EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND INCLUSION

Europe 2020 : Employment policies
Vocational training and adult education

ET 2020 WORKING GROUP ON ADULT LEARNING

REPORT OF SEVENTH MEETING, 16-17 JUNE 2015

Participants: AT, BE NL, BE FR, CY, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, HU, IT, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SR, IS, NO, CH, Cedefop, Eurydice, EFEE, CSEE-ETUCE, EAEA, ELGPN and EUCEN.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this meeting were to:

- Inform the Group of the results of two studies commissioned by the Commission to support the Group, and identify how these results could strenghten the Group's outputs;
- Finalise the mapping of content, key messages and policy recommendations for outputs 1 (Basic skills) and 2 (Policy effectiveness);
- Initiate the mapping of content, key messages and policy recommendations for output 3 (Digital skills and the use of ICT in AL);
- Consolidate the Editorial teams and identify next steps for their work.

1. WELCOME

Joao Santos, acting Head of Unit EMPL C5, welcomed the members of the working group to this seventh meeting and stressed that the Group is now approaching the important stage when the outputs - policy guidance to be used by colleagues in the member states countries – are to be produced. He then presented some recent strategic policy developments:

- New deliverables for VET (2015-2021), foreseen in the Bruges Communiqué, will be adopted at a ministerial meeting in Riga 22 June. The deliverables, which also give an added emphasis to adult learning for vocational purposes (C-VET), are:
1. Work-based learning in all its forms
2. Quality assurance in VET / information and feedback loops to VET
3. Access to training and qualifications for all (aimed at up-skilling and re-skilling)
4. Key competences in VET
5. Professional development of VET teachers and trainers.

- New priorities in the EU Agenda for adult learning will, as was reported in the WG meeting in April, be included in the ET 2020 Joint Report which is currently being finalised.

- The 2016 Work Programme for Erasmus+ is being finalised for discussion at the Erasmus Committee meeting in June. There will be AL related priorities under Key Action 3 (Forward-looking projects).
- The Commission is currently exploring ideas to work on a European Agenda on skills, focussing on the areas where the EU can add more value. The skills agenda could include understanding better the demand for skills from businesses, investing in education and training for skills that raise employability and support of validation and recognition of skills to promote mobility. More information about this will be available after the summer.
- The 2015 Country Specific Recommendations were adopted by the Commission in May. This year there are very few references to AL or VET, as the new guidelines for issuing a CSR is that the Commission should focus on recommendations in fields that are not sufficiently addressed and that can be evaluated relatively (12-18 months) soon. However, the recitals (the text preceding the actual recommendation) in some cases contain references to AL or VET. The WG will continue to be a support to MS who wish to exchange experiences, challenges and best practice with colleagues in the framework of addressing the CSR
- The structure of the next generation of ET2020 WGs will be discussed at the High Level Group meeting in Luxembourg later this week

Finally Joao Santos wished the Group a good meeting and looked forward to that important steps towards the final outputs would be taken during the meeting..

2. POLICY UPDATES

Paul Holdsworth informed the group about relevant activities under the Erasmus+ programme.

- The Commission had launched a call for proposals to fund the National Coordinators (NCs) for Adult Learning (AL) for 2016 and 2017. This call invited designated national authorities to establish a permanent mechanism for coordinating the activities of the different AL stakeholders, and to focus their activities on key priority areas including improving adults' basic skills, improving supply and take-up of AL, and engaging more employers in promoting AL. Applicants will be advised of the outcome of the selection process in September.
- The Commission had also launched a call for proposals to fund the National Support Services for EPALE in 2016; the deadline is 15 July 2015.
- The assessment and selection process is still ongoing for two further calls under key action 3 of the Erasmus+ programme.
  The first relates to the 'prospective initiatives' strand and invited applications involving the opening up of education or training infrastructures to make them available for adult learning. Few eligible applications had been received for this strand.
  The second relates to a call specifically designed to help Member States and other authorities and stakeholders work together to develop a coherent strategic aproach to the provision of continuing vocational education and training. Again, very few eligible applications had been received.

