



**POLICY
RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR IMPROVEMENT OF
QUALITY ASSURANCE
TOOLS IN NON-
FORMAL ADULT
LEARNING AT LOCAL
AND NATIONAL LEVEL**

2024



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Introduction

Erasmus+ project partner countries Lithuania, Latvia and Bulgaria are countries which urgently need to strengthen quality of adult learning systems in order to gain trust of relevant stakeholders about efficiency of public and private investment in adult learning. Gaining trust in adult learning systems is essential in motivation of adults to participate in trainings.

Quality aspects of adult learning are emphasized in EU and national level policy documents and recommendations with aims: to increase participation rates in adult learning, to monitor the impact of adult learning policies and to improve them.

Adult learning covers formal and non-formal education and training activities, and a person might have participated either in formal or in non-formal learning activities, or in both. Data shows that non-formal learning is more attractive and used by adults. Non-formal education and training clearly makes up the vast majority of adult learning. According Eurostat, in 2022 participation rate in non-formal education and training, age 25-64 in Bulgaria were 18.9%, Lithuania – 29.4% and Latvia – 50.6% but at the time in formal education and training were many times lower – in Latvia 4.2%, Bulgaria – 2.4%, Lithuania – 3.2%.

Within Erasmus+ program project “Creation of self-assessment quality assurance tool in non-formal adult learning” (2022-2024) in Lithuania, Latvia and Bulgaria were conducted surveys, interviews, organized stakeholder discussions and prepared national reports and comparative analyses with the aim of identifying the necessary actions needed to strengthen quality assurance in adult learning structures and tools.

Within project is developed digital transnational self-assessment tool for quality assurance in non-formal adult learning (more - <https://e-tool.smartminds.lv/index.php/en/>) and guidelines for using the tool thus giving chance to use international quality criteria set by European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) and thus helping training providers understand the importance of quality assurance and identify a way to achieve this. Using this tool, adult learning providers can identify the strengths and areas for improvement of their non-formal adults learning programs.

The self-assessment tool for quality assurance in non-formal adult learning aims to provide a structured framework for evaluating the quality of non-formal adult learning programs. It is

based on the EQAVET Quality Assurance and Improvement cycle, which includes planning, implementation, evaluation/assessment, and review/revision phases. EQAVET places importance on Quality Assurance in non-formal and informal learning contexts, providing a flexible framework adaptable to different national contexts. This encompasses mechanisms to assess the quality of education and training outside of formal settings, recognizing the diverse ways in which individuals acquire skills and knowledge.

Supporting decisions and actions of policy makers and implementers in field of non-formal adult education, by taking into account transnational experiences and EU policy tools like EQAVET, applying it on adult education quality assurance is best way to improve quality of non-formal adult learning programs and gain trust of adult learning stakeholders, increase participation of adults in learning.

Quality assurance systems in non-formal adult learning

□ Lithuania

The Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania specifies that non-formal education - education according to various programs for meeting educational needs, improving qualifications, acquiring additional competence, excluding formal education programs. Law indicates that: the municipality must have an optimal network of providers of primary, basic, secondary and non-formal education programs for children and adults, as well Law indicates the existence of the Lithuanian non-formal adult education council, which considers the main prospects for the development of non-formal education in Lithuania, and conducts an analysis of non-formal adult education system development projects.

Law of the Republic of Lithuania on non-formal adult education and continuing education states that this Law regulates non-formal adult education and continuing education, their structure, organization and funding bases. The purpose of the law is to provide legal guarantees to a person to realize his innate right to develop his personality throughout his life, to guarantee the opportunity to acquire knowledge and abilities, to discover new meanings in life, to encourage not only improving professional skills, but also to create meaningful free time, to be an active member of a democratic society.

Article 3 of the first section of the Law of the Republic of Lithuania on non-formal adult education and continuing education defines the following Article 3 Principles of non-formal adult education and continuing education:

1. *contextuality* – non-formal adult education and continuing education are closely related to the context of the country's economic, social, scientific and cultural development, renewing itself together with it and meeting the ever-changing needs of society;
2. *equal opportunities* - non-formal adult education and continuing education are socially just, ensure equal rights and opportunities for individuals, regardless of gender, race, nationality, language, origin, social status, faith, beliefs or views, age, sexual orientation, disability, ethnic addictions, religions; they guarantee the availability of education and continuing education for every person, create conditions for improving existing competences, qualifications or acquiring new competences;
3. *continuity* – non-formal adult education and continuous learning respond flexibly to changes and adopt good experience, creating conditions for lifelong learning;
4. *effectiveness* - non-formal adult education and continuing education aims to achieve quality results by skilfully and sparingly using available resources, applying various forms of organization of non-formal adult education and continuing education, constantly analysing, evaluating and planning activities, based on effective management - appropriate and timely decisions.

