



# IMPROVING THE QUALITY AND MONITORING OF BASIC SKILLS EDUCATION FOR ADULTS

## WORKSHOP ON BASIC SKILLS TRAININGS: MONITORING METHODOLOGIES AND TOOLS - MINUTES

Utrecht, 26 September 2019

### 1. Workshop participants

Speakers: **Mr Hans Hindriks** (Project Manager; Ministry of Education, Culture and Science of The Netherlands), **Ms Patricia Perez-Gomez** (Team Leader for Education; Structural Reform Support Service; European Commission), **Ms Glenda Quintini** (Senior Economist/Policy Analyst; OECD), **Ms Julie Lassébie** (Junior Policy Analyst; OECD), **Martina Ní Cheallaigh** (Senior Expert; Vocational Education and Training, Apprenticeships & Adult Learning; DG EMPL, European Commission).

National Experts: **Ms Ema Perme** (Univ. dipl. ped., prof. soc. / MA of Pedagogy, Sociology; Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of Slovenia; Department of Educational Development and Quality), **Ms Inez Bailey** (CEO at the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA); Ireland), **Mr Erno Hyvönen** (Project Coordinator; Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland; Department of VET).

Participants: representatives of Dutch local governments (approximately 30 participants from municipalities).

### 2. Overall goals

The workshop was convened to serve as a peer-to-peer forum for promoting the exchange of good practices and sharing successful experiences – in order to support the reform process of the monitoring of basic skills programmes and the quality assurance framework in the Netherlands (which started in July, 2019). The speakers, national experts and participants discussed different aspects of monitoring tools, such as:

- The information gathered to monitor number of people attending training programmes on basic skills;
- The types of indicators used for the monitoring;
- The methodologies and business processes applied by training providers, central/local government and other parties; and
- Other relevant elements, linked to the creation and effective performance of a monitoring tool.

### 3. Summary of the discussions – Morning plenary sessions

#### 3.1 Welcome addresses

**Mr Hans Hindriks** (Ministry OCW) delivered an opening speech to the participants, specifying the goal of the reform process: to develop a new monitoring framework over the next two months, within

the context of improving the level of basic skills in the Netherlands – as part of a five-year plan (*‘tel mee met taal II’*) with **three overarching goals**:

- Increasing the number of participants in courses NL
- More possibilities and financial room for adult learning in NL
- Improving the quality of AL courses as well as policy through monitoring

This is a co-creation process, working together with municipalities towards a new monitoring tool. Additionally, the external pressure due to the parliamentary debate in NL was addressed, leading to the time-pressured nature of the project: it needs to be reported what the new pillar on adult education will look like before the end of the year (the end date of the project being the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December 2019).

**Ms Patricia Perez-Gomez** (SRSS; EC) addressed the history of the Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS) and their role within this project. The SRSS will provide technical assistance by combining international expertise of the Intergovernmental Organisation in the field of adult education with the municipalities’ strong knowledge of the Dutch context. The Dutch case was selected on account of: (1) the strong determination of the Dutch government to go through the support process; (2) the involvement of all relevant ministries (which is rarely seen in applications); and (3) the nature of the support, being ‘co-creation’. The support is also relevant in light of the Commission initiative: Upskilling Pathways.

**Ms Glenda Quintini** (OECD) specified adult learning (AL) as one of the top priorities for the OECD and indicated that the issues the Netherlands is dealing with are encountered in many countries: even in countries where many individuals participate in AL, there is a disparity between low- and high-skilled workers, in that high-skilled workers are more active (participate in multiple courses, etc.) than low-skilled (workers). The importance of setting quality criteria for the training and monitoring related to AL was noted.

The project consists of workshops (involving the wider community of municipalities) and working groups (composed of a selection of municipalities) preparing the ground for a monitoring tool. The VNG (The Association of Netherlands Municipalities) is in charge of communication with the working groups: should anyone want to take part of the working groups, they need to communicate this to VNG.

## 3.2 Presentations

### 3.2.1 Monitoring participation and impact of basic skills’ trainings: *International Overview*

**Ms Julie Lassébie** (OECD) addressed the paper that was put together for the workshop<sup>1</sup>, providing an international overview of adult education for low-skilled adults as well as good practices seen in the EU for monitoring adult skill levels and participation.