3. WG AL Work programme 2015

Angela Andersson gave a short overview of what had so far been achieved by the Group, and the next steps which are: agreeing on outlines and drafting of first texts for the final outputs. She confirmed that the Group may, if needed, continue to work until the end of 2015.

Group members commented that so far discussions in the Group have focused on an organisational approach for the output, but to attract the attention of colleagues in the ministries a skills approach is necessary. Several members pointed out the importance of including the, to us obvious, general message that adult learning is important, especially as so many sectors are involved. It was also noted that key messages and recommendations need to be specific, and not try to cover the whole field. . It was also mentioned for recommendations to be useful for policy makers they need to be specific. Several members of the group said that the final output should include rather few recommendations but with strong messages.

A new contract to support the dissemination and exploitation of all the Working Groups' results is being finalised. The Group will, if needed, get support to produce professional presentation material, infographics and a short video.

The Editorial teams were presented and updated. The current teams are:

Output 1 Basic skills: Birgit Aschemann (AT), Norbert Lurz (DE), Snežana Medic and Mirjana Miljanovic(SR), Graciela Sbertoli (EBSN), Rositsa Panova (BG), Ema Perme (SI), Daniela Blagojecic Vella (MT)

Policy effectiveness: Myriam Schauwers (BE FR), Theres Kuratli (CH), Magda Trantallini (EL), Nicoletta Ioannou (CY), Aviana Bulgarelli (IT), Caroline Liberton (NL). Jelena Munina (LV), Petri Halita (FI), Tom Slevin (IE), György Szent-Léleky (HU), Jan Reitz Jørgensen (DK), Alexandra Dehmel (Cedefop)

ICT and OER in AL: Jan Rehnstam (SE), Svanhildur Sverrisdottis (IS), Michael Denes (SK), Rosella Benedetti (ETUCE), Anka Nilsen (NO).

Members who are not yet part of an editorial team are welcome to contact Angela to be added to a team.

4. Study: "Adult education and training in Europe: widening access to learning opportunities"

Ania Bourgeois, from the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, presented the main results of two parts of the Eurydice study: Policy Commitments and Outreach and Awareness. For the Policy Commitment part, up to three major policy documents issued in the past five years were collected. It is evident that support for adults with low basic skills or low level qualifications is now commonly integrated into countries' policy agendas, but that definite objectives and targets to be reached are scarce. Most countries had during the five year period carried out activities aiming at making adults aware of the benefits of lifelong learning, as outreach: activities for low-skilled or general awareness-raising initiatives targeting all prospective learners.

Discussions in smaller groups showed that, since the data collection for the study (reference year 2013/14) policy changes have been implemented or planned in about a third of the countries attending (BE NL, CY, DE, EE, ES, HU, IE, IT, LV, FI, SI, UK, NO). These are in both basic skills and literacy policies, in some cases triggered by PIAAC 2013 but not launched at the time of the data collection, and in some cases general AL policies. Countries taking part in PIAAC round 2 report informed that they plan to take action when results are known. In a few (CH, SE) countries there are older documents, not in the remit of the study, that are still valid. Policies in three countries (AT, IT, NL) are described as ensuring/allowing policy coherence, such as cooperation between different ministries (e.g. ministries of labour, education) regarding adult learning.

Four countries (LV, PL, FI, SI) report recent outreach activities increasing participation in existing provision, focusing on younger adults, directed at NEETs and in Poland at older learners. In Austria new activities will start end of 2015. In Germany, a new decade of literacy will be launched. ESF funding is mentioned as an enabler. Actions are monitored on a quantitative level, but impact studies and quality evaluations are scarce. Members of the Group expressed an interest in the Commission supporting them to monitor the results of their AL policies.

The challenge for some countries can also be that systems for adult education and training first need to be built up, before awareness raising campaigns become meaningful.

