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Common framework for adult education providers to support engagement for learners with SpLDs

## **Implementation Guide for SpLenDEd Common Assessment Framework and Digital Tool (O2-T3)**

Andragoški zavod Maribor – Ljudska univerza

December 2021

Project acronym: SpLenDEd  
Project name: Common framework for adult education providers to support engagement for learners with SpLDs  
Project code: 2020-1-SI01-KA204-075962

### **Document History**

<b>Versions</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Changes</b>	<b>Type of change</b>	<b>Delivered by</b>
V1	09.12.2021		Draft	AZM
V2	20. 12. 2021		Final	AZM

### **Document Information**

Document ID name: SpLenDEd\_O2-T3\_The Implementation Guide\_ 09-12-2021v1.0

Document title: O2-T3\_Implementation Guide for SpLenDEd Common Assessment Framework and Digital Tool

Output Type: Intellectual Output O2-T3

Date of Delivery: December 2021

Activity Type: Developing an Implementation Guide

Activity Leader: Andragoški zavod Maribor – Ljudska univerza

Dissemination level: Public

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## Contents

1. Introduction .....	4
2. The need for monitoring procedures in connection with SpLds.....	5
3. Educational monitoring and assessment systems in EU .....	6
3.1 SpLenDEd Consortium countries .....	6
3.1.1 Croatia.....	6
3.1.2 Germany.....	7
3.1.3 Greece.....	9
3.1.4 Slovenia.....	11
3.1.5 Sweden.....	12
3.2 Transferability of SpLenDEd Common Assessment Framework to other EU countries.....	13
4. Guide through Self-assessment process supported by the SpLenDEd Digital Tool .....	14
4.1 Setting up an assessment team .....	14
4.2 Instructions for using the digital tool.....	15
5. General recommendations for adult education providers.....	16
6. References: .....	18

## 1. Introduction

The Implementation Guide for the SpLenDEd Common Assessment Framework (SpLenDEd CAF) is one of the intellectual results of the SpLenDEd project and aims to support adult education providers and their leadership teams throughout the assessment process which involves using Splended Common Assessment digital tool and provides information towards setting up an effective Assessment Team. The purpose of the Guide is also to elaborate on the need for monitoring procedures, to ensure the transferability of the framework by considering monitoring systems in the countries of the SpLenDEd consortium and other EU countries, and to point out horizontal European monitoring systems of adult education.

The SpLenDEd Digital Tool is a digital adaptation of the Common Assessment Framework which minutely describes the factors affecting the effectiveness of adult education for learners with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs), specifies indicators and criteria for efficient inclusion of learners with SpLDs in the educational process and provides a description of the assessment principles including criteria, indicators, and verbal descriptions. It is addressed to adult learning providers who would like to assess the effectiveness of their education for learners with SpLDs. Adult education providers' representatives, trainers and managerial staff are invited to complete a short questionnaire in relation to certain criteria and receive a unique score portraying points of improvement or excellence. A personalized performance report is produced to be shared within the educational institution.

Detailed reading about the aim of the SpLenDEd (Common Framework for Adult Education Providers to Support Engagement for Learners with Specific Learning Difficulties) Project and its materials describing the background processes which resulted in the SpLenDEd Common Assessment Framework is available on the project website: <http://splended.mozello.com/> The website also provides a direct access to [the SpLenDEd Digital Tool](#).

## 2. The need for monitoring procedures in connection with SpLDs

Specific learning difficulties are often detected in early school years, yet there are still many adults in the EU who have never been diagnosed, and there is a substantial variation among EU Member States in the proportion of individuals documented, as well as the way those diagnosed are educated. Low-qualified adults with SpLDs, not properly supported might be consequently deterred from participating in any adult learning activities, and thus remain at an even greater risk of unemployment and social exclusion.

Adult education providers already put a lot of effort into adapting to the learning needs of individuals, including those with SpLDs, despite having limited means for self-assessment and improvement. One of the priorities of the SpLenDEd project is to contribute to the systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of adult education provision and we hope that adult education providers find the SpLenDEd Digital Assessment Tool useful and supportive in the process. When addressing the needs of learners with SpLDs they will be able to make more specific or targeted improvements suggested by the results of the quick and digital self-assessment process.

