Cross Country Report

Wave 1

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GOAL
Guidance and Orientation for Adult Learners

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GLOSSARY

Except where otherwise stated, the definitions included here are derived from the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN) Glossary: http://www.elgpn.eu/glossary.

Terms in English	*Definition*
Adult basic skills	Basic skills may include competences in literacy (reading and writing), numeracy/everyday mathematics, Digital competence/ICT skills, and oral communication. Adult basic skills courses/programmes are literacy and numeracy education for adults who for some reason did not acquire these skills or a level sufficient for everyday adult life when they were at school. Source: Project GOAL definition.
Basic skills assessment	An assessment tool that measures skills in reading and/or writing and/or Maths and/or digital skills. Source: Project GOAL definition.
Career	The interaction of work roles and other life roles over a person's lifespan, including how they balance paid and unpaid work, and their involvement in learning and education.
Career guidance	A range of activities that enable citizens of any age, and at any point in their lives, to identify their capacities, competences and interests; to make meaningful educational, training and occupational decisions; and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which these capacities and competences are learned and/or used.
Counselling	The interaction between a professional and an individual helping them to resolve a specific problem or issue.
Early leaver from education and training	A person aged 18 to 24 who has completed at most lower secondary education and is not involved in further education or training. Source: Eurostat, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Category:Glossary
Early school leaver	See **Early leaver from education and training.**
Educational counselling/guidance	Helping an individual to reflect on personal educational issues and experiences and to make appropriate educational choices.

Employment counselling/guidance	Counselling or guidance that addresses one or more of the following domains: career/ occupational decision-making, skill enhancement, job search and employment maintenance. Activities include assessment, development and implementation of an action plan, follow-up and evaluation.
Guidance	Help for individuals to make choices about education, training and employment.
Guidance counsellor	A trained individual delivering guidance as defined above. Guidance counsellors assist people to explore, pursue and attain their career goals.
Guidance services	The range of services offered by a particular guidance provider. These might be services designed for different client groups or the different ways that guidance might be delivered (e.g. face-to-face, online, telephone, etc.).
Interest inventory	An interest inventory is a career guidance tool that assesses an individual's interests in order to identify the employment or educational opportunities that are most appropriate for those interests. Source: GOAL Project Definition
Lifelong guidance	A range of activities that enables citizens of any age and at any point in their lives to identify their capacities, competences and interests, to make educational, training and occupational decisions and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which these capacities and competences are learned and/or used.
Lifelong learning	All learning activity undertaken throughout life, which results in improving knowledge, know-how, skills, competences and/or qualifications for personal, social and/or professional reasons.
Low-educated adult	An adult without upper secondary education
One step up	A priority of the 2007 Action Plan on Adult Learning is to "Increase the possibilities for adults to go one step up and achieve at least one level higher qualification". Source: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52007DC0558

Outcome (quality)	Positive or negative longer-term socio-economic change or impact that occurs directly or indirectly from an intervention's input, activities and output
Self-knowledge	Knowledge that an individual has about him/herself. Developing self-knowledge/awareness is considered an important activity in career counselling: many career interventions are designed to increase self-knowledge.
Validation of non-formal and informal learning/ validation of prior learning (VPL)	A process of confirmation by an authorised body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes against a relevant standard. It consists of four distinct phases: (1) identification – through dialogue – of particular experiences made by an individual; (2) documentation – to make visible the individual experiences; (3) a formal assessment of these experiences; and (4) recognition leading to a certification, e.g. a partial or full qualification.
Vocational rehabilitation	A process which enables persons with functional, psychological, developmental, cognitive and emotional impairments or health disabilities to overcome barriers to accessing, maintaining or returning to employment or other useful occupation. Source: http://www.vra-uk.org/

Executive Summary

This report presents cross-country findings from Wave 1 of the evaluation of the "Guidance and Orientation for Adult Learners" (GOAL) project. These are **interim findings** based on the early stages of the GOAL project. A final evaluation report will be produced in January 2018.

Project GOAL aims to develop or expand guidance and orientation interventions for low-educated adults in six countries: Belgium (Flanders), Czech Republic, Iceland, the Netherlands, Lithuania, and Slovenia. Running from February 2015 to January 2018, GOAL is coordinated by the Flemish Government's Department of Education and Training. The evaluation is being carried out by the UCL Institute of Education (IOE), London, working with local evaluation teams in each country.

GOAL Activities

The ambition underpinning GOAL is that an independent one-stop guidance service that puts the specific needs of low-educated adults at its centre may help to increase the participation of this target group in education and training. Each of the six partner countries is piloting new guidance models to specific target groups within the low-educated adult population. Five intervention strategies are being implemented:

1. **Networks and partnerships** with relevant organisations are being established or improved.
2. **High-quality tools** are being developed which will facilitate the delivery of guidance specifically to low-educated adults.
3. The **competences** which counsellors require to enable them to address the specific needs of low-educated adults are being defined.
4. **Outreach activities** designed to bring guidance services to specific target groups within the low-educated population are being developed.
5. **High-quality guidance services** are being provided with the aim of optimising individuals' learning and/or employment outcomes.

Research questions

Four research questions underpin the evaluation:

1. How do existing conditions/resources in the pre-programme environments moderate the relationships among programme operations and outcomes?
2. What programme processes are developed across the various intervention sites and how do these differ? Why do they differ?

3. What service user outcomes are achieved, for what groups, and to what degree?
4. What programme and policy characteristics appear to be associated with positive service-user outcomes?

Evaluation data

During Wave 1 of the evaluation, data were gathered via:

- client monitoring data (to establish baseline, ongoing and exit data)
- client satisfaction and outcome data (user survey and qualitative interviews)
- programme and policy data (literature review; needs and strengths analysis)
- case studies of programme sites (qualitative interviews, document analysis, analysis of quantitative data)
- qualitative interviews with policy actors.

Dataset

Overview

The cross-country Wave 1 dataset was collected from quantitative fieldwork undertaken between **start dates** in April 2015 (Flanders), January 2016 (Czech Republic), February 2016 (Iceland, Lithuania, the Netherlands) and March 2016 (Slovenia) and **end dates** in either April 2016 (Iceland, Flanders, Lithuania, Slovenia) or May 2016 (Czech Republic, the Netherlands). Qualitative interviews were carried out in April and May of 2016.

The quantitative dataset is comprised of:

- **Monitoring data for 291 clients**. Half (51%) of these service-users are from the GOAL project in Flanders; 17% of clients come from each of Lithuania and Slovenia; 7% from Iceland; 5% from the Czech Republic, and 3% from the Netherlands.
- **228 client satisfaction surveys**. In most of the six GOAL countries, all service-users completed this survey after their first counselling session, except in Flanders were response rates were lower.
- **29 programme staff surveys**. This instrument collected basic socio-demographic data, as well as information on staff's education and training background.

The qualitative data set is comprised of individual interview data from **18 clients** as well as interview and focus group data from **28 programme staff**; **45 programme partners**; and **31 policy actors**.

Quantitative data

A common **data monitoring instrument** was developed by IOE and circulated with guidelines for implementation in **November 2015**. The six partners were not, however, required to use a common method for collecting these data, and a variety of approaches were used. Some countries incorporated the GOAL data fields into their existing registration systems; other devised new systems. Some data were gathered directly from service users, and other data were recorded by counsellors either during or immediately after the guidance session.

A key finding related to the methodology is that in most of the participating countries the data monitoring template proved to be a far more useful tool that was originally envisaged by the local programme developers and evaluators.

There are 291 service users in the Wave 1 sample. Two countries reached (or exceeded) their sample size target for Wave 1: Flanders (148 service users) and Lithuania (50 service users). The **shortfall in client numbers** in the other four countries is, to a large extent, a direct consequence of the **challenges each experienced in getting their GOAL programmes up and running**. Very limited data are available on around 90 of the 148 clients in Flanders, as these clients were in the guidance process prior to the launch of the common data monitoring tool.

