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ADULT BASIC SKILLS IN SLOVENIA

In the this paper, which is giving the introduction to understanding of basic skills of adults in Slovenia, describing the scope of the problem and the existing implemented provision and policy solutions, we attempt to give the framework for possible introduction of European Certificate of Basic Skills in Slovenia.

Definition

Term 'basic skills' is associated in Slovenia with 'adult literacy' or 'functional literacy' in the sense of ability to use basic reading, writing and numeracy in daily activities. There are several popular understandings of literacy/adult literacy. In public term 'functional literacy' or 'functional illiteracy' has been widely used in this relation: functional literacy is narrowly interpreted in the continuum 'have or have not'. The term literacy is also associated with different scientific or occupational fields, so terms such as scientific literacy, computer or digital literacy, etc are being widely used. A working definition of literacy adopted by the **Expert group for Literacy Development** (appointed 2004-2006) responsible for national creation of Strategy for raising literacy levels of children, youth and adults is as follows: *"Literacy is continuously developing ability of individual to use agreed systems of symbols for creating, understanding and using texts in the context of family, school, work and society."* Furthermore, definition of literacy that underpin the development of literacy programmes at **Slovenian Institute for Adult Education** which is the main Slovenian institution for development and research of adult literacy in Slovenia is based on understanding of literacy as social phenomenon: literacy is defined in terms of skills that adults need to perform a variety of activities and roles in their life, including participation in the labour market and in the community; in the knowledge society adults need besides solid reading, writing, communication and numeracy skills, also skills which are closely related to literacy skills such as lifelong learning, social skills, computer skills, citizenship skills, etc.

Within the last couple of years there has been a shift from basic knowledge and skills towards more complex structures of key competences; however Slovenia has no national curriculum for basic skills or for key competences. There have been lively discussions among professionals and policy makers on national definition of the term "key competence" as well as on implementation possibilities within the school system. Probably most tangible results in this respect are visible in VET, though more expert work and efforts are needed to make a more decisive breakthrough. As a result of new approaches derived from an evaluation of the current training programmes carried out in 2000 with the support of Phare a first training

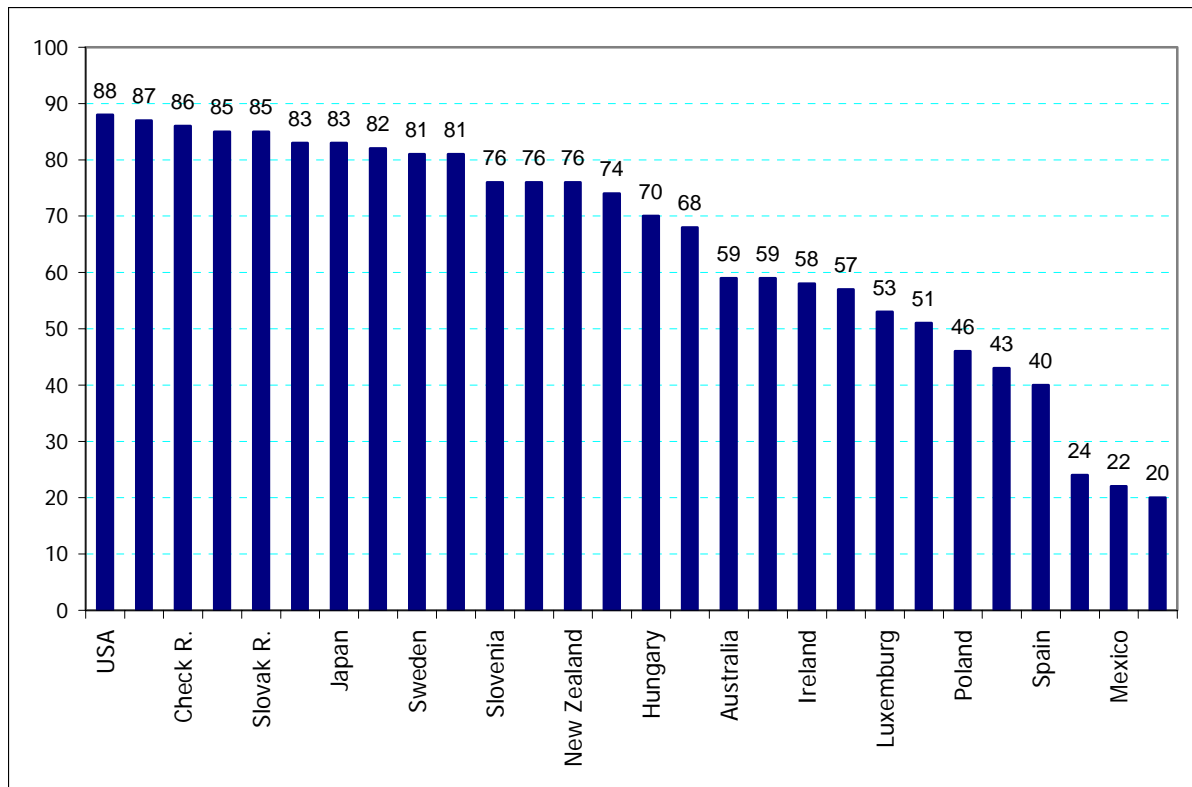
programme has been introduced on experimental basis, built around vocational and general competencies agreed upon by the state and social partners. It includes vocational qualifications as well as personal competencies and competencies needed for further learning. The competencies to be developed in the training programme leading to a vocational qualification in enhance 10 areas, such as: Communication capabilities (in the mother tongue, in a foreign language and in mathematical language); Creative capacities; Capability to understand and critically judge events and processes in nature and society; Ability of understanding oneself and others; Social skills and capabilities for work and cooperation in groups as well as capabilities for active citizenship and conflict resolution; Development of capabilities and strategies for work with modern technologies; A healthy life-style and responsibility for retaining one's own health and the health of others and protection of the environment; The capacities needed for efficient lifelong learning; Awareness of the importance of knowledge for economic efficiency and competitiveness of an individual, a business or a society as a whole. Approaches recommended in all education and training programmes and on all pre-university levels of education, advocating setting clear objectives that should not limit themselves so much to factual knowledge, but develop higher levels of knowledge and attitudes, are conducive to what is referred to as competencies. It is believed that to attain the goals of the reform stated above objectives must be formulated in terms of competencies.