WG members pointed out a limitation of the study in its mapping of outreach and awareness raising initiatives. As such activities are most often carried out on regional or local level, in many cases by educational providers. Members of the Group (representatives of group A) also pointed out that there are quite a few targeted awareness campaigns (e.g. directed at migrants) but again they are not always nationwide. For that reason a survey of national level initiatives does not reflect the full picture.

It was also mentioned that in some countries AL is still not a priority and there are no complete AL strategies. The latter is one of the main obstacles to launching nationwide awareness campaigns.

Members of the group also noticed that due to political changes some of the actions concerning adult learning will be modified but at this stage it is too early to predict the direction of the changes.

5. POLICY CHALLENGE 1, BASIC SKILLS PROVISION

Günter Hefler, ICF, introduced the discussion on the further preparation for the output on Basic Skills, highlighting, as previously agreed, that the output should not only refer to, but also substantially add to, the policy discourse, as represented by recent policy documents. The current "menu" of key messages and recommendations, updated online by a few WG members since the April meeting, still needs to be worked on. There might also be recommendations coming from an additional, still unpublished, report on policies supporting adult basic skills that the Commission had commissioned from ICF.

In the discussion it was pointed out that several of the recommendations added online originated from the workshop in Stuttgart in October. Members of the group suggested that the final output should include a clarification on how adult learning is different to adult "school" education, and a recommendation for "real life" approaches in adult learning. Adult

learning professionals, in particular teachers in basic skills, were also mentioned as an important topic for a recommendation.

The group also discussed the basis for key messages and recommendations. What level of robustness of the research background does the Group envisage for the outputs? Günter Hefler noted that there might be national sources that could be used to back up conclusions, but also pointed out that the Group would have to consider if they will focus on only issues where there is very solid research.

It was agreed that the current list of messages and recommendations should be given to the Editorial team for output 1, Basic Skills, for them to take further. The new ICF report on Policies supporting adult basic skills from ICF will be posted on Yammer as soon as it is available.

After a breakout session where members of the Group reflected on most relevant types of target audiences for the final outputs, a voting exercise resulted in the following being considered most likely audiences: units in Ministries of Education (21 votes), Employment and Public Employment Services (17 votes), followed by Ministries of Finance (14 votes). Social partners, Agencies in the field of Adult learning, Adult Learning providers, regions and HE training institutions were also mentioned. This information will be further dealt with by the Editorial team for output 1, to be considered in the final selection of topics and approach for the output.

6. POLICY CHALLENGE 3, ICT AND OER IN ADULT LEARNING

6.1 Study: "Adult learners in Digital Learning Environments"
Presentation of Final report
Angela informed the Group that the study is now finalised. The study's objective was to provide a detailed picture on the current provision and take-up of ICT-enhanced learning, including OER (Open Educational Resources), in adult learning, and to suggest policy advice on how stakeholders can better harness the potential of ICT for the benefit of adult learners. The study should also develop an approach for a self-assessment tool. The Group has during the last year been involved in consultations on the tool and in the collection of good practice., The study had been commissioned from Ecorys and Bertelsmann Stiftung by the Commission, with the intention that its results could support the Group's work and, to the extent that the Group decides, make a useful contribution to the Group's output described in the Mandate as "policy guidance on how to improve the digital skills of adults and the use of ICT enhanced learning and OER in adult learning".

The picture provided in the final report is based on in-depth country studies from a range of countries, selected through an analysis of statistics from Eurostat and OECD. The selection identified countries across a range of adult learning using ICTs and OER, from countries with advanced practice to those experiencing significant challenges in developing adult learning. Subsequent country level investigation involved an online survey on how providers of adult learning used ICTs and OERs in their provision and country-specific research.

Benefits of ICT and OER in adult learning can, according to the report be used to extend and diversify the provision of learning, enable tailoring of content, time and place and widening the access of learning. However, first-generation ICT tools still dominate, and there are

particularly strong challenges for Open Educational Resources. Results indicate that there is a clear digital divide amongst AL institutions and the study concludes that the full potential of digital use in adult learning is still to be realised.