Adult learners with SpLDs are often reluctant to participate and engage in learning activities which leaves them at the very high risk of unemployment and social exclusion. Effective educational programmes are the ones that specifically address the needs of target groups, reduce disparities and increase engagement of learners. The SpLenDEd Common Assessment Framework enables educators to design improvement plans and implement the necessary steps to make their programmes more efficient for the target group. Teaching and administrative staff can participate in the process to achieve longer lasting and substantial impact on the effectiveness of lifelong learning for adult learners with SpLDs.

### 3. Educational monitoring and assessment systems in EU

#### 3.1 SpLenDEd Consortium countries

##### 3.1.1 Croatia

###### **Assessment within inclusive education systems**

The new Regulation on Primary and Secondary Education of Students with Developmental Difficulties is based on the principles of inclusion and an individual approach to every pupil with developmental difficulties. It ensures that differences among pupils are acknowledged and that schools and the education system are adapted to pupils' needs. The implementation of the new Regulation aims to ensure greater inclusion of pupils with developmental difficulties in the mainstream education system. This is to improve their quality of life (socialisation and training for independent life and work) and integrate them into life in the community after a period of suitable and adjusted education.

The Regulation states that pupils with developmental difficulties are entitled to follow suitable education programmes and receive suitable support during their school education. Suitable programmes and support are provided in the form of programme and professional support, as well as spatial, pedagogic and didactic adjustments.

###### **Monitoring SpLDs for adults**

The education system in the Republic of Croatia affords all children, learners and young people – including those with developmental disabilities, members of national minorities, gifted learners and those in a disadvantaged position – inclusion in the education system at all levels, as well as further education through adult education and lifelong learning programmes. The Ministry of Science and Education, together with competent agencies, ensures the necessary programme, professional and expert aid, which enables successful inclusion for everyone in the education system in the area where they live.

There are a number of sources of information regarding the number of people with intellectual disabilities in Croatia. Given the range of definitions used in different legislation and the lack of common terminology, statistics from different sources vary greatly. The lack of reliable statistical information is a serious obstacle to effective policy-making in this area; common terminology, and centralised data collection related to people with intellectual disabilities should be a priority for the Government. At the end of 2002, 59,699 persons with physical and intellectual disabilities were registered as social welfare recipients,<sup>63</sup> of which 10,436 people (or 17.5 per cent) had intellectual disabilities under ICD-10 definitions – 3,454 children and 6,982 adults.

### 3.1.2 Germany

#### **Assessment within inclusive education systems**

Article 3 of the German Basic Law reads the following: “No person shall be favoured or disfavoured because of sex, parentage, race, language, homeland and origin, faith or religious or political opinions. No person shall be disfavoured because of disability”. This regulation means that all population groups (incl. vulnerable ones) have an equal right to participate in the life of society, incl. education. To enable vulnerable groups to exercise their rights, the German state has adopted a number of legal acts and policy documents.

In 1997, the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder (i.e. federal states) adopted the Konstanzer Resolution that declared quality assurance processes a central issue for its work. Since then the Länder have developed evaluation instruments in the narrower sense that may be employed depending on the objective.

In June 2006, the Standing Conference adopted a comprehensive strategy for educational monitoring (revised in 2015) that foresees the following methods and instruments:

- participation in international school performance studies (PIRLS/IGLU, TIMSS primary school, PISA)

- monitoring and implementation of educational standards for the primary sector, the lower secondary level and the Allgemeine Hochschulreife
- methods to ensure quality at the level of schools
- the joint report on education of the Federation and Länder.

For the vocational education, including continuing education, the relevant federal departments, representatives of the employees' and employers' sides and the Länder are responsible for quality assurance of the regulated further training of the Federation and the competent bodies. The employment agencies entrusted external certification bodies (so-called Fachkundige Stellen) with the task of inspecting maintaining bodies for continuing education in the area of continuing VET as promoted by the Federal Employment Agency (Bundesagentur für Arbeit).

The support of continuing education was reformed with the aim of improving competition and transparency in the area of continuing VET. The scope of compulsory registration was extended in order to further improve the quality of labour market services and thus the performance and efficiency of the labour market policy support system. Since then, the Accreditation and Licensing Regulation for Employment Promotion (Akkreditierungs- und Zulassungsverordnung Arbeitsförderung – AZAV) has regulated the corresponding licensing procedure. According to the AZAV, the competent bodies (Fachkundige Stellen) must decide not only on the approval of continuing VET providers, but also on the approval of all providers who want to offer measures of active employment promotion under Book Three of the Social Code (Drittes Buch Sozialgesetzbuch – Arbeitsförderung).