Scale of the problem

Literacy of the population in Slovenia has been measured directly and indirectly. Indirect estimations are based on the presumption that adults with certain levels of education have expected levels of literacy. **The census data (1991, 2002)** are used in this sense, and the borderline of literacy or illiteracy is considered 3 years of primary school completed; 0,4 % of population above 15 years old are considered illiterate according to this definition. In this respect the education structure of Slovenian adult population is considered solid and comparable to other advanced countries. In 2002 more than three quarters (76 %) of Slovenian population above 15 years of age has completed at least secondary education (figure 1).¹ However, this is just one point of view since Slovenia has still one third of population (33,1 %) with completed primary education or less and on the other end the share of tertiary educated people is relatively low - 13 %.

Figure 1: Population with at least secondary school completed in the OECD countries (2001) and in Slovenia (2002), 15 years and over

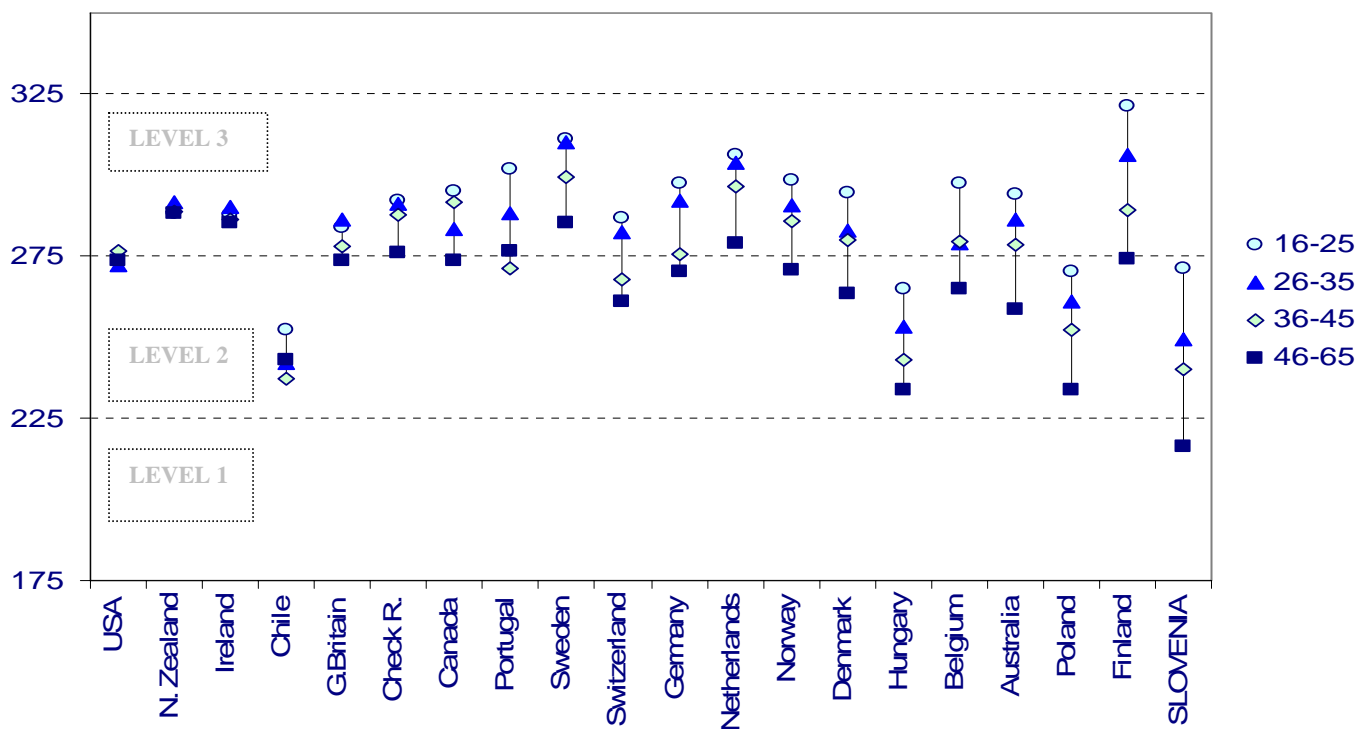
¹ In Slovenia secondary vocational (duration of 2, 3 or 4 years) and general secondary education (4 years) is included in the figure of 76%, that means that the estimation "at least secondary education" in Slovenia does not necessary mean 12 years of schooling.