In terms of the share of adults that are considered ‘low literacy’ and in terms of the participation in adult education, the Netherlands performs pretty well. There is, however, a difference in AL participation rates between low and high-skilled adults, with high-skilled performing approximately 40 percentage points better than the low-skilled. Overall, monitoring data is lacking to evaluate the effectiveness of basic skills training in the Netherlands, and understand what works and what not.

Some **examples of existing indicators within this topic** were presented<sup>2</sup>, to serve as inspiration for the group discussions:

- Indicators for participation:
  - Number of **registered individuals**;
  - Number of **course completers**;
  - Number of **participants per course/training**; and/or

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<sup>1</sup> OECD (2019). Monitoring participation in adult learning programmes - A review of European best practices on monitoring instruments.

<sup>2</sup> Which can be found in existing surveys or already existing metrics developed in the psychology literature.

- Number of **courses/programmes started/finished**.
- Indicators for impact:
  - **Satisfaction (subjective)** – such as usefulness of the course/training, opinions on learning goals; opinions on learning utility in work/daily life after completion.
  - **Career development** – such as employment status, further training, labour market aspects (job level, change in income, etc.).
  - **Social outcomes** – such as health behaviours, well-being (both physical/mental), social and political attitudes, trust in others, communication competences, cooperation, civic participation.

Furthermore, the need to consider whether to use before and after measurements or to gather both measures retrospectively was addressed. Finally, some other open questions/topics were introduced:

- Whether to use paper form or electronic forms for collection;
- In which format/frequency data transmission should occur;
- The maximum number of participants to be studied;
- Possibilities to link with other data sources;
- Whether to use a follow-up survey (and who will do this?);
- How to adapt the wording of questions to the literacy level of learners;
- What level of harmonization is desired; and
- What will be the uses of the data?

In the coming weeks the OECD will produce a **report on monitoring practices in the Netherlands**, feeding the development of a monitoring tool (with the support of national researchers that are present in the room).

### Box 1 – Questions & Answers

**1. In terms of logistics of the gathered information, is there experience in the EU with the exchange of potentially sensitive information of learners between parties / stakeholders?**

Sweden, for example, collects participant information, which includes a personal identification number (e.g. social security number). They use a data sharing information system in order to pass data to the statistical institute – although the format in which data is exchanged (Excel, or txt files) varies between municipalities.

### 3.2.2 The Irish case: Challenges and success factors of development and implementation of VET monitoring tools

**Ms Inez Bailey** discussed the reform of the Irish FET system (5 years ago), aiming to form one strategy for all further education and training (not just AL). At the time, it was made clear (by the Irish government) that there was insufficient data available to communicate the importance of the FET sector to government and other stakeholders (and thus of limited use in decision making). Prerequisites to the FET-sector were to develop:

- A national FET **‘programme database’** of all FET courses. All 17 districts should complete this database according to a strict format.
- A national FET **‘course calendar’** identifying when courses are due to start and the places providing them (e.g. recruitment facilities).
- A real-time **‘learner database’** that collects all sorts of information on learners/participants of FET, with emphasis on putting training in a wider context – such as sustainable employment – by allowing for data exchange with other parties.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Such as: The Department of Education and Social Protection (DEASP); Revenue; Quality & Qualifications Ireland (QQI); and the statutory planning and policy development body for higher education and research in Ireland – the Higher Education Authority (HEA).

In terms of responsibilities and access – the following aspects were discussed for the Irish case:

- Programme information is **entered into the programme database by providers**, database is funded through SOLAS;
- **Individuals can apply by themselves** through the course calendar database, or they are referred (i.e. entered as applicant by a third party, such as employer).
- The Department of Education and Social Protection (DEASP) has access to information on referred clients (for linking to ‘learner database’);
- The **providers are able to send information to all three databases as well as retrieve information from them** (defining courses, managing applications/referrals, etc.);
- Additionally, it was noted that the education training boards were able to see these data sources as a valuable resource for themselves as well – supporting them in their local processes. The data would allow them to self-evaluate a lot of their work, thus proving valuable for quality assurance.

In terms of technical development, it was discussed for the Irish case that it did require a lot of resources - to set-up the system, and to allow it to connect to other sources for data collection (i.e. setting up an information management system, determining needs for certain data formats, etc.).