Policy recommendations are suggested on EU, national and provider level. EU level recommendations include support sharing of good practice and pan-European use of ICT and OER in adult learning. Member states' are recommended to build information and resources to promote the value of adult learning using ICTs and OER and to develop policies and strategies to enable the development and take-up of innovative adult learning. Providers are adviced to develop new institutional strategies and an institutional IT infrastructure, to build and use networks of practice and to provide systematic and continuous training for educators.

The study also provides a suggestion for an assessment tool for adult learning institutions for analysing their state of the art in use of ICT and OER, which has earlier been presented to the Group. The tool could, when fully developed, also be used by policy-makers as it will contain a Handbook of best practice. The Commission's plan is, after the assessment tool has been finalised and tested, to make it publicly available via EPALE.

Discussion
The Group stressed the importance of recommendations for national level policies and systems for access and quality of content such as OER. Recommendations on educating the educator should include raising skills in andragogy, use of ICT and use of ICT for adult learning. The learner perspective was found missing in the recommendations.

6.2 Output 3, Digital skills and the use of ICT in AL
Jan Hylén, ICF International, presented a short paper from OERUP, an Erasmus+ project aimed at promoting and fostering the successful implementation of OER and OEPs (Open Educational Practices) in adult education in Europe in order to widen participation in Open Education. Trends observed are that there in AL are open minds in spite of skepticism on digitalization and the lack of resources in national languages and that very much is up to the individual teacher/trainer. The big, unused potential referred to in the Ecorys study is mentioned also in this paper. Four country reports have been produced in the framework of the project, from DE, ES, RO and UK. WG members from ES, DE and RO commented on the respective report and found them little (RO) to moderately (DE, ES) interesting. A representative from EBSN had looked at the UK report and found it solid, in particular on the issue of staff development. The Group agreed to consider using parts of these reports as input for the final output.

Jan updated the Group on the current version of the adapted "4 in Balance", the Dutch model developed for the evaluation of implementation of ICT in schools which the participants in the Oslo workshop had suggested could be modified for AL use. Experience from other sectors show that, when implementing ICT, not all areas needed for successful implementation are always considered. The intended use of the model is to support countries, regions and providers to implement ICT in adult learning, and it can also serve as a checklist for follow-up and evaluation.

The communication aspect was already in Oslo identified as a field for improvement, and in the April webinar it was pointed out that the learner focus and terminology must be different in an AL environment. Comments from the Group on this version of the model

were that the learners are missing and should be made much more visible. The quality assurance aspect was mentioned and it was pointed out that there are only few quality instruments for adult learning. In this context recognition and validation, not present in a school environment, should also be considered if the tool is to be used for adult learning. The group also found that the values or ethos of adult learning, which may be different than in school education, might have to be clarified.

Input from the discussion will be further dealt with by the Editorial team for output 3, to be considered in list of possible key messages and recommendations for the output.

7. POLICY CHALLENGE 2, POLICY EFFECTIVENESS

7.1 Study: "Analysis of adult learning policies and their effectiveness"

Mantas Sekmokas, DG EMPL, informed the group that the study, in which the Group has been closely involved since its launch in early 2014, is now finalised. One of the deliverables was an analytical tool that will help the Commission and Member states' policy makers in analysing and developing adult learning policies. The study had been commissioned by the Commission, independently from the Working Group, but the intention has been that its results could support the Group's work and, to the extent that the Group decides, make a useful contribution to the Group's output described in the Mandate as responding to the "need to improve coherence of policies and strategies on adult skills" by providing "a guidance framework focusing on efficiency and effectiveness of policies".

Presentation of analytical tool

Séin Ó Muineacháin from ICF International demonstrated a prototype version of the analytical tool, designed to support Member States to formulate and implement effective AL policies, and make better use of the existing evidence base. The prototype uses sample data and has been developed to show how such a tool can be used by policymakers to monitor performance and policy developments in adult learning.