The 291 service users took part in **a total of 441 guidance sessions**. In Lithuania and the Netherlands, the number of service users is the same of the number of guidance sessions: in other words, all service users from these countries experienced one guidance session only. In the Czech Republic, Flanders, Iceland and Slovenia, a proportion of service-users experienced more than one guidance session. Whether a client will have one session or multiple sessions is normally dictated by the programme model rather than the client.

The short client satisfaction survey was also developed by IOE. It includes a bank of common questions as well as a few optional items tailored to individual countries. It was administered in either paper (Czech Republic, Lithuania, and Slovenia) or online formats (Flanders, Iceland and the Netherlands).

In three of the partner countries, Iceland, Lithuania and Slovenia, the number of completed **client satisfaction surveys** is equal to the number of clients; each service user completed the survey once. In the Czech Republic, clients also completed the survey at follow-up sessions. **Flanders was the only country to record a low response rate**: 128 of the 148 clients were asked to complete the survey, but only 69% of these clients at the intervention site *de Leerwinkel* and 59% at the site *de Stap* agreed.

No background data on programme staff were collected in the Netherlands. Data were received about four staff members in each of the Czech Republic, Iceland and Lithuania. Slovenia provided data on 10 programme staff and Flanders on seven.

Qualitative data

No client interviews were conducted in the Netherlands, a consequence of the fact that all the Wave 1 clients are detainees. Almost half (eight out of eighteen) of the individual qualitative client interviews were conducted in Lithuania. All 18 client interviews were conducted individually, 11 face-to-face and seven by telephone. By contrast, the majority of qualitative data from programme staff and from programme partners and policy actors were gathered in a focus group setting.

Evaluation challenges

The methodology chosen for the GOAL evaluation was shaped by the **complexities of the project design**, chief among these being that six different programmes are being implemented in 12 different locations to adults that face multiple challenges in their daily lives, not just their education and careers.

For the most part, this interim evaluation report suggests that the evaluation design is working and that robust data are being gathering which will allow researchers to draw meaningful insights at the national and cross-national level by the time of the project's conclusion.

A number of challenges have arisen during Wave 1 that have a bearing on both the quantity and breadth of the current dataset. In the Czech Republic, Iceland, the Netherlands and Slovenia, **programme set-up challenges delayed the launch of the guidance programme, limiting the data collection fieldwork period** and meaning that client numbers were lower than anticipated, considerably so in the case of the Netherlands. Differing levels of success in reaching low-educated adults in the GOAL project's first phase has implications for data analysis at the cross-country level: the total number of Wave 1 service users for Flanders is greater than that for the other five participating countries combined. There is therefore the danger than any insights offered about Wave 1 service users are actually derived from one country rather than the entire project.

One evaluation challenge in particular should be highlighted. A recurring theme in the Wave 1 report is that the GOAL programme in the Netherlands is very much an outlier; it is not an elaborate programme of guidance, as in the other five countries, but a quick scanning and referral process. So whereas the more comprehensive programmes can, to a large extent, absorb the requirements of the evaluation research (e.g. the extensive data monitoring template), doing so is more problematic in the Netherlands, where the evaluation components have represented an administrative burden that seems too large for such a light touch intervention.

Findings

Programme participants and stakeholders

Socio-demographic characteristics

Two thirds (67%) of the Wave 1 service users were early school leavers. However, this strongly reflects the fact that all the service users from Flanders, who make up 51% of the entire sample, were classified as early school leavers. The next most sizable subgroup was that of "job-seeker/unemployed" – almost one in five of the service users across the six countries was placed in this category.

Male service users (58%) outnumber female service users (42%) across the six countries. The target sub-group of jobseeker/unemployed has a higher proportion of male service users. In the Czech Republic and in Slovenia, there were considerably more female than male service users.

The vast majority of GOAL service users in Wave 1 were **aged 35 years or under** (217 out of 286), with the most common age range being between 19 and 25 years old. This profile is determined in large part by the Flemish sample – overall, 79% of clients in Flanders were aged under 26 – although the observation that most service users were in the younger age bands holds good for most countries. **Female service users tend to be slightly older than male service users.**

Most service users in Wave 1 were citizens of the country in which they live: **86% were nationals**. The next most common residence status was refugee, but all refugees (and almost all asylum seekers) were in the Flanders sample, meaning that GOAL in most countries provides guidance for citizens only. Almost three-quarters (72%) of service users were **native speakers** of a main language/s of the GOAL project country. Service users who are native speakers tend to be slightly older than service users from linguistic minorities. Service users in Flanders had a total of 18 different first language backgrounds.

Education and employment characteristics

78% of the Wave 1 sample have lower secondary education or less as their highest educational level. The remaining 22% include 54 service users with upper secondary education and three clients with tertiary-level education.

Out of all the Wave 1 service users, **75 (26%) were involved in learning at the time of their guidance session**, and out of those, slightly more than one third (28 clients) were working towards a qualification.

Over half (57%) of the Wave 1 GOAL clients were unemployed. A fifth of service users are registered as economically inactive, that is, not retired and not looking for a job. There is no strong connection between educational level and employment status for service users.

The dataset points to possible different attitudes toward adult guidance in the six countries and different adult guidance cultures. None of the Wave 1 clients in the Czech Republic had any previous

experience of receiving guidance as an adult. Only two of the eight clients in the Netherlands and eight of the 50 clients in Lithuania had received guidance previously. In Flanders and Iceland, however, around half the service users had previous experience of guidance.

Across the six project countries, **half of the service users (51%) had the highest possible score on the self-efficacy scale**. Slightly more than a half of Wave 1 service users (57%) agreed that they liked learning a lot, a further 37% reported that they liked learning new things a bit and only 6% said they did not like learning new things.

Service users whose guidance focused on education were asked about their learning goals. No clear association emerged between learning goals and age. A higher proportion of male service users wanted to achieve a specific qualification whereas a higher proportion of female service users wanted to achieve a qualification of any sort, but were more specific about an area in which they wanted to improve their skills.

Service users whose guidance focused on careers were asked about their employment goals. Only around **one quarter (26%) of service users had a specific job in mind** and around one third (35%) knew what industry they wanted to work in and/or the type of work they wanted to do. The remaining clients (39%) did not have any career or specific job in mind. **A slightly higher proportion of younger service users had more specific ideas about their career.** Male service users had more specific ideas about what job they wanted to do or what industry and/or type of work they wanted to do than female service users.

Service users cited a broad range of reasons why they had not improved their education or career more up to this stage in their lives. No single reason or set of reasons stood out, but the most commonly cited factor**, not being able to afford education or training**, was cited by 25% of respondents. Younger service users are more likely to mention negative experience at school and lack of motivation as barriers while a higher proportion of older service users mention their age, language proficiency and being busy at work as something that stopped them until now.

Programme staff

Background data were collected on 29 programme staff (mostly counsellors but also managers) across the six countries. **Twenty-four of the GOAL programme staff are female and five are male.** The **average age of programme staff is 43 years old**, with the youngest being 26 years of age and the oldest 71.

Implications

Whereas Iceland is currently focusing on very disadvantaged clients, other countries are targeting less challenging groups. Differences such as these across countries mean that it may be difficult and perhaps even misleading to **compare programme outcomes**.

The challenges associated with **particularly disadvantaged clients**, as in Iceland, may have implications for guidance-related policy. It is possible, for instance, that guidance services for

particularly hard to reach groups should limit their focus to pre-educational and pre-employment elements such as punctuality, motivation and self-esteem.