**Sensitive information challenges** encountered were mainly related to the following aspects:

1. **GDPR (privacy law)** - people would need to know *what* information was being collected, *why* this information was required, *how* it was being stored, with *whom* it would be shared and for *which* purpose(s) (and for which not);
2. **Huge concerns to turn ‘vulnerable learners’ off** – such as prisoners and those with personal reasons not wanting to share personal information;
3. **Value and effort needed to be critically assessed (and communicated)** – providers initially did not always understand the added value of the monitoring. During the course of the project, awareness increased and the exercise was ultimately seen as an asset, thus resulting in a positive change in attitude (towards taking part in the monitoring);
4. **Ensuring the use of ‘plain English’ in the data collection process**, in order to explain clearly why the respective information was asked for.

Lastly, a reflection on the process was discussed: The technical orientation of the development process may have neglected some of the sensitive issues mentioned before. It was found to be easier to prepare for the hard parts (technical) than the unexpected (resistance against sensitive data sharing), which resulted in ongoing discussion between the technical side and the stakeholders involved – in particular the National steering group. **Thus, it was noted that it is important to create a general understanding that this is to be an evolving project.**

## Box 2 – Questions and answers

### 1. How to overcome sensitive issues and emotional aspects around data collection?

These were overcome by making compromises, finding solutions to the most difficult/sensitive issues topics and especially putting thought into the (English) phrasing towards providers as well. Their initial complaints were (for example) not understanding the questions/indicators themselves and why it is relevant to gather this information, thus very de-stimulated to collect the data / use the same questions on participants. Therefore, it is important to explain clearly to the providers why collecting data is important, putting less weight on the official requirement/threatening, and more weight on the value for them of collecting and having access to such data. It was also stressed out that involving the learning providers and especially the teachers and learners from the start is crucial– having them fill in the information and experience difficulties – in order to identify the issues and address them.

### 2. Does the database include non-formal learning?

Yes, it includes all types of further learning, regardless of whether a certificate/qualification is

achieved through completion of the course.

**3. How do you know that all the partners that collect the information will provide the necessary information?**

It is aggregated and published at a national level (annual service plan, published via SOLAS.IE), meaning providers would be able to see their information be made available to the public (which never happened before in Ireland).

**4. Is the information checked?**

There is no ‘audits’ at classroom level to determine whether for example participant numbers are correct. The providers were made responsible for their own quality assurance. Interestingly, there were cases where the number of participants went down over the years.

**5. Does it also include non-formal education of partners that do not get financial support from the government?**

Yes, since they are registered as soon as they receive any type of funding. Also, there was a change in approach in Ireland in terms of funding, not incorporated into this system (thus it exists next to it / alongside it), essentially leaving behind the ‘set-in-stone’/structured financing system and moving more towards a ‘journey-traveled’ financing system.

**6. Any indication in terms of the financial costs of implementation?**

None of the parties involved felt it wasn’t a financial burden, but everybody had their eye on the prize: increased funding. This was successfully obtained; in fact, the government invested more money only to speed up the process as much as they could. Note of course that in the Irish case, the entire FET system was reformed, not just AL.

**7. Was the self-assessment tool considered useful?**

Not so much in direct analysis, given the sensitivity of information. It is mainly used for sketching a case/profile for programmes, which is then used to obtain funding for the programme (for 3 years at a time, instead of the former 1-year funding periods).

*3.2.3 Adult basic skills in Finland: The importance of capacity building for VET providers.*

**Mr Erno Hyvönen** noted that, prior to 2019, there were no policies in relation to basic skills in Finland, meaning there was no method of collecting such statistics. A comparison was made to the Netherlands, regarding some aspects of the Finnish (basic) education system, to provide additional insights:

- The base level (7 to 16 years of age) only has one level of outcome;
- All levels of secondary education are within same level (i.e. no different levels within initial VET);
- There are, however, specialized tracks for further education in VET, which are at a higher EQF level;
- There is a huge non-formal (AL) system, though most often used by those who already have higher education and are doing a course, for example for hobby. Since this sector does not provide a qualification/certification it was not ‘counted’.

Furthermore, as a result of VET reforms from a year ago, the following aspects were of interest in relation to VET education in Finland:

- A personal study plan is developed for each participant, if desired in cooperation with employer/etc;
- Increased study time flexibility – the whole qualification consists of 5 parts, each with a respective test/assessment to pass; Furthermore, there is **no minimum study duration before attempting the test** (i.e. if you already have the skills, you can just go do the test at day 1).