The tool provides an overview of the conceptual framework, explaining its various elements and provides information on the strength of the evidence underpinning each building block. It also provides access to data on measures that monitor each of the building blocks and success factors in the framework. It is possible to compare quantitative data across time periods (where available) and countries, and qualitative data across countries. Data can be downloaded as individual country reports.

In addition, the tool provides access to additional resources, such as research evidence or data sources that may be of interest to policymakers and practitioners.

The prototype is limited by the quality and range of measures and data available. However, the tool can be updated when new data become available and when new and stronger evidence is produced, and new building blocks could be added as evidence improves or becomes available.

Discussion

The Group expressed that the prototype looked very promising, congratulated ICF on successful work so far, and looked forward to starting to use it.

The group were invited now to consider how exactly the tool could best be used in each national context. After reflection, it was reported that, in addition to the possibility for supporting the development of policies informed by European comparison, awareness raising and strengthening of the identity of adult learning, the analytical tool could also be used to identify knowledge gaps in the MS, and to help develop their own research agenda. Comparison was pointed out as being strength, but also a possible weakness as access to qualitative data is still limited. Senior management, researchers and providers were listed among possible users of the tool, and the importance of ensuring that also in the future only valid and reliable data would be used was highlighted. Questions were raised about the possibility of developing other levels of the tool, adding national or even regional and local data; ICF replied that this theoretically would be possible. Finally it was clarified that the final tool will present information from all countries for which there is statistical information collected.

The members of the Group were eager to continue to explore the prototype tool together with colleagues in their countries, and requested access to the link with the prototype. They also requested presentation material. The Commission promised to publish the link to the prototype as soon as possible but emphasised that the tool being delivered as part of this study is still a non-public prototype. The plan is, after it has been finalised and tested, to make it publicly available, for example via EPALE. Hopefully presentation material about the tool could be part of the general dissemination plan of the Group's final outputs.

7.2 Analysis of adult learning policies and their effectiveness
Presentation of final report
Shane Beadle, ICF International, gave an overview of the key results and key findings of the study underpinning, and identified conclusions and recommendations.

The study provides an extensive international overview of the research evidence around all the policy actions believed to contribute to effective adult learning, and a broad analysis of all the statistical data and their usefulness as measures for monitoring change. It enables assessment of AL policies in Europe, building on a conceptual framework which can be developed further, and gives a clearer view of what is needed to improve policy effectiveness in AL.

Among the key findings is that participation in learning is strongly linked to the availability of learning opportunities which governments fund in whole or part, and that work-related training is a key driver in increasing the overall participation rate. Improving learners' disposition to learning also increases participation in learning. Policy actions should increase the availability of all forms of learning, why employers motivation to train and develop their employees should also be encouraged.

Another key finding is that monitoring and evaluation of policy actions and the publication of evaluations are not always in place, and where they do take place, the quality varies considerably. Data to assess and review progress of policy actions are not available in all countries or only for a limited range. A key conclusion of the study is that the evidence base on the effectiveness of AL policies exists, but is still limited in coverage and quality. The statistical base for the monitoring of AL policies is updated infrequently, with changing definitions and limited coverage of policy actions.

In addition, adult learning policies are not well aligned with other government policies, preventing maximum effectiveness.

The EU and all MS therefore face some challenges with AL as well as with AL policy design and implementation at national/regional/local levels. The study and the analytical tool can provide advice and guidance on AL policy effectiveness at EU/MS levels, but improving the evidence base by evaluating and monitoring policies on all levels would help considerably in making the tool more effective and valuable

Recommendations to Member States include, obviously, that they should now address the specific policy challenges identified by the study.

It is also recommended that they should in future make full use of the evidence base and the analytical framework for a more informed selection, design and implementation of policies. The report also recommends increasing the availability of data and evaluation to measure and compare implementation, quality and impact of policies as well as improving research and statistics forming the evidence base. Finally it is recommended to continue to update the analytical framework.