GOAL Guidance service

The most popular reason service users gave for seeking guidance was **"exploring educational opportunities" (75%)** followed, with a significant gap, by "finding links between personal interests and occupational/educational opportunities" (37%). A further 22% of the service users mentioned getting assistance with job seeking.

Older service users were more likely than younger users to seek validation of prior learning. Whereas only 6% of clients aged 35 and younger sought validation of prior learning, 14% of clients aged 36-55 did so, as did 56% of clients aged 55-65. The desire to explore educational opportunities showed an inverse U-shaped curve with age. Exploring educational opportunities was an objective for 67% of 19-25-year-olds, rose to 84% for 26-35-year-olds, and fell slightly to 76% for 36-55-year-olds.

Across the six countries, 98% of the first counselling sessions and 97% of all subsequent sessions were **individual face-to-face sessions.** Most of the first sessions in all six countries were relatively long: **81% were 31 minutes or longer** and 51% lasted between 31 and 60 minutes. In all three countries in which more than one session took place, subsequent sessions were relatively long. 81% of all subsequent sessions were 31 minutes or longer and 46% lasted between 31 and 60 minutes.

The most common routes for clients to get to the GOAL service were **referral** from employment/unemployment services (23%), self-referral (20%), referral from educational support services (17%), and referral from social welfare services (15%).

A key theme across all countries was the need for a **custom-fit service tailored to the unique and often complex needs of GOAL clients**. Counselling approaches appear to be professional but also highly personalised. For example, whereas guidance sessions or journeys might follow a rough general structure, individual pathways showed great variety.

Partnerships and Networks

At Wave 1, the **main objectives of partnerships relate to referral and participation**: finding low-educated adults and motivating them to get involved in adult education and training. In national reporting, local evaluators from Flanders classified **five broad types of partners** relevant to their programme, and these hold good for the other countries. These types of partnership are: **1) Local policy; 2) Welfare; agencies 3) Education; 4) Work; and 5) Migration and civic integration**.

Partnerships are valuable to the various GOAL programmes because, as well as lines of referral, they offer the possibility of **information sharing and mutual learning**, both at a broader level (about the target group in local and national contexts) and at the client-specific level. However, partner organisations do not always agree about the relevance, quality and added value of the GOAL service.

The Flemish national report draws attention to the fact that some potential partners may be focused on short-term outcomes such as getting *any* job, rather than on the guidance, education and training needed to get an *appropriate* job. There is also the possibility of conflict with partners, most obviously educational institutions, which offer similar services, or courses they think clients should be steered towards. In these circumstances independence is not always valued.

Key to developing programme partnerships is understanding the existing landscape and where efforts should be placed. In **developing sustainable partnerships**, good communication of the **purpose and value of guidance** is clear. From the programme perspective, this communication can help make the case for the existence and funding of the service. For existing and potential partners, such **communication** can highlight the benefits and added value that such a service can bring to their own organisation. Evidence from the national reports suggests that expectations should be set, but care taken to ensure that these expectations are realistic, otherwise there is a threat to sustainability.

A potential first stage in this process is making it clear that the GOAL programme is well-defined, so that its remit, and the boundaries of its aims, are clear to potential partners. There is likely to be a need for sensitivity in this process, as there may be some **overlap between services**: where this is the case counselling may run the risk of being institution-centred rather than **client-centred**. The time taken to do this work should not be underestimated, and more than one national report emphasises the importance of cross-organisational **trust** in the process.

Counsellor competences

There is no standard approach across the GOAL countries to the **professionalization** of those working in adult guidance and counselling services: where adult education is a marginalised and/or underfunded field, there is little impetus to develop professional standards for staff.

GOAL programme staff across the six countries are all on either permanent or fixed term contracts, with 76% on the former. No staff were on casual or temporary contracts. 76% of programme counselling staff are employed full-time, with 17% being part-time and 9% being either sessional or hourly-paid.

Programme staff's average years of experience in adult counselling ranged from two in Flanders to 12 in Slovenia. Aggregating all GOAL countries (with the exception of the Netherlands), the **average years of experience in adult counselling was seven**. Two thirds of staff (66%) have a specific guidance/counselling qualification. Across the five countries, 79% of staff had engaged in CPD in the past two years

Across countries, counsellors differed substantially in various aspects of their work history and situation. Counsellors in Slovenia tended to have been employed by their current organisation for a long period of time, averaging just under 17 years in their current organisation. At the other end of the scale, counsellors in Flanders averaged just over one year with their current organisation.

There was more consistency across countries with regard to the average **number of hours worked**: in all countries except the Czech Republic, this ranged between 32 and 40 hours per week. However, this consistency was not matched in terms of **how much time was spent on adult guidance and counselling** activities. In three countries (Czech Republic, Lithuania and Slovenia), staff spent less than 12 hours per week on adult guidance and counselling activities. In Flanders, the average was 19 hours per week on these activities. In Iceland, staff devoted almost all their working time to adult guidance and counselling activities (36 out of 39 hours per week). The major obstacle to counsellor's professional competency is the **multiple roles** they have to play in their job, including administrative tasks. **Staff across the six countries devote an average of 29% of their working time to GOAL**, with this percentage ranging widely across countries, from a low of 9% in Slovenia to a high of 68% in the Czech Republic.

In most countries, work on defining **competence standards** was in its initial stages in Wave 1 and thus it is not possible to reflect in this report on whether the competence standards are being achieved. Across all six reports, emphasis was placed on how important **personal skills** were to guidance counsellors working with low-educated adults. Although the guidance services on offer are explicitly designed to help the target group with their education and their careers, in practice, the **complex lives** many lead, and the obstacles they face in multiple areas, mean that a counsellor's ability to understand, to empathise, and to not be judgemental are critical to the guidance process.

Programme **clients were very positive in their feedback on the counselling** they received. Across the six countries, no clients answered "no" to the question "Did the counsellor explain things clearly?" and only five answered "somewhat" instead of "yes". Results were very similar for the question "Did the counsellor give you helpful information?" No service users answered 'no' and 13 qualified the answer as "somewhat".

Guidance tools

The Slovenian report contains a finding that holds true for most of the GOAL partner countries: there is a **good range of tools available to counsellors, but many of these require adaptation to better suit the GOAL target group**; there are fewer tools outside of the project that have been developed specifically with low-educated adults in mind.

In general, the GOAL projects argue against sticking rigidly to set tools and to using them in set ways, instead preferring a **custom-fit approach**. Findings to date from a number of countries suggest that counsellors need a portfolio, or toolbox, of different tools, from which they can select those that best suit the individual client's needs and goals.

Across the six countries there have been **few attempts to date to systematically assess the impact of tools** on counsellors, clients or the service more generally. No negative comments on tools were raised by clients in any country in either the client satisfaction survey or the qualitative interviews. In Wave 2, the impact of the lack of formal structures for evaluating tools used during the GOAL project should be addressed. It may be the case that more **informal processes** are preferred; however,

should this be the case, it would be necessary to understand and develop the conditions through which informal processes can themselves by encouraged and built into the structure of counsellors' work, rather than being dependent on individual initiative.

The **data monitoring instrument** created by IOE proved to be a valuable tool. Rather than detracting from the guidance session, collecting the monitoring data has enhanced their work, according to counsellors in most countries. An exception is Flanders, where it was felt that the data monitoring instrument was too time-consuming. According to programme staff in Iceland, the questions on "self-assertiveness" and positive psychology have been most effective for clients.

Outreach

For most of the GOAL countries, outreach activities to increase the amount of referrals is focused on **employment services, welfare services and educational institutions**. In Flanders, for example, 75% of clients came to the service through one of these three routes.