Because of this, **in Finland, there was no need to develop a system for validation of prior learning and/or skill recognition.**

In terms of data collection, the Finnish case introduced ‘Vipunen’ – the education administration's reporting portal. This portal presents statistics on education, based on data and registers collected by (1) the Ministry of Culture and Education, and (2) the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI). With the data collected, it is possible to do very specific analyses – such as determining learning factors that ‘stimulate’ dropping out of VET programmes.<sup>4</sup> A critical note addressed was that only gathering counts of all sorts of participants or programme statistics (in order to calculate the success chance) does not provide enough insight. Things that should be counted in particular are, for example, aspects related to:

- Counselling / guidance prior to the studies
- Support at the beginning of the studies
- Group dynamics
- Self-esteem
- Feeling of belonging to a group / the society

Additionally, it was addressed that everybody benefits from: (1) simplified language / linguistic awareness; and (2) personalisation of the studies / feedback and listening.

In terms of tools developed, the Finnish case presented the Work Capacity Certificate for students, teachers and education providers. Its objective is to increase the students’ knowledge, skills and motivation to take care of their own health and well-being during and after studying, while introducing the importance of them maintaining their well-being both in school and at work.

Following the formation of the new government, reforms are currently ongoing - related to the development of statistics and tools for capacity building of VET providers. These include the formation of a statement on adult basic skills, which aims at creating a comprehensive service for lifelong guidance through training adults with low basic skills. For this, a total of 4 specific target groups were identified in Finland (based on the data from Vipunen) – more specifically a set of common ‘profiles’, referred to as ‘Archetypes’:

- The ‘young NEET’: 20+ years of age, already dropped out of at least one study programme;
- The ‘young immigrant’: male, from the Middle East;
- The ‘stay-at-home mom’: from East-Africa, without work experience or settled literacy skill;
- The blue-collar worker, 50+ years old, male, anxious about the new machinery in the workplace.

Lastly, it was noted that these archetypes can be used for many purposes, communicated to providers, in order for them to consider how these groups can be addressed and to identify good practices.

### **Box 3 – Questions and answers**

**1. How is some of the information collected – such as sensitive information on wellbeing/health – do you use health records or something similar?**

Records such as criminal and health are not accessible for everyone

**2. When considering the archetype ‘stay-at-home mom’ – how do you stimulate this person to even get her competences assessed (if language is already such a barrier, that they may not even follow news/ads that is relevant to them).**

<sup>4</sup> Such as: lack of basic skills, lack of learning skills, lack of language skills, foreign background, learning difficulties, underachiever status, has already dropped out in other studies, health and mental health problems, addictions, financial problems, etc. But also factors such as: the role of teachers (looking into teachers with high dropout rates), housing (student dorms more likely to finish/succeed than private housing options for those living too far from the VET school) and lots of other interconnected things that are harder to calculate.

Currently we are not sufficiently equipped, encountering barriers when reaching out to disadvantaged groups.

**3. Are programmes for integration (*‘inburgering’*) accessible for Finnish learners as well? And if so, it is important to note that some of these archetypes exist in the Netherlands as well, it is mainly immigrants that end up becoming ‘online learners’ (*webcursisten*).**

The 1st and 2nd generation immigrants don’t do well in primary and secondary station, thus the Finnish system for integration is not very efficient (behind compared to NL, something to work on). Language courses for immigrants are provided by VET providers – and thus they are available for Finnish students as well.

**4. You mentioned only formal education is monitored – could you elaborate on that?**

Informal education cannot be tracked, because they do not have an official status / position. Right now, there is no national measure for adult skills training, as it was not included in policy up until recently. Adults *are* present in VET education, but there is no way to measure the totality of adults in AL, since there is no information on unofficial courses. This is something Finland wants to work towards, but at this time not possible.