Source: Education at glance, OECD 2002, p.37, and Statistical Office of Slovenia, Census 2002.

There were just a few direct national assessments on the quality of knowledge and skills of population, but adult literacy study carried out as a part of **International Adult Literacy Survey in 1998**, was the only one on the performance of the adult population. The survey revealed devastating results of literacy levels of adult population: **77% of adults** performed below international average on the literacy test used in the survey. We understand that the problem in Slovenia is the quality of knowledge and skills in the sense of sustainability and transferability of skills gained in school. Quality of schooling on one hand and duration of schooling on the other play crucial role when the level of literacy skills of population is in question. Adults in Slovenia with at least 12 years of schooling (completed 4 years of upper secondary school) have solid and comparable skills and they tend to maintain and develop skills after formal schooling. There is a great **gap in literacy performance between this group and those with less than 12 years of schooling**. Comparative analysis among countries also showed that in Slovenia **the differences in literacy performance between younger and the oldest age groups are the largest** among 20 countries compared even when population with completed secondary education is considered (figure 2).

Figure 2: Average attainment in prose literacy of age groups of population with at least secondary education, 16 – 65



Source: OECD, Literacy in the Information age, 2000.

Among this large group of people, with less than 12 years of schooling there are groups more at risk or identified as more vulnerable:

- young drop-outs from 16 to 25,
- low educated parents of preschool and school age children,
- people living in the rural areas,
- low educated employed,
- low educated unemployed,
- elderly,
- ethnic groups (Roma population),
- immigrant population,
- low income groups.

Marginality of some of those groups is compounded; low initial education – low chances for work-less income-less chances for further education and acquisition of skills-low literacy.

Policy solutions

The governmental commitment for literacy of adults in Slovenia has risen considerably after the results of the International Adult Literacy Survey were released in 2000 in compare to the period before. In 2002 Ministry of Education and Sport gave a commission to Slovenian Institute for Adult Education to create a **Strategy for raising literacy levels of adults**. The Strategy was completed in March 2003 but has not been yet adopted by the government as planned.

Furthermore, the need to raise the literacy levels was included among priorities in the **National Adult Education Master Plan** adopted in 2004. The Master Plan is the main Slovenian strategic document for development of Adult Education to 2010. It will have an important impact on the development and implementation of literacy provision. There are three priority goals covering respectively: first, general and non-formal education of adults (within this goal raising the levels of adult literacy is one of the priorities); second, raising the levels of formal education; third, education of employed. The Master Plan will be implemented through **Annual Adult Education Plan** and 2005 is the first year of implementation of the plan.

Literacy is centrally financed in Slovenia, all finances for development and implementation of the programs come from Ministry of Education and Sport (in the period 2004-2006 this funds are complemented with funds from European Social Fund).

Literacy provision

There are two main focuses of literacy provision in Slovenia:

- First is raising literacy level to undertake further education and to raise the level of education of population (which leads to higher levels of literacy itself).