The GOAL team in the Czech Republic identified **three outreach challenges**, most of which are pertinent to each of the six programmes:

- Challenges related to the **characteristics of the target group**, namely that as people who are marginalised from both education and the labour market, they are harder-to-reach and harder to engage.
- Challenges related to **resources**, both in terms of financial resources, such as investment in promotional and information materials, and staff time, where they must take their message and their service to external organisations.
- Challenges related to **accessibility**, particularly where the target group are unable, because of lack of funds or lack of transport, to travel to the guidance service.

Effective outreach strategies are heavily dependent on **ensuring that referral partners are familiar with the GOAL service and with what it can deliver for their service users**. However, getting to the stage where partner organisations automatically refer client to GOAL requires a very significant investment of time and energy. In this context it seems important that the GOAL programme has some level of **official or structural recognition**.

Service users in this target group frequently lack 'readiness' and perseverance. What the GOAL project is Iceland has shown is that if a person is in a place in their lives that hinders them from committing to counselling and looking into learning, then they are unlikely to come to sessions or benefit from the programme, no matter how many phone calls or text messages they receive.

Service outcomes

Delays in some programmes' roll-out mean that the cut-off date for Wave 1 of the evaluation occurred during what turned out to be a relatively early phase of those programme's development.

Only 34 clients had exit data recorded on the monitoring template, and for these service-users there are further missing items.

There was significant variation across the six countries with regard to the **number of sessions** that were planned in the programme model and how and when exit from the guidance occurs. The 'exit schedule' could also differ between sites within a country. For example, three clients in the Czech Republic had attended two guidance sessions; the remaining 12 attended one session only. All 50 clients in Lithuania and all eight in the Netherlands had one guidance session only – in both cases, this was in line with the national GOAL model, which is based on the completion of one session only. In Iceland, there are no exit data as all 21 clients are still regarded as being in the system. This is also the case in Slovenia.

Clients perceived their guidance sessions as very positive. 77% of the clients who participated in the survey in all six countries agreed that the next steps were clearer after the session and 22% reported that the steps were somewhat clearer. 78% agreed that the counselling helped them to plan what to do next and 85% felt more motivated after the session.

Compared to the youngest group of clients (i.e. those aged 18-25), clients aged 26 and over tended to be more positive about the outcomes of session. Lithuanian evaluators speculate that **clients in their mid-20s and up may be more aware of their objectives**, and are thus more active during counselling sessions, and more inclined to find answers to questions about their future. Analysis of 'focus of the session' data suggests that clients who cited only one focus of the session had a more positive perception of session outcomes than clients who cited more than one session. That is, clients whose sessions (according to them) focused either on learning or jobs provided more positive outcome feedback than clients whose sessions focused on learning and jobs.

Across the six countries, the **most common session results** were: the client being informed about what they could study and where (48%), the client gaining information on formal qualifications (46%), and the client gaining information about formal education courses (42%). As these percentages suggest, many sessions had multiple results.

Further analysis of the data suggests that those clients who had more positive attitude towards learning were more likely to: be informed about what they could study and where; be informed about formal qualifications and formal courses; develop a personal action plan; and receive information on how to find financial resources for taking up a study course. Clients who reported that did not really like learning were more likely to get information on retraining courses and assessment of key competences in their counselling sessions

The overwhelmingly positive feedback received from service users in the satisfaction survey indicates that **for most clients, the GOAL counselling met, or even exceeded their expectations**. In reporting this, of course, it should be remembered that **for 61% of service users, GOAL was their first experience of educational or career counselling as an adult**, and they may not have known what to expect from it.

Caution is in order regarding these early findings: clients' positive experiences of GOAL does not necessarily mean they will achieve their desired outcomes; for many clients, there are **significant barriers** – attitudinal, situational, and more – to overcome.

Financing of educational opportunities and availability of funding (e.g. scholarships etc.) constitute the **main policy barriers** to programme success as measured by client outcomes in Iceland, the Czech Republic and Slovenia. Counselling for adult learners can only be effective if combined with other incentives like active employment policy with measures for integrating vulnerable groups into the labour market. If there is no offer of further training, courses and programmes, or financial incentives, the counselling itself is unlikely to have sustainable effects.

Service quality

97% of the clients agreed that they were satisfied with the counselling session. Most clients (more than 90%) across all countries thought that the **counsellors respected their choices** (100% in Flanders), understood their needs, and were encouraging. Clients also reported that counsellors answered their questions, explained things clearly, and gave them information they needed.

Some clients were not yet able to reflect fully on the quality of the guidance. Qualitative interview data from clients in the Czech Republic suggests that although clients feel more knowledgeable, motivated and confident after the sessions, until these feelings are translated into concrete, practical achievements, there was an understandable reluctance to be wholly positive.

Tensions may potentially arise with regard to the relationship between service quality and service efficiency, for example with regard to **staff time and other costs**. These tensions may have implications for which target groups are focused on. Clients may benefit from a service model based on providing more than one session per client (on average), as additional sessions may help in the provision of information about next steps, and may help clients to reflect on and negotiate barriers, structural and otherwise.

1 Introduction

The "Guidance and Orientation for Adult Learners" Project (GOAL) is a collaboration between six partner countries: Belgium (Flanders), the Czech Republic, Iceland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, and Slovenia[1]. Project GOAL aims to develop existing models of guidance and orientation for adults in the six countries in order that these services specifically reach low-educated adults and address their needs. GOAL is a three-year project, running from February 2015 to January 2018, and is coordinated by the Flemish Government's Department of Education and Training. Project GOAL is being evaluated by the UCL Institute of Education (IOE), London.

This report presents cross country findings from Wave 1 of the GOAL evaluation. The Wave 1 evaluation dataset consists of quantitative data on GOAL service users collected between the launch of the GOAL programme in the six countries (a range of dates from April 2015 to March 2016[2]) and April (Iceland, Flanders, Lithuania, Slovenia) or May 2016 (Czech Republic, the Netherlands); qualitative data collected from programme stakeholders in April and May 2016, and contextual data gathered during a local needs and strengths analysis.

1.1 The GOAL project

Funded under ERASMUS+, Project GOAL addresses the European Commission's priority theme of reducing the number of low-educated adults through increasing participation rates in adult education. As well as contributing to the European Agenda for Lifelong Learning (http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/adult-learning/adult_en.htm), GOAL will contribute to three priority areas of the 2008 'Council Resolution on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies' (http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/104236.pdf), that is, to facilitate access by all citizens to guidance services, to develop the quality assurance or guidance processes, and to encourage coordination and cooperation among the various national, regional and local stakeholders.

Project GOAL is targeted at low-educated adults, that is, at adults without upper secondary education (ISCED level 3[3]). The context for GOAL is that adult education provision in the six countries is fragmented and there is currently a lack of coordination between the different providers and stakeholders that are involved with low-educated adults. Moreover, although the partner countries have some forms of guidance for adult learners, or have specific policy strategies that focus on

[1] Two members of the Turkish Directorate of Lifelong Learning are participating in GOAL as observers, with the aim of learning from the project and identifying opportunities to promote lessons in Turkish guidance policies.
[2] The start dates for quantitative data collection were as follows: April 2015 (Flanders), January 2016 (Czech Republic), February 2016 (Iceland, Lithuania, the Netherlands) and March 2016 (Slovenia).
[3] For more on UNESCO's International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) see http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Documents/isced-2011-en.pdf

educational guidance and orientation, the existing services, or the structures on which these services rely, do not reach the adults most in need of education as well as they could or in sufficient numbers.