Article 8 of the first section of the Law indicates that:

1. The Government of the Republic of Lithuania (hereinafter - the Government) approves the Development Program of Non-formal Adult Education and Continuing Education, in which it determines the main directions for the development of non-formal adult education and continuing education. The Minister of Education and Science, after consulting with the Lithuanian Non-formal Adult Education Council and other social partners, approves the action plan for the implementation of the Non-formal Adult Education and Continuing Education Development Program for 3 years.
2. The municipal council, taking into account the action plan for the implementation of the Informal Adult Education and Continuing Education Development Program approved by the Minister of Education and Science and the needs of the municipality's

residents, employers, and other social partners, approves the municipality's informal adult education and continuing education action plan and appoints its implementation coordinator.

3. Providers of non-formal adult education and continuing education have the right to run non-formal adult education and continuing education programs financed from the state and/or municipal budgets, having acquired this right in accordance with the procedure established by the Minister of Education and Science.

4. The qualifications of civil servants and employees of other budgetary institutions can be improved by providers of non-formal adult education and continuing education, who are granted such a right in accordance with the procedure established by legal acts.

And Article 10 of the first section of the Law indicates that:

1. The provider of informal adult education and continuing education and the institution implementing the rights and duties of its owner (meeting of participants) are responsible for the quality of non-formal adult education and continuing education.

2. The procedure for quality assurance of non-formal adult education and continuing education, self-evaluation of activities, external evaluation, self-evaluation of participants' progress and achievements, financed from the state and/or municipal budgets, shall be established by the Government after consulting with the Lithuanian Non-formal Adult Education Council.

This indicates that non-formal education of adults is regulated in Lithuania, its goals, tasks and principles of implementation are specified. Even a separate law regulating this area has been approved. The main actors of non-formal adult education in Lithuania are municipalities, which are also responsible for the supervision and quality management of the implementation of this activity.

Coordinators of this activity are appointed in the municipalities. However, this is not a full-time position - it is likely that due to insufficient funding and the lack of an opportunity to pay sufficient remuneration, this function is usually assigned to some employee of the municipal administration and thus, it is not the main activity of this person. In Lithuania, the network of adult non-formal education coordinators is well developed, but there is still no clear description of this position, so there are many individual interpretations and there is a lack of a unified understanding of the activities being carried out.

Supervision of the quality of adult non-formal education activities is assigned to municipalities, more often the quantitative, but not the qualitative parameter of this activity is assessed. That is, very little attention is paid to analyzing the content of non-formal education programs for adults. The content is evaluated more carefully in cases where state or municipal budget funding is allocated to this activity. However, even in such cases, the assessment of content is insufficient to clearly distinguish the intended learning from simply spending free time participating in non-formal learning activities.

□ Latvia

On September 15, 2022 in the Education Law was amended Article No. 46. defining non-formal education programs and determining components of the non-formal education program, namely, that non-formal education programs include the learning outcomes to be achieved, the form of education, language, content, scope and material and intellectual resources necessary for implementation;

By replacing the licensing of non-formal education programs in local governments, applying a different procedure determined by local governments, with the one determined by the Cabinet of Ministers united procedure in municipalities for obtaining their implementation permits, as well as each the municipality's obligation to register non-formal education programs. Persons who are not registered in the Register of Educational Institutions must obtain a permit. Accredited educational institutions, as well as units of the National Armed Forces, are entitled to implement non-formal education programs without obtaining a permit. Paragraph 100 of the Transitional Provisions of the Education Law stipulates that educational institutions that are registered in the Register of Educational Institutions, but are not accredited, are entitled to continue the implementation of the relevant educational programs without a permit no longer than until May 31, 2024. Determining that for graduation of the non-formal education program, incl. adults, provider issues a certificate.

On November 14, 2022, amendments to Article 1 of the Education Law entered into force, adding¹⁶ point, which for the promotion of access and quality of education determines that municipality education ecosystem- the system that the municipality creates in order to provide the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to the population throughout their life. The municipality develops a set of purposefully working institutions under its management and

supervision, cooperating in the field of education with municipal, private and state educational institutions, employers, social partners, non-governmental organizations, other municipalities and educational institutions located in their territories, coordinating the implementation of education in all educational programs and grades.