### **Monitoring SpLDs for adults**

In 2009, Germany ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It laid the groundwork for significant normative and structural changes in the education system, specifically – transition from integration to inclusion. According to Sabine Lauber-Pohle, however, these changes mostly address the topic of inclusive education for children and youths, gradually extending over to pre-school education to VET and higher education. Adult education and continuous learning, according to Lauber-Pohle, are not in the focus of these efforts – common



adult education institutions (especially Volkshochschulen) mostly focus on raising literacy skills and integration of persons with migration background; efforts on including other vulnerable groups do not have a systematic character. Generally, each federal state was given an opportunity to decide on and incorporate the needed changes themselves.

In 2019, a National Continuing Education Strategy (National Weiterbildungsstrategie) was adopted. Under the key priority "Examine and reinforce the quality and quality assessment of continuing education offers" it is stated that provision of barrier-free educational offers is an important prerequisite for ensuring inclusive continuing learning. In this sense, special attention is given to digital solutions.

It should be noted that Germany has a long-standing tradition of Volkshochschulen (more than 100 years), whose main mission is to ensure the accessibility of educational offers to different population groups. In this sense, the possibility to participate in adult education also serves as a means to ensure equal participation in the life of society. This principle is also laid down in the Recommendations of German Adult Education Association on Raising the Accessibility of Volkshochschulen.

Additionally, German authorities take targeted measures to meet the needs of and ensure active participation in society of specific target groups. E.g., in 2015 the state announced the National Decade for Literacy and Basic skills (2016-2026) with the aim to raise basic education levels and to improve adult reading and writing skills.

### 3.1.3 Greece

#### **Assessment within inclusive education systems**

A recent legislative framework Assessment of educational outcomes of school units (September 2021) –LAW 4189/2021 was introduced by the Ministry of Education and it is addressed to school units with pupils until 18 years old.

It contains 11 articles. Main topics are:

1. Aim and objectives of internal evaluation and self- evaluation of school units.
2. Planning-Implementation-Assessment of educational outcomes

3. Functions- thematic axis and indexes for internal assessment and self-evaluation of school units
4. Procedures for collective planning of school units
5. Procedure for internal assessment and self-assessment of school units
6. Internal assessment of school units by Educational Consultants with Pedagogical responsibilities
7. External assessment of school units by Supervisor for quality of education and Regional Supervisor for quality of education
8. Coordination and monitoring
9. Digital application of Institute of Educational Policy for collective planning, internal and external assessment at a local, regional and national level
10. Implementation of assessment procedures
11. Provisions for the school year 2021-2022

### **Monitoring SpLDs for adults**

Law 490/20/02/2017 Quality Framework of Educational Programmes for VET, among other things, emphasizes at 2nd article section paragraphs: 1, 2, 3, 4 that educational programs should take into account the following principles:

- should be adjusted to specificities of adult learning population and follow fundamental principles of adult education;
- the diversity of learning population in terms of cultural, financial, social and geographical characteristics that emerge experiences, knowledge and skills;
- individual differences among learners (learning profile, readiness etc), interests and any particular social and cultural background that emerge learning and training experiences as well as alternative methods of approaches and learning evaluation;
- prior learning and training experiences.

Also, in relation to evaluation of adult educational programs, the Institution of Educational Policy and the General Secretariat of Life Long Learning and Youth are responsible on principle of planning, implementation and effectiveness. Also, adult education centres are obliged to proceed annually to internal self-assessment and external assessment.

### 3.1.4 Slovenia

#### **Assessment within inclusive education systems**

The approach introduced in Slovenia recognises the needs of learners with special educational needs (SEN) as disabilities, barriers and/or disorders that require changes or adjustments in the learner's environment or adaptation of the latter to the needs of the learner.

The guidance of learners with special needs (2000, including amendments in 2006 and 2007) defines the groups of learners with SEN as follows:

- Learners with intellectual disabilities
- Learners who are blind and learners with visual impairments
- Learners who are deaf and learners with hearing impairments
- Learners with speech problems
- Learners with physical disabilities
- Learners with long-term illnesses
- Learners with learning problems in specific fields of education
- Learners with emotional and behavioural disorders.

The Act is based on the principle that a learner's needs must be recognised as soon as possible and that early childhood intervention is a dynamic process. The recognition of the learner's needs and early intervention occur simultaneously.

Learners are recognised as having SEN when they get an official decision by the National Education Institute of Slovenia (NEIS). Parents usually request the introduction of official guidance procedures for learners with SEN, but schools or learners themselves (from 15 years old) can also request it.