Discussion

The Group noted that it would be most important to improve the quality of the evidence base and ensure competent and safe updating of data over time, as this will improve the power of the analytical framework.

Fiscal impact was mentioned as an area not present in the recommendations, and members of the Group considered that this would be useful in dialogue with Ministries of Finance. The learner and the outcomes perspectives were also pointed out as not visible in the recommendations. These will be addressed in the Group's final output.

7.3 Output 2 Policy effectiveness

Presentation

Günter Hefler, ICF International, introduced the discussion on the further preparation for the output on Policy Coherence, Efficiency and Effectiveness. The current "menu" of key messages and recommendations, with additions made in the online template by a few WG members since the last meeting, is now rather extensive and some selection of messages and recommendations will have to be carried out. The Group will also have to consider how to make more effective use of the study that was presented earlier in the meeting.

Questions and comments

Günter reminded that group that we are still at the point where we collect arguments, recommendations and key messages. They are too many at the moment, and need to be sharpened. We have not reached the state when we should prioritize. The process started during the meeting will be continued in the Editorial team.

The recommendations as currently framed were considered to be too vague and bureaucratic; there was a question about the difference between key messages and recommendations. Günter clarified that we will need to separate messages that should be new from actions that need to be taken. Shaping the wording of the recommendation and making them as clear as possible is important. We should ourselves feel empowered and motivated by the recommendations.

World café

After the presentation the groups discussed the recommendations so far suggested by the Group's members in a world café setting. The goal was to extend the list of recommendations, to sharpen recommendations, and to identify related key messages. In addition it aimed at identifying needs for the background section and possible country examples.

The suggested recommendations had been grouped into recommendations (a) for coherence of AL policies over time, (b) across goals and fields of AL, (c) with regard to the AL workforce and (d) across policy fields.

Many recommendations as currently framed were considered too vague and general. Some suggestions on how to clarify them were collected and some country examples were identified. Group members agreed that it is of important that recommendations are concrete and adult learning - specific. It was pointed out that better coordination with other ET 2020 Working Groups could help raising the profile of adult learning in the educational systems.

Very few possible key messages were identified, but it was mentioned that they should contain a "story", address challenges and have a country example to illustrate them. The need for evaluation is a possible theme for a key message, which is also supported by the results of the two studies presented during the meeting.

For policy coherence over time it was suggested to have one recommendation focusing on sustainability and possibly to add recommendations about flexibility and respecting the full diversity of AL It was suggested to use a soon to be implemented long term skills strategy in Norway as a country example, and possibly also a Dutch Family learning programme which has run for a long time.

The recommendations for coherence across fields of AL were suggested to be clarified on what is meant by "outcomes", not to refer generally to "subfields" but rather indicate what fields are concerned. It was also pointed out that workplaces might need to be defined and that social partners should be included in recommendations for workplace learning. A suggested addition is a recommendation to support employers to carry out skills analyses and identification which recommendations refer to micro and small companies and which to medium and large establishments.

It was proposed to recommend including a standard training in andragogy in training programmes for all types of adult educator in a country, and to recommend that each country establish a formalised and recognised career pathway for educators. The monitoring of these should be carried out through agreed standards and in line with EU frameworks.

For coherence across policy fields two new recommendations were put forward. One was to recommend a dedicated body with a mandate to oversee overall AL coordination nationally, and some country good practices from Denmark, Slovenia, Latvia and Italy was introduced. Another proposed recommendation concerned carrying out skills analysis of learners, where there was a good practice case in Italy that could be used. Information from the discussion will be further dealt with by the Editorial team for output 2, to be considered in the final selection of topics and approach for the output

Each editorial team will now take further the discussions on their respective output with a view to arriving at clear proposals to present to the next meeting of the group..

10. NEXT STEPS

All presentations will be uploaded on Yammer.

Editorial teams will start their work on drafting final outputs and sub-groups will be created on Yammer for this purpose.

A new timetable for the WG will be uploaded on Yammer

11. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the WG will take place on 16 and 17 September in Brussels.