### *3.2.4 Adult learning in Slovenia: Developing cross-sectoral co-operation in participation monitoring*

**Ms Ema Perme** addressed the Slovenian background in terms of relevant policies, of which multiple currently exist side-by-side:

- The Adult Education Act (1996 – 2018)<sup>5</sup>
- The National Master Plan on Adult Education (2005-2010; 2013-2020; 3rd in-dev)
- The annual plan for Adult Education
- The Slovenian development strategy 2030 (since 2017)<sup>6</sup>
- The Skills strategy (1st phase 2015-17; 2nd phase 2017-2018)<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, a National literacy strategy is currently in development (draft stage), which will include adult literacy, whereas the previously mentioned strategies only focus on literacy of children. Within this context, the following priority fields of the relevant policies were addressed:

- General Non-formal adult education
- Raising educational attainment
- Job-related education activities supporting AE<sup>8</sup>

In relation to monitoring, it was indicated this was a big challenge for the Slovenian case. Some aspects of their monitoring system were addressed:

- National database for curriculum at all levels (MESS – CEUVIZ database)
- Database of literacy courses for different target groups (SIAE)
- Databases related to special job training, soft skills courses, etc. (MLFSA + ESS)
- The other 7 ministries have their own, separate, databases on: integration of migrants, health awareness raising, traffic safety, counselling in agriculture, cultural and language heritage.

Among others, the following **examples of characteristics included the databases** were discussed:

- **MESS- national database for curriculums at all levels:**
  - Personal identification number

<sup>5</sup> This ‘masterplan’ defines goals, determines priority fields, and defines measures - while ensuring cooperation between ministries, setting goals and defining global funds, as well as monitoring. The most recent revision of the AEA was last year.

<sup>6</sup> Which was developed in cooperation with the OECD.

<sup>7</sup> Which is similar to the skills strategy of the Netherlands. Also, it was noted that for the second phase, it was decided that the most important challenge is governance.

<sup>8</sup> Research and development; guidance; professional training courses.

- Data on enrolment
- Educational history
- Type of education
- Status of participants<sup>9</sup> (in order to ‘follow’ them through their educational trajectory)
- **MPAE, SIAE – literacy courses for different target groups:**
  - Personal characteristics (such as education level)
  - Whether the course was mainly financed by ESF (i.e. following the reporting requirements).
  - Whether there was a change in learning pathway and/or in employment.
- **‘PES’ – Monitoring database of PES<sup>10</sup>:**
  - Personal characteristics (they follow more the data of providers)
  - Number of participants

**In terms of challenges and obstacles, the following issues were identified** (in relation to the databases discussed before):

- **MESS:**
  - Lack of standardized outputs from databases by categories (in process to be developed)
  - Not possible to merge or transfer to other databases.
- **MPAE, SIAE:**
  - Lack of standardized output from database by categories (only status, educational attainment and age groups).
  - Not possible to follow the participants learning pathway – enrolment in different courses
  - Not possible to merge or transfer to other databases
- **‘PES’:**
  - There is no possibility of measuring the programme content and employment outcomes
  - Not possible to merge or transfer to other databases.

Overall, it was noted that **a lack of standardised outputs made it difficult to link this data with other databases**. This resulted in being **unable to follow the learning pathway** for these types of courses.

#### **Box 4 – Questions and answers**

**1. You mentioned that a new identification number is used for each participation instance, meaning there is no unique identifier used (i.e. social security nr.) to link cases from different data sources. Is there any reason for not using the social number?**

It is not being used currently indeed, the reasons are mostly related to policy issues – lack of communication between ministries and ‘talking in different languages’.

**2. Did you get any feedback from other Slovenian ministries – are they open to work together?**

Year by year, it’s getting better. But the data gathering is still seen as an ‘additional task’ / increased workload - and it’s becoming more of a challenge to get stakeholders to cooperate (this also counts for non-governmental stakeholders).

**3. In ESF there are also reporting and monitoring conditions for getting the funding, is the ESF structure used for monitoring?**

Some regulations are from EU, some from Slovenia. Currently it is not possible to get data on impact.

<sup>9</sup> This in order to allow for ‘following’ individuals through their educational trajectory.

<sup>10</sup> Based on MLFSA + ESS data, which have special regulations on who can enter data (thus consisting of their own databases).



### 3.3 Open debate and questions

Moderated by Ms Patricia Perez-Gomez (SRSS) and Ms Glenda Quintini (OECD)

Before opening the debate, it was addressed that in Ireland the information is collected specifically, whereas in Finland the information is linked from other administrations. This shows it is important to decide how to collect the information and whether to use existing resources/administrations or have it sent in by learners/providers (surveying).