#### **Monitoring SpLDs for adults in Slovenia**

Institute for Dyslexia offers a possibility for adults to participate in testing procedures developed to identify possible dyslexia or scotopic syndrome. The Institute raises awareness regarding neurological background of persons with SpLDs, patterns of their cognitive abilities and identification of their strengths and

weaknesses. Adults turn to the Institute because they are having difficulties and would like to know exactly what their difficulties are to deal with it more effectively in their everyday lives. After the testing procedure performed by clinical psychologist is completed, adults can receive the expert's opinion about their SpLDs in writing. Testing and issuing a certificate are services that need to be financed by the client since these services are not subsidised by any public source.

### 3.1.5 Sweden

#### **Assessment within inclusive education systems**

The local municipalities are independent in terms of organisation. There are different ways to identify and investigate individual needs for special support.

In the Education Act, every school must have a pupil health team under the head teacher. These teams work with prevention, intervention and compensation for pupils with educational needs. Health services and psychologists are available for pupils, parents and childcare and school staff to consult. There are regular health checks for all children.

Parents approve longer-term or more detailed investigations by psychologists or medical staff. They must be offered a forum for consultation in order to influence their child's education. Each pre-primary and school unit shall contain one or more forums for consultation with learners and guardians. Within these forums, learners and guardians must be informed of proposals and given an opportunity to comment before decisions are made. The head is responsible for forums for consultation and information and for ensuring that consultation obligations are fulfilled.

Municipal childcare, pre-primary activities, compulsory schooling, after-school centres and youth centres are often part of the same organisation with a common school board. Often, several of these activities are integrated, with staff organising joint work together. This facilitates a complete view of each pupil. It is common practice to provide for the pupils' needs in close co-operation with their parents. The Education Act (Skollagen 2010:800 13 §) states the importance of parents' participation in planning pupils' education.

## **Monitoring SpLDs for adults in Sweden**

The Swedish Dyslexia Association is a non-profit, national organization with members throughout the country.

The Swedish Dyslexia Association was founded in 1989. The members are primarily people who work with children or adults who have severe difficulties in reading and writing. Members include teachers, special educators, speech-language pathologists, doctors and psychologists. The Association, though, is open to all.

The association aims to spread knowledge and awareness of dyslexia, put current research into practice in educational settings and monitor and safeguard the interests of people with dyslexia

The Swedish Dyslexia Association works in close cooperation with the Swedish Dyslexia Foundation which consists of internationally prominent researchers who shed light on problems related to dyslexia from their particular fields of expertise. The Association collaborates with the Swedish Federation for Persons with Difficulties in Reading and Writing/Dyslexia (Dyslexiförbundet FMLS), and the Parent Association for Children with Dyslexia (FDB).

### **3.2 Transferability of SpLenDEd Common Assessment Framework to other EU countries**

When comparing educational monitoring and assessment systems of SpLenDEd Consortium partner countries, one can notice that although there may be some similarities in the processes it is impossible to draw parallels among them. Each country follows its own rules and directives for inclusive education defined by law. What we can say is that for younger generations the processes of diagnosing learning difficulties are systematic and well established whereas it is usually up to adults with suspected specific learning difficulties or up to their supportive environment to initiate the assessment process.

The SpLenDEd Common Assessment Framework and Digital Tool are designed to support the process of optimizing adult education offer to the needs of adult learners with SpLDs in a way that is easily transferable to any country. Availability wise the Framework and the Tool are open licensed and available in digital form and five language versions: Croatian, English, German, Greek, and Swedish. The

content of 10 self-assessment criteria defines the general needs of adults with SpLDs.

In countries without systematically established process of diagnosing SpLDs in adults, adult education institutions may benefit from the SpLenDEd CAF, especially when institutions suspect that a learner might encounter such a learning difficulty. Also, in countries with good accessibility and a low-threshold cost structure, adult education institutions are confronted with considerable challenges when planning inclusive learning programmes since the programmes need to be based on the needs of participants and meet market requirements.

Further unification of approaches (incl. common criteria for recording, collecting and evaluating) towards inclusion in adult education is required. The CAF can help organizations become more aware of SpLDs related needs and of the importance of monitoring and tracking the development of people with SpLDs.

The nature of CAF and its flexibility makes it compatible with different quality assurance processes, internal and external. The Digital Tool provides results that are measurable in comparable because adult education providers can repeat the self-assessment process without limitation.