The hypothesis underpinning GOAL is that an independent one-stop guidance service that puts the specific needs of low-educated adult learners at its centre may help to increase the participation of this target group in adult education. To this end, each of the six countries is piloting new guidance models, in two locations, to specific target groups within the low-educated adult population (see 1.3 below for more details on these target groups). Five intervention strategies are being implemented by the GOAL partners, although not all strategies will be implemented in all countries:

1. **Networks and partnerships** with relevant organisations are being established or improved.
2. **High-quality tools** are being developed which will facilitate the delivery of guidance specifically to low-educated adults.
3. The **competences** which counsellors require to enable them to address the specific needs of low-educated adults are being defined.
4. **Outreach activities** designed to bring guidance services to specific target groups within the low-educated population are being developed.
5. **High-quality guidance services** are being provided with the aim of optimising individuals' learning and/or employment outcomes.

The aim of the GOAL project is that, through developing, piloting and evaluating these interventions:

1. The **processes** to implement effective guidance services and supporting networks that improve service user outcomes will be mapped.
2. The **criteria, success factors and conditions** on implementation (processes) that contribute to outcomes of guidance users will be identified
3. Potential generalisable **case studies** will be made available to be analysed by policymakers to understand and analyse challenges and success factors in establishing 'joined-up' programmes in complex policy fields.
4. The **policy processes** that play a role in influencing programmes success will be identified and described.

1.2 The GOAL evaluation

The GOAL evaluation being carried out by IOE has two aims. Its primary aim is to understand, assess and improve GOAL across the six participating countries. The evaluation also aims to provide country-specific case studies that can be analysed by policymakers seeking to understand challenges and success factors in establishing 'joined-up' programmes in complex policy fields.

The evaluation focuses on processes and outcomes, thereby enabling the identification of success factors across different programme contexts. This evidence can potentially be used to develop a structural support basis amongst decision makers and relevant stakeholders for scaling up the pilot learning guidance and orientation models in partner or other countries.

Four research questions underpin the evaluation:

1. How do existing conditions/resources in the pre-programme environments influence the relationships among programme operations and outcomes?
2. What programme processes are developed across the various intervention sites and how do these differ? Why?
3. What service user outcomes are achieved, for what groups, and to what degree?
4. What programme and policy characteristics appear to be associated with improvements in service-user outcomes?

The evaluation is taking place in a series of stages:

1. **Pre-implementation stage** (February 2015 - October 2015): activities centred on needs and strengths analyses in each of the six countries; on reporting the results of these analyses, and generating data collection tools.
2. **Ongoing (cross-wave) data collection** (November 2015 - Spring 2017)
    a. Client satisfaction survey
    b. Monitoring data
    c. Longitudinal follow-up with 30 clients per country
3. **Wave 1 data collection** (with national reporting in June 2016)
4. **Wave 2 data collection** (with national reporting in May 2017)
5. **Data analysis and final reporting** (with final report due November 2017)

IOE is carrying out this evaluation with the assistance of local evaluators who gather, analyse and report on national data. The six GOAL programme developers were responsible for hiring these local evaluation teams and oversee their day-to-day work. IOE is responsible for developing the evaluation methodology, the evaluation instruments, and the data and reporting templates, as well as all cross-country analysis and reporting.

The local evaluators whose work is reported in this cross-country report are:

Czech Republic	Tereza Halouzková, National Institute for Education (NUV) Martin Úlovec, National Institute for Education (NUV) Martina Weigertová, National Institute for Education (NUV)
Flanders	Elien Colman, Tempera Kathleen Hoefnagels, Tempera Nadia Reynders, Department of Education and Training, Government of Flanders
Iceland	Lára Rún Sigurvinsdóttir, Educational Research Institute, School of Education, University of Iceland Sigríður Kristín Hrafnkelsdóttir, Educational Research Institute, School of Education, University of Iceland Kristín Erla Harðardóttir, Educational Research Institute, School of Education, University of Iceland
Lithuania	Gintautas Bužinskas, Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre Saulius Samulevičius, Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre Lina Vaitkutė, Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre
Netherlands	Lianne Bertling, Regioplan Policy Research Bjørn Dekker, Regioplan Policy Research Jeanine Klaver, Regioplan Policy Research
Slovenia	Tanja Vilič Klenovšek, Slovenian Institute for Adult Education (SIAE) Andreja Dobrovoljc, Slovenian Institute for Adult Education (SIAE) Barbara Kunčič Krapež, Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training (IRSVET) Katja Kavnik, Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training (IRSVET)

1.3 Project GOAL in the six countries

Contexts

The six GOAL programmes have a range of starting points and aim to reach a range of target groups within the low-educated cohort. At one end of the scale, in the **Czech Republic** there is currently no careers guidance for low-educated adults and the pilot projects there are, in effect, **starting from scratch**, by establishing two regional centres where the GOAL service can be offered. By contrast, in **the Netherlands**, although there is no existing guidance for adults with low basic skills, the GOAL pilots involve taking a **tried and tested basic skills screening tool** to new locations and target groups.

In **Flanders**, bespoke counselling services are available for unemployed young people and those in employment: these service focus on jobs and careers, and not explicitly on educational guidance. Research over the past decade on previous initiatives has demonstrated that there is a need in Flanders for **a specialised service focusing on educational guidance** to direct adults towards an educational programme that fits their interests and needs. The GOAL project in Flanders builds on the model developed by these earlier initiatives.

In **Iceland**, although educational and vocational guidance for adults is generally well-developed and professionally staffed, a lack of knowledge about low-educated adults means that current services are not adequately **meeting the needs of more vulnerable adults**, particularly with regard to addressing the barriers they face when engaging and participating in adult education. In **Lithuania**, **adult educational guidance services are fragmented**: services are not equally distributed throughout Lithuania; adults are not always aware of the availability of such services in their neighbourhood; services are not always targeted to low-educated adults, and guidance staff may lack knowledge of and tools for this group.

In **Slovenia**, adults can access counselling services either at one of 14 regional guidance centres, which provide services for adults enrolled in adult education, or at school centres, where counselling services are available to adults both before and during the learning course. The main weakness in the current system is that **counselling activities in the regional guidance centres and the school centres are not linked**.

The Wave 1 evaluation report from the Netherlands identifies **three broad challenges** governments face in providing educational and/or career guidance services to adults with low levels of education. While the target groups differ across the six GOAL countries, these themes are relevant to all:

1. The challenge of increasing the number of people reached; in particular, the challenge of helping this target group to recognise that guidance tailored to their situation can be beneficial to them. Given that the demand for guidance services from the target group is generally low, meeting this challenge may involve a shift from a demand-driven to a need-driven service.

2. The challenge of increasing the number of organisations involved in delivering guidance services.
3. The challenge of trying to make guidance services for adults with low education or low skills effective at each stage of **the journey from advice to action to impact**.

GOAL programmes

Aims

The six GOAL programmes have a common aim: to increase the participation of low-educated adults in education and training, by offering educational and/or vocational guidance to this target group. It is anticipated that lessons learned from the design, set-up and implementation of the pilot projects will inform, at both the programme and policy levels, a wider roll-out of similar initiatives.

Within this broad aim, each country has its own specific objectives.

Czech Republic	To promote the **availability** of and increase the **demand** for further education and to develop schools as centres of lifelong learning.
Flanders	To provide policymakers with **evidence of the potential value** of educational guidance and its complementarity with more established services. The GOAL project in Flanders implements different aspects of educational guidance services in different contexts (urban and rural), with different types of target groups and within different collaboration structures.
Iceland	To bring together organisations that are involved with the target group, and through improved cooperation and information-sharing, **increase knowledge of low-educated adults** and how their situation can be addressed through guidance.
Lithuania	To improve the **participation rates** of low-skilled and low-educated persons in adult education; to identify ways of **reaching** low-qualified or low-educated people and **motivate** them to get involved into guidance process; to find the most suitable ways and tools to provide counselling to this group; and to establish and/or strengthen the partnerships between the different stakeholders and service providers in this area.
Netherlands	The project aims stem from the belief that greater knowledge of an adult's basic skills levels, through the use of a quick online scanning tool, will mean that more effective, tailored guidance and counselling services can be provided. It therefore aims to **get more organisations trained and using a basic skills scanning tool**, and to develop a regional road map directing low skilled adults to education and career-service providers.