There are three programmes currently implemented nationally within this scope: first is one year non-formal programme for young drop-outs (title of the programme is Project Learning for Young Adults), this is not literacy programme in the first place but one of the goals of the programme is also to raise literacy skills needed to undertake further education.

The second is 3- month literacy programme meant for adults returning to formal education or are already taking part in it (title of the programme is Bridge to Education) to assist them to acquire skills needed to start and to complete formal education successfully.

The third is family literacy programme (title of the programme is Read and Write Together) meant for parents of school age children.

- Second is raising literacy levels for a better position in the market (this is enhanced in the first too).

Within this scope there are a couple of programmes still under development, they will be implemented in 2005/2006 e.g. literacy programmes for rural areas, workplace literacy and literacy for people with special needs. For example literacy programmes for rural areas are meant to assist individuals to find self-employment opportunities in the living environment, especially those which support traditional crafts and sustainable development of certain areas.

The above mentioned Strategy for raising literacy levels of adults in Slovenia anticipate that the access to literacy provision is guaranteed as “a right” to individuals whose literacy skills are below certain level.

The reality is much different, since literacy provision in Slovenia is still under development and existing growing provision is not capable to cover the estimated needs. The literacy provision is centrally planned (there is no local financing of adult education in Slovenia) and it is at the moment under the responsibility of Ministry of Education and Sport. At the moment all the existing literacy provision is free of charge for participants. In case participants are unemployed the Ministry of Labour guarantees also certain benefits for those who participate in literacy programmes.

All literacy provision in Slovenia is delivered for groups of adults; there is no accreditation system developed for this provision. All literacy programmes were adopted by Minister of Education and they are verified but at the moment they are not giving any credits to participants and the certificate is not automatically recognised within the formal school system. The links to formal system are yet to be established.

The future of EUCEBS certificate/certificates in Slovenia

SIAE has been performing several activities aiming at implementing the EUCEBS certificate/s beyond the support from Leonardo da Vinci project. They are structured into three main groups:

1. implementation of the certificate/s as a part of the national adult education system
2. implementation of the certificate/s in employee training sector
3. implementation of the certificate in the process of designing national key competencies in secondary vocational education

1. According to Slovenian educational legislation the EUCEBS standards can be implemented in national AE system
 - either as a constituent part of AE educational programme, that should be developed and adopted by Expert Council for AE² (further on Expert Council) . The new programme would enrich the corpus of verified AE programmes, and bring new

² Expert Council for AE has no power to adopt the standards themselves: According to legislation The Council is in charge of adopting AE programmes and their obligatory part are standards of knowledge and competences. In order to implement EUCEB's certificate/s a special programme has to be developed in which the EUCEBS standards are incorporated.

learning needs and training of teachers for carrying out the newly developed programme.

- or as standards, that are equivalent to standards adopted in public verified literacy programme.

Both possibilities were discussed with the president of the Expert Council. It was agreed that development of a new “EUCEBS” programme should be accomplished in two steps: at first Expert Council is presented the EUCEBS certificate/s in order to adopt it/them, and then the Expert Council entrusts SIAE development of a new training programme, implementing EUCEBS standards in all 5 domains and at the same time to develop and conduct training of EUCEBS assessors.

2. Chamber of Commerce, Slovenia has a strong training center. It provides job training schemes and other forms of professional training; organization of courses and seminars; professional examinations and certification of qualification. EUCEBS certificate/s has been presented to the head of the Centre with an invitation to the Centre to disseminate the certificate/s among their partners (industry and trade) It has been also agreed that the EUCEBS tests will be further piloted among the participants of the Centre’s training programmes and exams.
3. In Slovenia a process of renewing secondary vocational education programmes takes place. At the same time within the system of the national certifications system numerous NVQ are developed. In both systems (educational and certification) the issues how to determine/design key competences (core skills) play important role and occupy national and international experts. Centre for Vocational Education has been entrusted to develop and implement the concept of key competences in vocational education systems: lower – 2 years, vocational – 3 years and professional – 4 years. EUCEBS certificate has been presented at first to the Key competences project manager and vice director of the Center and then at the first meeting of experts participating in the project. The group approved EUCEBS standards as a solid starting point for the development of key competences in lower vocational education. We are seeking for further co-operation with the Expert group.

There is also another, important option how to implement the EUCEBS certificate. SIAE has designed Strategy for raising literacy levels among adult population in 2003. One of its aims is also development of National basic skills standards, that would meet employers and employees needs. EUCEBS certificate/s will be taken as a starting point, and in case that piloting the tests in Chamber of Commerce proves EUCEBS relevance the EUCEBS standards and the Certificate/s might be fully or partly adopted as National basic skills standard.