## 4. Guide through Self-assessment process supported by the SpLenDEd Digital Tool

### 4.1 Setting up an assessment team

Setting up an assessment team within an institution providing educational programmes for adults may be seen at the 1<sup>st</sup> step towards formalising the self-assessment process. The number of staff members that form an assessment team depends on the size of the institution and staff availability. We suggest including representatives of management, teaching and administrative staff. It is important that the team operates with tasks that are clearly defined and specifically allocated to its members. The initial task of the team is to construct an action plan which comprises of the list of all tasks supported by checklist, time schedule or deadlines for each task to be completed and short evaluation procedure for each completed

task. Tasks in the action plan refer to completing the assessment framework: interpreting results, sharing results with all staff, exploiting result within an institution, and preparing improvement plans.

## 4.2 Instructions for using the digital tool

Self-assessment results are available to the assessment team with the use of the SpLenDEd Assessment Framework Digital Tool. It is a user-friendly interactive tool that consists of short questions addressing specific attention areas within the educational institute regarding effectiveness of education in work with SpLDs learners and provides results in the form of a diagram together with explanations.

The Digital Assessment Tool is easy to use and available in English, Croatian, German, Greek, Slovenian and Swedish language. It takes approximately 10 minutes to complete the process. The Tool does not request any personal information and does not store any data in clouds or on digital servers. No technical prerequisites are needed or requested. It is free of charge and requires no password or registration.

A user is guided through a self-assessment process consisting of 30 assessments questions divided into 10 criteria which are:

1. Testing and early identification of SpLDs
2. Recognising strengths and potential of SpLDs
3. Ensuring post-educational progress of the learners
4. Awareness about institution and reaching out the learners
5. Constant upskilling of adult educators
6. Effective communication and recognition of needs of learners
7. Methods and forms of implementation of education for SpLDs learners
8. Systematic quality assurance
9. Provision of necessary adjustments
10. Updated and adjusted curriculum

Answers are given in a scale form (from 1 to 5) which corresponds to the points allocated and summed up by the Tool: Fully disagree (1 point), Somewhat disagree

(2 points), Neither disagree nor agree (3 points), 4 Somewhat agree (4 points and Fully agree (5 points).

Results are given automatically and are based on the sum reached for each criteria. A user can download the results in the PDF form.

The numerical results are interpreted in the following way:

- For 1-3 points reached: "Pay attention to this criterion. It is recommended to put it at your highest priority."
- For 4-9 points reached: "You have made some progress in this area, however there is room for improvement. It is time to reconsider and work harder on this criterion."
- For 10-12 points reached: "You are doing very well! But even more development is doable to achieve excellence."
- Over 12 points reached: "Congratulations! You are proficient in this area, you are recommended to continue this way and share your results as good/best practice with other institutions, if you would like to."

Guidelines give general advice to enhance an institution wide commitment, policy and action plan on continuous improvement.

## 5. General recommendations for adult education providers

Based on the 10 criteria relevant for the effectiveness of educational offer of adult education providers we summarised 10 recommendations to follow so as to achieve inclusive education addressed to learners with SpLDs:

1. Provide an opportunity for your learners to be tested for SpLDs either in your institution or in a relevant testing center,
2. Motivate learners with SpLDs by acknowledging their success via different methods, pay attention to their already existing skills and celebrate diversity among all learners,



3. Follow your learners' post-educational development/pathway and focus on their independence and ability to cope with difficulties on their own,
4. Deploy numerous channels to ensure the widest outreach possible via your networks or directly to learners with SpLDs or other disadvantaged learners' groups,
5. Support your staff in their continuous education and upskilling by providing them with access to relevant educational or training programmes and projects,
6. Prioritise, understand and recognise your learners needs by communicating with them effectively,
7. Use modern evidence-based learning methods and provide inclusive learning environment for all learners,
8. Systematically measure the quality and effectiveness of your educational services by monitoring various indicators of quality assurance,
9. Ensure the accessibility of you learning premises, methods and programmes
10. Be open and flexible when developing curriculum, include development of soft skills and use adapted evaluation procedures for learners with SpLDs.

Best Practice Guide on Improving Learning Provision Effectiveness and Inclusiveness for Adult Learners with SpLDs will be made available during SpLenDEd project life span. It will provide a useful source of information and examples on how an institution can improve effectiveness of its provision. Adult education providers will also be invited to make improvements plans, sign Memorandum of Cooperation, contribute to benchmarking repository and/or use the repository as a source of information on improving the educational offer.

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