Slovenia	The programme team are working in two local environments, in the hope that by studying the outreach activity of adult guidance centres they can test which **approach is more suitable for schools**. Establishing new regional cooperation and networks is a key objective of the Slovenian work plan.

Activities

Activities in the GOAL project address five major themes – these are five intervention strategies outlined in section 1.1 above. Not all countries are carrying out activities for each of the five intervention strategies. Table 1.1 below shows which countries are focusing on which intervention strategies.

Table 1.1. *Intervention Strategy, by country*

Intervention strategy	CZ	FL	IS	LT	NL	SI
1 Partnerships	x	√	√	√	√	√
2 Tools	√	√	√	√	√	√
3 Competences	√	√	√	x	x	√
4 Outreach	√	√	√	x	√	√
5 Quality	√	√	√	√	√	√

In the **Czech Republic** GOAL activities centre on **establishing careers guidance centres**. In **Flanders**, activities related to all five interventions strategies are being built into **two established educational guidance projects**. In **Iceland**, as stated above, activities on the five intervention strategies focus on what can be learned and achieved through **partnership and cooperation** with other interested organisations. The focus in **Lithuania** is adding GOAL services to those offered by **existing centres of adult education.** Activities in **Slovenia** are also focused on existing educational institutions (both adult and school) and on **strengthening cooperation** between the two.

The pilot in the **Netherlands** can be characterised as a **quick screening** for low literacy and referral to appropriate training facilities where the education and coaching would take place. The primary challenge the Dutch GOAL project seeks to address is increasing the number of people that are reached. The experimentation in the Netherlands is quite **different** from the GOAL programmes in the other five countries where more elaborated guidance programmes are being set up, often involving multiple counselling sessions.

Sites

In the majority of the six GOAL countries, programmes are being implemented in **two geographic locations:** this is the case in the Czech Republic, Flanders, Iceland and Slovenia. In Lithuania, there are two intervention sites, but both are located in the capital, Vilnius. In the Netherlands, the original proposal was to work with eight different organisations clustered in two regional locations, Drenthe and Twente. To offset recruitment problems encountered in the project set-up stage, this reach was widened to include three additional regions, Friesland, Flevoland and Gelderland. As a result three

organisations are included in the Dutch Wave 1 dataset, with client data available from only one of these sites. (Although a fourth organisation was recruited within the fieldwork period this recruitment occurred too late for inclusion in this wave of the evaluation.)

Table 1.1. GOAL *Intervention Sites*, *Wave 1*

Country	Sites	
Czech Republic	Regional Centre for Career Guidance, Olomouc	Regional Centre for Career Guidance, Most
Flanders	De Stap, City of Ghent	De Leerwinkel, West-Flanders
Iceland	Mímir Lifelong Learning Centre	MSS Lifelong Learning Centre
Lithuania	Vilnius Adult Education Centre (VAEC)	Public Institution Vilnius Jeruzalem Labour Market Training Centre (VJLMTC)
Netherlands	Penitentiary Institution (PI) Lelystad (Flevoland)	Municipality of Emmen (Drenthe)
	Penitentiary Institution (PI) Achterhoek (Gelderland)	Aksept, an organisation specialising in services relating to labour market participation and health care (Twente)
Slovenia	ISIO Guidance Centre and Biotechnical School Centre, Llubljana	ISIO Guidance Centre and School Centre, Velenje

The two **Flemish** sites were chosen for the contrasts they offer between **urban** (Ghent) and **rural** (West Flanders) services. In **Iceland,** Mímir and MSS are similar lifelong guidance centres in the network of the Education and Training Services Centre; Mímir is located in Reykjavik, MSS in the a more rural area in the Southern peninsula where the challenges in relation to unemployment and social welfare are greater. The two sites in Vilnius, **Lithuania** are both adult educational institutions, but differ in the learners they attract: there is some overlap, but broadly speaking, VAEC focuses on **second chance education** and VJLMTC on **vocational training**. The four organisations in the **Netherlands'** sample include two **prisons**, a private company and a municipal authority. In the **Czech Republic**, there are contrasts in the economic and social profiles of the two sites. In **Slovenia**, one site in the capital city, Llubljana, the other in the east of the country, in the town of Velenje.

Target groups

The six GOAL programmes have a common target group: low-educated adults, that is, adults without upper secondary education. Within this broad target group, some countries are focusing on specific sub-groups, which have been identified as particularly in need of guidance in their respective countries.

In **Lithuania** there is a different focus in each of the two sites because of the different client groups each site serves: **early school leavers** and **low skilled/qualified adults**. This is also the case in **Slovenia**, where the sites in one location are working with **low-educated adults** whereas the other location is trying to recruit **migrants** and people **aged over 50**. In **Flanders**, services in the City of Ghent are specifically targeted at unqualified school leavers between **18 and 25 years old**, and the second site has a far broader intake of clients, although in practice the latter site has attracted mainly **migrants** and **unemployed job seekers**. A specific goal of the Flemish project is to map how the approaches for the target group of 18-25-year-old guidance seekers does or does not differ from approaches aimed a broad target group of adults of all ages. GOAL in the **Netherlands** focuses explicitly on adults with **low basic skills**. In **Iceland** the focus is on particularly **vulnerable adults**, who tend to face multiple barriers to progress in education and employment.

Some countries have experienced problems in recruiting some target sub-groups to the study. In the Czech Republic, for example, attempts were made to include prisoners in the project, but cooperation was not possible as guidance and educational opportunities are already offered to prisoners "in-house". Chapters 2 and 3 of this report on the problems some teams encountered in reaching specific types of adults during the first wave of data collection and detailed information on the achieved target samples respectively. At this stage, however, it is worth noting that where some programmes (Lithuania, for example) have faced fewer challenges in reaching potential service-users than others (such as Iceland) this may point to important distinctions between the characteristics of the national samples (**more motivated and less motivated clients**) and use of programme resources (**ease of picking "low-hanging fruit" compared to difficulty of constantly "chasing" clients**).

Dissemination

In **Flanders**, the main dissemination platform is the project advisory committee, which brings together Flemish policy makers and stakeholders at the Flemish level including the relevant Ministries, (Education, work, integration, social welfare) and representatives of the Public Employment Services, Educational networks, Flemish Federation of Second Chance Education, Flemish Support Center for Adult Education, Brussels Government, and the National Agency Erasmus+. At an Advisory Committee meeting in June 2016 it was agreed that all stakeholders will develop more concrete modalities of how they see the guidance service being developed in the future, along with their own services (with a focus on complementarity and synergy). The intention is to get strategic agreements from each organisation of how they see the Educational Guidance service in the future and to what extent they value the service.

In **Iceland**, experiences from GOAL will feed into a **quality assurance system** used with the Education and Training Services Centre (ETSC)'s network of fourteen Lifelong Learning (LLL) centres. Standards will be reviewed in light of the main findings. Findings will also feed into **policy development** with regard to the cooperation of the 14 LLL centres with the target group stakeholders in their local areas.

In **Lithuania** information about the project results will be disseminated to all major adult education policy actors representing the Ministries of Education and Science, Social Security and Labour and Economy. Information on the concept and focus of the project has been presented to representatives of National Public Employment Service, who expressed their support for the adult education guidance services evaluation, the first of its kind in Lithuania. After adopting the Law on Adult Non-formal and Continuing Education (2014), each municipality has assigned a person to act as adult education coordinator. They, together with adult education providers, should benefit from information about adult guidance successes, failures and lessons learned from the other GOAL countries. With the dissemination of GOAL information, the Lithuanian project team is striving to **open up a policy debate** which will result in practical solutions on how to reduce the fragmentation of adult guidance services in Lithuania and make these more accessible.