Article 46 of the Education Law and Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers "Procedures for Issuing and Cancelling Permits for the Implementation of Non-Formal Education Programs" determine the requirements for the development of non-formal education programs for adults and obtaining permits, if the implementer needs one. The requirements are set for the educational program and the preparation of its implementer for the implementation of the program, namely the non-formal education program should include the learning outcomes to be achieved, the form, language, content, scope and material and intellectual resources necessary for implementation.

At the same time, the survey results indicate that an information campaign on quality assurance for non-formal education program providers and educators is needed. It is understandable that an educational program prepared only in accordance with the requirements of regulatory acts does not yet ensure high-quality and inclusive education, because the quality of education also includes the implementation, environment and management of the educational process, which provides everyone with an inclusive education and the opportunity to achieve high-value results. Therefore, measures to ensure the quality of non-formal education should be gradually introduced, e.g. self-assessment process, stakeholders should be informed and educated. At the same time, it would be useful to implement the self-assessment process using the possibilities of digital resources, reducing routine activities and administrative burden. Survey data indicate that most respondents noted that non-formal education program providers and trainers need self-assessment tools to improve the quality of non-formal education programs.

In accordance with the Law on Education, the national education quality monitoring system covers four areas of education quality monitoring (see Figure 1): (1) compliance with goals (educational results in accordance with the needs of students and the entire society), (2) quality teaching (learning process, teachers), (3) inclusive environment (physically and emotionally safe, positive environment, motivation), (4) good management (process efficiency).¹

¹ Guidelines for ensuring the quality of education in general and vocational education 2022 (Internal regulations of the State Service of Education Quality, p. 1-2. <https://www.ikvd.gov.lv/lv/akreditacija>.

Taking into account the fact that the current legal framework for ensuring the quality of non-formal education covers only the requirements for the non-formal education program and the requirements for obtaining a permit for its implementer, then in order to include non-formal education in monitoring the quality of education, additional information on quality areas and criteria is required. The initial solution can be the implementation of a self-assessment tool, which would ensure the accumulation of the necessary information and the possibilities of its use.

Article 46 of the Education Law stipulates the obligation of each municipality to register non-formal education permits.

□ Bulgaria

The Law on Vocational Education and Training is the main normative act that regulates vocational education and training and, in particular, quality assurance in the provision of VET. The Law on Vocational Education and Training (VET Act) was promulgated in the State Gazette No. 68 of July 30, 1999. In the supplementary regulations to the VET Act, definitions of non-formal education and informal learning are given, namely:

- Non-formal education is education that is organized by institutions outside the official vocational education and training system;
- Informal learning is non-institutionalized and non-systematized accumulation of knowledge, skills and competences.

According to Art. 9a, para. 1 of the VET Act, "quality is a set of characteristics of vocational education and training that are in accordance with the expectations and needs of the individual and society".

Unlike the non-formal adult education system, where quality assurance is not regulated, in the formal VET system, "Centers for vocational training ensure the quality of vocational training by building an internal quality assurance system in compliance with state educational requirements for acquisition of qualification by professions and of the current legislation". The establishment of an internal quality assurance system is mandatory for the Centers for Vocational Training.

The quality of learning outside the formal system is somewhat optional for people. The mechanism for evaluating and certifying the training results in most organizations is imperfect,

and the quality assessment is expressed only by the completion of a satisfaction survey at the end of the training activities.

In non-formal education system, the culture of seeking and ensuring quality is relatively low. The lack of effective institutions and mechanisms for evaluation, monitoring and reporting, as well as insufficient competences in the field of quality management at all levels of the system, also explain the low adequacy of non-formal education.

The intensively developing field of additional and alternative educational services for students and adults, provided by specialized state, private and non-governmental organizations outside the formal education system, is gaining an increasingly significant role in the education market. The new Council Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials to boost lifelong learning and employability has focused heavily on the widespread implementation of short-term courses leading to employment. That is why the question of the quality of the provided services becomes significant for a wide range of interested parties.

The various non-formal vocational training programs organized by companies, trade unions, private agencies and by formal education institutions constitute non-formal education. This is the area where there is increased cooperation between formal education institutions, trade unions and state institutions and local authorities. And these programs tend to be offered to and serve people with higher degrees from the formal education and those who are higher up in the social hierarchy.

Assessment of non-formal and informal training is a new area where objectives and responsibilities need to be clarified. This need reflects the conceptual diversity that characterizes these types of training. Assessment methods should no longer be considered in isolation from other initiatives and activities in training - the development of programs, standards, the development of mechanisms for giving credits for learning, the preparation of special training programs. In Bulgaria, the process of experimentation in this area and the state of uncertainty still prevails.