Additionally, it was noted that in the Netherlands, there is no collective administration/system already in place that gathers the required data. Ireland approached this by setting up such a system – which would provide good, comparable information on the one hand – however, setting up such a system would require a lot of resources and may prove difficult in terms of getting the providers involved.

**1. A main concern for NL is the high number of informal / non-formal providers – if we ask all of them to take on the task of collecting and sending (sensitive) information, we can already expect a lot of resistance and even providers that refuse to take part or quit. How could this be dealt with?**

- In Ireland, the government has made the provision of data a requirement to receive funding. This could be adopted in the Netherlands, although it would mean raising the funding as well.

**2. It needs to be considered that, in the Netherlands, we have 3 separate systems that are interconnected: the laws related to integration, the formal education system and informal education system. However, the goals of these are not equal: for integration and formal education there are obligations in place (i.e. obligation to obtain certificate/qualification), whereas for the informal system it is more important whether the participant *feels* they are better able to participate in the society and is usually ‘completed’ through an interview or self-assessment. This makes it difficult to put one format/framework across all three systems.**

- The data collection itself can be set up creatively – not to make it an imposition, but for example making it part of the learning process.
- We should not only focus on how much the costs would be for the investment, but also how much we would gain in return (money saved compared to when the situation is left unchanged).

## 4. Summary of the discussions – Afternoon round-tables sessions

*Representatives of Dutch municipalities were divided into (4) groups, to brainstorm on International best practices and their possible applicability in The Netherlands. For each of the following topics, the groups of representatives presented the main outcomes of their discussions.*

### 4.1 Monitoring participation in basic skills trainings

Subtopics discussed in this context were:

- What is the objective of monitoring according to you?
- What is the degree of detail that you think you should get?
- What are potential challenges and obstacles?

With regards to the **objectives of monitoring** - within the context of adult education - a variety of potential aims were presented: (1) to provide insights into the target group<sup>11</sup>; (2) to get a view of the outreach and effect of AE; and (3) to measure its effectiveness.

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<sup>11</sup> Such as: how many participate, how often does training occur, what customer types can be identified (age, educational background, NT1/NT2 language level, etc.).

Additionally, the groups indicated there are several ways in which the collected data can be used: (1) to know what works, for whom and in which context; (2) to improve local and regional policies<sup>12</sup>; (3) to determine whether specific effects occur (increase in social inclusion, for example); and (4) using the information to improve communication with providers. It was noted that the information can also be used for accountability (awarding subsidies), but that this should not be the main goal of the monitoring.

Furthermore, several groups indicated that there needs to be a distinguishment between education types (i.e. formal / informal / non-formal), as there are differences in their primary objectives that needs to be taken into account<sup>13</sup>.

With regard to the question on **the degree of detail required**, more stakeholder-specific aspects were discussed. The groups indicate that for the government, the focus should be on providing a comparable, but minimal set of data. For municipalities, on the other hand, there should be a system that is tailored to the regional and/or local level – for example through the idea developed by Maurice de Greef<sup>14</sup>, where the providers can deliver information to a council at different levels of detail.

It was noted that it should also be considered what systems are already in place or in development, in order to prevent that organisations are asked to double their work and then to do it all over again. Thus, it was suggested to first determine a list of minimal information requirements and work from there.

Additionally, some examples of details of learners that can be collected were addressed:

- Background characteristics – educational background, age (categories)
- Number of unique participants and/or number of programmes completed
- Distinguishing between the types of AL offered (formal / informal / non-formal)
- Participation effect on learner

In terms of **potential challenges and obstacles**, the collection of information ‘at the individual level’ remained a sensitive topic: Some groups indicated that it would be preferred to include the BSN (social security number) – for example in order to determine the number of unique participants, or to allow for ‘tracking’ students across the AE types and gain insights into what people do after completion (follow more courses, get a job, etc.). Others note that asking providers to collect this information (and learners to provide it) would very likely lead to resistance (or even refusal) to take part in the monitoring.

## 4.2 Monitoring the impact of basic skills’ trainings on trainees’ life

Subtopics discussed in this context were:

- What does impact mean to you?
- What indicators would you use to measure impact?
- What are potential challenges and obstacles?