In the **Netherlands**, the Wave One evaluation report will be sent to the four organisations that provide guidance services for the GOAL project. Also a link will be added to articles on the GOAL project on the Dutch EPALE and Erasmus+ websites.

In **Slovenia**, a promotional brochure has been published, as well as articles in the newsletters and websites of the programme partners; information presentations on the project have also been held at professional events for staff in adult education and in school centres, and for experts in adult education and in career guidance. Dissemination of the Wave 1 results are taking place at three levels:

- With the four intervention sites, results and findings are being shared so that programme processes can be reviews and amended if necessary;
- With partners in the regional networks, to determine the expectations of future collaborations;
- At the national level, with the presentation of results to stakeholders in late 2016.

This interim cross country report was published in November 2016.

1.4 About this report

The first cross-country report has been produced concurrently with the first wave of national reports, which can be found on the project website: http://www.projectgoal.eu/. Key aims of the cross-country report are to enable participating countries to learn from one another's programme development experiences, and to draw lessons that can support national-level programme improvement.

The following report is comprised of 11 chapters including this introduction. This report is structured as follows.

- Chapter 2 describes the methodological design of the evaluation.
- Chapter 3 provides an overview of the GOAL programme participants and stakeholders.

- Chapters 4-10 report on Wave 1 findings, covering the following topics.
- Chapter 4 describes the GOAL services in the six partner countries.
- Chapter 5 discusses GOAL partnerships and networks.
- Chapter 6 discusses GOAL counsellor competences.
- Chapter 7 focuses on guidance tools used in the provision of GOAL services.
- Chapter 8 looks at GOAL outreach strategies.
- Chapter 9 provides an overview of programme outcomes to this point.
- Chapter 10 discusses the quality of the GOAL programme.
- Chapter 11 provides a brief summary of the key findings in this report with regard to the four evaluation questions, highlighting the potential implications of these findings for the GOAL service, GOAL partnerships and networks, and policy.

The reporting template on which this cross-country report is based was designed by IOE to be used across all six countries as part of Wave 1 national reporting. IOE also contributed generic text to the six national reports, including the material on the GOAL project background and the evaluation methodology.

2 Methodology

This chapter summarises the evaluation methodology and how the evaluation protocol is being implemented in each of the six countries.

2.1 Evaluation design and methods

Evaluation design

The methodology for the IOE evaluation is shaped by the complexities of the project design, namely the facts that:

- GOAL is multi-site (12 'sites' or locations, that is, two in each of six countries) and multi-organisational.
- GOAL has multiple objectives.
- GOAL is predicated on cross-organisational collaboration.
- Each partner country has its own unique context and target groups (and target numbers to achieve).
- Programme resources are finite, and should be primarily focused on the interventions rather than the evaluation.

For these reasons it was neither feasible nor advisable to conduct an experimental or quasi-experimental evaluation involving comparison groups. Instead the evaluation draws on two theoretical frameworks: the '**Theory of Change**'[4] and **Realist Evaluation**[5] approaches. Theory of Change approach specifies what programme implementers believe will happen as a result of the intervention, and what processes are required[6]. The articulation of the underlying programme theory serves as the foundation for the initiative's operation as well as its evaluation[7]. Realist evaluation approaches emphasise the central importance of **programme contexts and programme mechanisms**, and focuses on the interplay between these two factors, and their combined impact on outcomes.

The evaluation is **integrated within the project throughout its lifespan**, not only at programme level, but also at policy level: an important element of the evaluation's **multilevel approach** is the description and assessment of the policy processes that play a role in influencing programme

[4] Weitzman, B. C., Silver, D., & Dillman, K. N. (2002). Integrating a comparison group design into a theory of change evaluation: The case of the Urban Health Initiative. *American Journal of Evaluation*, *23*(4), 371-385.
[5] Pawson, R., & Tilley, N. (1997). *Realistic Evaluation*. SAGE.
[6] Weiss, C. (1997). How can theory-based evaluation make greater headway? *Evaluation Review*, *21*, 501–524.
[7] Rossi, P. H., Lipsey, M. W., & Freeman, H. E. (2004). *Evaluation: A systematic approach*. Sage Publications.

success. It is hoped that this dual focus on **programme-level and policy-level processes**, and their interaction, will provide useful evidence for a range of policymakers working in complex fields.

Evaluation data are being gathered via:

- client monitoring data (to establish baseline, ongoing and exit data)
- client satisfaction and outcome data (user survey and qualitative interviews)
- programme and policy data (literature review; needs and strengths analysis)
- case studies of programme sites (qualitative interviews, document analysis, analysis of quantitative data)
- qualitative interviews with policy actors.

The evaluation includes: a) ongoing data collection (throughout the life of the project) and b) wave-specific data collection.

Ongoing data collection

Quantitative client data are being collected throughout the life of the programme via client surveys and monitoring data. In addition to these two modes of data collection, there will be a third quantitative mode: a **follow-up survey** administered to a planned minimum of 30 clients in each country.

The **data monitoring instrument** gathers detailed information about the clients on the GOAL programmes, thus enabling evaluators to measure target numbers and track a range of programme processes and service user outcomes. This instrument includes a question asking clients if they can be contacted later as part of the evaluation study. Measuring service user numbers allows us to evaluate the fourth intervention strategy: bringing guidance to specific target groups. Measuring client outcomes is part of the evaluation of the fifth intervention strategy – the quality of guidance services: service user outcomes.

The data monitoring instrument is used **each time** a client has a guidance session, although not all fields are completed at every session, with some fields relevant to first sessions only (entrance data) and others designed to collect exit data. Each client is assigned a unique identifier by the counsellor, allowing evaluators to link data for clients who participate in multiple sessions.

The **Client Satisfaction Survey** was designed to gather data from service users about their experiences of counselling services. The instrument is a short, two-page, self-completion survey offered in either paper or online formats. It contains eight questions: two gather demographic information on the client (age, gender); five focus on the counselling session, and the final question

asks clients to record if they received assistance in completing the survey[8]. There are small differences between the surveys offered in the six countries, reflecting the different contexts in which the guidance is offered, and the different objectives of various programmes. Measuring client satisfaction is part of the evaluation of the fifth intervention strategy: the quality of guidance services: service user outcomes.

Both instruments were developed by IOE in close collaboration with the country partners in order that the instruments were sufficiently sensitive to the target groups involved and to national data protection regulations and concerns. The tools were finalised in autumn 2015.

Wave-specific data collection

Programme and policy data are being collected and analysed in two waves, with the findings of **Wave 1** analysed and disseminated amongst programme partners – via this national report and a cross-country report – in order to facilitate service adaptation and improvement. **Wave 2** data collection will repeat the same data collection processes, but with an emphasis on the degree to which expectations have been met, what has been learned and how programmes have evolved. Reporting of Waves 1 and 2 will include analysis of quantitative data collected as part of (a) ongoing data collection.

During each data collection wave, case studies of the GOAL interventions at each location are being collated from document analysis and **semi-structured qualitative interviews** with a range of GOAL stakeholders. In the GOAL Wave 1 data collection, these stakeholder views were captured through either one-to-one interviews (face-to-face and, in the case of some service-users, by telephone) or focus groups. Four topic guides were developed by IOE to assist local evaluators in Wave 1 data gathering and ensure consistency across the programme locations: **1) Programme Staff; 2) Programme Partners; 3) Policy Actors; and 4) Service Users**. A fifth Topic Guide, used in Iceland only, combined questions for Programme Partners and Policy Actors.