Common recommendations for improvement of quality assurance tools in non-formal adult learning at local and national level

In examining non-formal and informal adult education across Bulgaria, Lithuania, and Lithuania, several key findings and recommendations emerge. Quality assurance mechanisms are often limited, relying on feedback surveys and employment tracking. Extra-curricular educational services provided by external organizations are gaining importance, emphasizing the need for quality assurance. A unified framework for quality assurance is lacking.

Main common conclusions/ recommendations at local and national level are:

1. Efforts are needed to promote inclusivity and social justice in access to non-formal adult learning.
2. Clarity and support for adult learning providers are required in assessing and ensuring quality in non-formal and informal adult learning.
3. Municipalities play a vital role in managing non-formal adult learning but require more dedicated support. Clearer guidelines are necessary for consistent implementation of adult learning.
4. Standardization of responsibilities of adult learning coordinators in local municipalities is needed, along with a shift towards evaluating content quality and skill development.
5. A comprehensive assessment tool for acquired skills would enhance non-formal education effectiveness.
6. Developing quality assurance tools, improving regulatory frameworks, and providing professional development of adult learning providers and other stakeholders are crucial steps forward.
7. An information campaign on quality assurance is also recommended to enhance non-formal adult learning program quality and inclusion in monitoring systems.

Country specific recommendations for improvement of quality assurance tools in non-formal adult learning at local and national level

The following conclusions and recommendations can be drawn from the prepared national reports for Lithuania, Latvia and Bulgaria:

☐ Lithuania

- Clearer regulation and specific guidelines for quality assurance in non-formal adult education in Lithuania is needed to avoid ambiguity and ensure consistent implementation of adult learning programs.
- Adult learning coordinators in local municipalities role needs to be strengthened as municipalities play a key role in non-formal adult education, including supervision and quality management. A more dedicated approach to this role is necessary.
- The network of adult non-formal education coordinators in Lithuania is well developed, but there is a lack of a clear and unified understanding of their responsibilities. A standardized description of the coordinator position should be established.
- The assessment of non-formal education programs for adults in Lithuania tends to focus on quantitative measures rather than the quality of content. There is a need to evaluate the learning outcomes and distinguish between targeted skill development and leisure activities.
- The assessment of skills acquired through non-formal adult education is limited, with a focus on measuring the number of learners rather than their actual achievements. Developing a comprehensive self- assessment tool could be beneficial in evaluating the effectiveness of non-formal education.



☐ Latvia

- More clear quality assurance tools for adult non-formal education in Latvia needs to be created and implemented. The Education Law and Cabinet of Ministers regulations define the requirements for non-formal education programs and permits, but additional measures are necessary to ensure inclusive and high-quality education.
- An information campaign on quality assurance is needed to educate non-formal adult education program providers and educators. Implementing a self-assessment process, possibly utilizing digital resources, could help improve the quality of non-formal education programs.
- The national education quality monitoring system in Latvia covers four areas: compliance with goals, quality teaching, inclusive environment, and good management. However, the current legal framework does not adequately include quality monitoring of non-formal education. Additional information on quality areas and criteria is required, and a self-assessment tool can be an initial solution.
- Improving the regulatory framework and functionality is necessary. Establishing a unified register of permits for non-formal education programs and enhancing the State education information system would facilitate data collection and transparency in adult learning thus gaining trust of stakeholders.
- Professional development programs for non-formal adult education providers and other stakeholders should be developed to enhance their skills and competencies. These programs can include workshops and training sessions focusing on instructional design, adult learning principles, assessment methods, and program evaluation. Adult learning coordinators at local level can play crucial role in quality assurance in adult learning.

☐ Bulgaria

- Internal and external quality assurance mechanisms in non-formal trainings in Bulgaria has to be introduced, by applying EQAVET principles thus supporting building comprehensive quality assurance systems in non-formal trainings.



- Additional and alternative educational services provided by various organizations outside the formal education system are gaining importance in Bulgaria. Quality assurance of these services becomes crucial, especially with the European education policy that supports focus on short-term courses leading to employment.
- Non-formal vocational training programs in Bulgaria involve collaboration between formal education institutions, trade unions, and state institutions. Involvement of stakeholders in building non-formal adult learning programs would promote social justice and overall economic development.
- Civil society organizations in Bulgaria are increasingly involved in personal development activities and participate as partners in formal education programs. Clarification of objectives and responsibilities in assessing non-formal and informal training is needed due to the conceptual diversity in these types of training.
- The development of a unified conceptual basis for quality assurance in vocational education and training (VET) is needed in Bulgaria. While various government documents address VET quality in formal and non-formal settings, a comprehensive document and legislation specifically focusing on quality assurance in VET has not been developed.

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