted entries for adult education successfully structures into <i>educational areas</i> and into <i>subjects</i>. These approaches have demonstrated easier, direct access to the resources that the teacher is looking for.</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Regional approach – trainings were organized all over Estonia (almost 300 locations).</li> <li>2) Practical approach – trainings were linked to real e-services, for instance use of ID-card and mobile ID (including use of digital signature) and introduction of various public and private e-services (electronic declaration of taxes, e-school, e-voting, e-banking etc).</li> </ol>
<p>The use of Moodle to provide additional support materials for students has been quite successful. Students who access the materials may be provided with additional resources to support acquisition of knowledge and concepts, pod casts of lectures, links to appropriate video resources etc.</p> <p>The relatively simple process for staff to upload content and students to access it from any device has contributed to this success.</p>

Continuous intake and flexible start and finish dates/ durations provides a flexible model that has proven popular with a wide variety of learners that enables them to continue to seek employment while completing their course. Learners can also take up employment opportunities as they arise and complete their course as an employed learner.

Virtual Classroom and eTutor support has increased certification levels and engagement.

Moodle as a Learning Management System has developed in line with technology developments and has proven an excellent tool for course management.

Users can study at their own pace and in their own time to improve their skills or get a national qualification. It reduces barriers to learning such as access and stigma.

Write On has 44,270 learner accounts since 2009.

2,573 learners used the website to achieve 12,045 minor awards and 1,216 major awards at Level 2 and 2,434 minor awards and 172 major awards at Level 3.

www.writeon.ie includes a facility for the recognition for prior learning.

Increasingly used as a learning resource for blended learning delivery by providers

As an example of what seems to have been successful in in this field is using Skype while recognition non-formal and informal learning.

Content is accessible and helpful.

Two TV series were broadcast on family literacy development and featured the website. Each six-part series followed families working together to overcome educational issues affecting their lives and ran on RTE 1 Television, the main national broadcast TV station.

Facebook campaign to promote website and use of social media.

Monthly E-zines to subscribers.

Promotion of the site with stakeholders worked well – these included early learning and literacy learning and teaching professionals, pre-school groups, teachers unions and other school organisations and libraries.

Statistics for the second year of operation of www.helpmykidlearn.ie (from 7 September 2013 to 6 September 2014) are set out below:

- 92,600 users (in 2013 same period there were 66,743 unique visitors)
- 22.3% of users return
- 1,215 people signed up for monthly tips
- 710 likes on Facebook page

## B. Challenges.

Only two countries have indicated lower levels of success in an initiative or policy, or 2 on the five grade scale. Serbia reports that guidelines for improving the role of ICT in education were made but there are no concrete measures and actions to achieve them. Iceland says: “We do not have any strategy guide of ICT in adult educating in the same way we have at other levels of education, and there is no specific program in this field for adult education.”

From the reports of “What doesn’t work” in the reporting template, there are a number of challenges that in many cases refers to lack of coherence. In terms of coherence, the most important challenge seem to be lack of systemic coherence:

- Passing prisoners online is not possible yet due to security issue
- Typical, strict curricular teaching. Flexibility is the key to success.
- Less successful than was envisaged or planned, largely due to the unfamiliarity of teachers with the protocols and systems to enable it, coupled with less than optimal instruction and support when rolling it out
- Referrals sometimes do not match the right learner with the right course.
- The forum was used by multipliers and trainers more often than by (lower-skilled) learners.
- The participation rate could have been even larger.
- Difficulties to have some former “paper-learners” e-mail address (because they don’t have one)

Another challenge seem to be lack of cross-organisational coherence:

- Lot of time was invested for press releases and advertisement, but the support of print media was quite low.

Then there are challenges of other kind:

- At one time the portal comprised too many, too different resources, and the portal became 'Big' and overwhelming, and too difficult to navigate
- Online learning and assessment does not suit every learner, but where a learner is interested in studying online and improving computer and technology skills at the same time as their reading, writing, speaking and listening competencies, it offers many advantages.
- Some adult learning centres have found it easier to adopt and use than others.

## 7. Concluding remarks

The material submitted is very rich and complex. This summary has tried to highlight similarities more than differences. It should be remembered that each policy, strategy or initiative has a unique history and context which means that what works in one country may not work at all in another country. Still there seem to be a lot of lessons to learn and knowledge that could be shared among countries. Hopefully this summary has given readers appetite for taking a closer look at some of the reporting templates uploaded at Yammer.