With regard to **the meaning of impact** within the context of AE and basic skills, it was agreed upon that **the impact of a programme will always be linked to the initial goal of the learner** (such as finding a job, improving their skills, etc.) and that this should be taken into account for determining impact measures, as well as the existence of **secondary goals** and/or side-effects (i.e. secondary attainments). Here as well, it was recommended to distinguish between goals (and thus impacts) for

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<sup>12</sup> For example: based on which target groups are not being reached, or which groups are overrepresented in a certain region/municipality.

<sup>13</sup> For the formal sector monitoring should focus on: accountability and effectivity; For the non-formal sector it should focus on: customer satisfaction and quality assurance/improvement.

<sup>14</sup> Developed by Maurice de Greef, in collaboration with 10 municipalities. In this system, a council is formed where the provider can deliver information at different levels of detail.

different education types (formal, informal, non-formal). More specific measures discussed (for impact) were self-sufficiency (*'zelfredzaamheid'*), social inclusion, happiness, and participation<sup>15</sup>.

In terms of **indicators to measure impact**, it was noted that there is a general tendency to measure impact mainly in the *number of participants*, and the *language level achieved* through the programme ('learning achievements'). This is considered a pitfall, as it only observes the primary goal of a language programme (raising skill) and does not provide any insights into secondary, potentially beneficial effects / impacts. Along this line, several groups indicated the focus should be mainly on qualitative measures (i.e. impacts as experienced by learner), and quantitative measures – if available - would be supplementary ('good to have').

Examples of potential indicators presented by the groups are: social context, volunteer work; judgement of customer on happiness / social inclusion.

Alternatively, another approach was introduced – where the focus is less on what level people achieve, more towards looking at what people can actually do afterwards (in practical terms<sup>16</sup>).

One of the **challenges** that was addressed (within the context of measuring impact) relates to the differences between the formal and informal/non-formal sectors. It was argued that many individuals with low literacy skills have bad experiences with school environments in their past and thus informal learning is often preferred in these cases. These programmes should still have a learning goal, but it is generally not the primary goal and thus harder to identify/measure. Another challenge addressed was that not all programmes related to basic skills are long enough (duration) to measure long-term effects. In order to provide such insights, a longer research period would be required (i.e. multiple 'after'-measurements).

#### 4.3 Coordinating and sharing responsibilities in data collection

Subtopics discussed in this context were:

- What are the responsibilities of providers (P)?
- What are the responsibilities of municipalities (M)?
- What are the responsibilities of the ministry/government (G)?

In terms of who is responsible for what, the discussions resulted in an overall view, with only some minor differences. Overall, working from a bottom up-perspective, the groups were in agreement that the **collection and registration of participant details should be conducted by providers (P)** and they are to send the data to the municipalities (M). Municipalities would be mainly responsible for ensuring that the data is being collected by providers (i.e. stimulate to deliver the right information) and that the information received is correct (i.e. validation).

In terms of what should be done (and by who) with the gathered information, some minor differences were presented at this point: One option would be that M should enter the collected data directly into a national system (developed by G), while another option puts the aggregation of the information as a responsibility at government level (G).

Additionally, it was noted that there is another 'actor' to consider here – the regional center ('contactgemeente'). Therefore, it was suggested that municipalities only need to send the data to their respective regional center (which serves as liaison between M and G). The regional center (R) would then be responsible for ensuring that the M in their region send in their data; for combining the information at regional level; and for sending the data to G. Other responsibilities of the ministry / government (G) that were agreed on were: to ensure a clear understanding regarding what level of

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<sup>15</sup> In terms of socio-economic participation: whether/not active on labour market; volunteer work; membership of associations (sports, culture, etc.); et

<sup>16</sup> For example: can the learner send an email in Dutch; can they understand an official letter (taxes, etc.)?

information is to be collected (and why); to set up the national system<sup>17</sup>; and to produce a national overview.

#### **4.4 Final remarks**

Although many participants speak the same language, a few tensions can be identified. One of the tensions is maybe between the need of having comparable data at national level, and data needed at local / regional level. Apart from that, the main points were:

- Which forms of education should be included or excluded and why (i.e. cumbersome for providers, etc.)
- Measuring hard versus soft outcomes. Many agree that much of the impact measures are about soft outcomes (social inclusion etc.), while focusing on hard measures is likely to underestimate the effects (i.e. not score high on hard indicators, thus seemingly no impact, while the impact may be more in the soft outcomes).

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<sup>17</sup> In terms of ‘national information management system’, or as a platform through which the data can be entered, depending on the approach ultimately selected.