In Wave 1, a short quantitative survey was administered to all **GOAL programme staff members** (not only those participating in qualitative interviews and focus groups) to gather some basic data on their educational background, their current employment, and their professional development and training.

[8] It was anticipated that low literacy levels, or migrants' low skills in the national language, might prevent some clients from completing the survey without assistance.

2.2 Sample

This section describes the Wave 1 cross-county dataset.

Quantitative data

Monitoring data

When the GOAL evaluation was designed, each country set a target for the number of service users that their guidance programme would reach (see Table 2.1.).

Table 2.2. *Target sample sizes, GOAL proposal*

Partner country	Full evaluation target (number of clients	Wave 1 target (number of clients)
Czech Republic	100	50
Flanders	200	100
Iceland	100	50
Lithuania	100	50
Netherlands	200	100
Slovenia	150	75

Taking the end of Wave 1 data collection as the project's mid-point, we can see that two countries reached (or exceeded) the **sample size target** (see Table 2.): Flanders (148 service users) and Lithuania (50 service users). The remaining four countries did not reach the sample size target in the first wave of data collection: Slovenia reached 49 service users (target 75), Iceland 21 service users (target 50), and Czech Republic 15 (target 50). With only eight service users in the Wave 1 data set, the Netherlands was furthest from the target sample size (of 100 adults). These eight clients all came from one of the Netherland's four interventions sites: no service user data were collected from one site, as, contrary to expectation, client intake at this sites was negligible. The remaining two Dutch sites were recruited to the study too late to have clients to include in Wave 1.

Table 2.2. *Monitoring data sample. N of service users and sessions by country*

	Service Users		Sessions	
	N	**%**	**N**	**%**
Czech Republic	15	5	15	3
Flanders	148	51	273	62
Iceland	21	7	30	7
Lithuania	50	17	50	11
Netherlands	8	3	8	2
Slovenia	49	17	64	15
Total	**291**	**100**	**440**	**100**

The shortfall in client numbers is to a large extent a direct consequence of **the challenges most countries experienced in getting their GOAL programmes up and running** and, in particular, the

challenge of attracting a hard-to-reach target group to what, in most countries, is a new service (even if only for that target group).

In most countries there is an expectation that the targets for sample size will nevertheless be reached by the end of the second wave of data collection. This expectation is largely based on the fact that the partnership and network arrangements which drive the referral process are now established and working well (see Chapter 5 for more information and analysis on this subject).

In two of the partner countries (Lithuania and the Netherlands), the number of service users in Wave 1 is the same of the number of guidance sessions: in other words, all service users from these countries experienced one guidance session only. **Whether a client will have one session or multiple sessions** is normally dictated by the programme model rather than the client, although there are plans to develop the model in Lithuania further in Wave 2. In the Czech Republic, Flanders, Iceland and Slovenia, a proportion of service-users experienced more than one guidance session.

The main source of quantitative data in Wave 1 comes from the data collected about the service users via the data monitoring template. Each **face-to-face contact session** with a service user is recorded in the data monitoring template, meaning that the total number of entries in this database is equal to the total number of sessions (440) and not to the total number of service users (291). Micro-contacts made by email, text or phone in Flanders were not recorded in the data monitoring template, nor were data on all those who completed the basic skills scan in the Netherlands.

There is an important limitation to the data on service users in **Flanders**. The headline statistics show that a larger number (148) of clients were included in the national dataset for Wave 1, a consequence primarily of the fact that the Flanders programme model builds on existing services rather than establishing completely new ones, meaning that clients were available from launch of the project in April 2015. However, the data monitoring template used in the six countries was not in use until November 2015. As a consequence, very limited data are available on around 90 of the 148 clients in Flanders.

Client satisfaction survey

The total number of completed client satisfaction surveys is 228. Countries could choose whether to administer this survey to service users in **paper or online** formats. Flanders, the Netherlands and Iceland opted for an online version of the client satisfaction survey and Lithuania, Slovenia and the Czech Republic collected the client satisfaction survey data through paper based questionnaires. Generally speaking, countries opted for the format that national evaluators felt would be easier for service users to complete. In all countries, clients could choose to receive assistance in completing the survey (although not from the staff members they had been counselled by). Overall 19% of service users (43 out of 228) had some **help in completing the survey**. No help was needed in Lithuania and the Czech Republic. Around one third of service users from Flanders and Iceland had some help to complete the client satisfaction survey and slightly more than two thirds had help in the Netherlands (albeit from a very small sample size).

Table 2.3. *Did anyone help you complete this survey?*

		Yes		No		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Country	**CZ**	-	-	18	100	**18**	**100**
	FL	26	32	56	68	**83**	**100**
	IS	7	33	14	67	**21**	**100**
	LT	-	-	50	100	**50**	**100**
	NL	5	71	2	29	**7**	**100**
	SL	5	10	44	90	**49**	**100**
	Total	**43**	**19**	**185**	**81**	**227**	**100**

In three of the partner countries, Iceland, Lithuania and Slovenia, the number of completed client satisfaction surveys is equal to the number of clients; in other words, each service user completed the survey once (generally at the first session, although there were some exceptions in Iceland). In the Czech Republic there is a (slightly) greater number of surveys than clients because three clients completed two sessions and they were given the satisfaction survey after each session. One client from the Dutch sample did not complete the satisfaction survey. A far greater shortfall in completed surveys can be observed in Flanders, where 83 of the 149 service-users filled in the satisfaction survey. This shortfall can partly be explained by the fact that, as with the data monitoring, some clients in Flanders were engaged in the guidance programme before the satisfaction survey went into the field. However, 128 of the 148 clients were asked to complete the survey; response rates were low compared to those in other countries: 69% for de Leerwinkel (51/74) and 59% for de Stap (32/54). Local evaluators reflect that this poor response, particularly in Ghent (de Stap), is likely to be connected to language problems.

Table 2.4. *Satisfaction survey sample, N of respondents by country*

	Satisfaction survey respondents		Service users	
	N	%	N	%
CZ	18	8	15	5
FL	83	36	148	51
IS	21	9	21	7
LT	50	22	50	17
NL	7	3	8	3
SI	49	22	49	17
Total	**228**	**100**	**291**	**100**

Programme staff background survey

The programme staff background survey includes data on 29 members of staff from five out of the six countries. In the Netherlands, no quantitative information was collected from programme staff as evaluators chose not to burden participating organisations further, because of the complex situation (for example, in the case of the two participating prisons) and because staff data were considered as less relevant given the light touch nature of the Dutch intervention. Data were received about four staff members in each of the three project countries (see Table 2.5): the Czech Republic, Iceland and Lithuania. Slovenia provided data on 10 programme staff and Flanders on seven.

Table 2.5. *Staff background survey sample, by country*

		N	%
Country	**CZ**	4	14
	FL	7	24
	IS	4	14
	LT	4	14
	SI	10	34
	Total	**29**	**100**

Qualitative data

Table 2.6 presents an overview of the qualitative data collected in Wave 1 from interviews and focus groups. As with the collection of quantitative data, national teams used a variety of strategies to gather these data, taking into account their local situation when developing their methodologies.

Table 2.6. *Qualitative data sample by country*

	Service users		**Programme staff**		**Programme partners**		**Policy actors**	
	Method	**N**	**Method**	**N**	**Method**	**N**	**Method**	**N**
Czech Republic	Face-to-face interviews	2	Face-to-face interviews	2	-	-	Face-to-face interviews	3
Flanders	Interviews	4	Focus group	6	Focus group	24	Focus group	5
Iceland	Face-to-face interviews	2	Focus group	4	Focus group	4	Focus group	2
Lithuania	Face-to-face interviews	2	Focus group	4	Face-to-face interviews	4	Face-to-face interviews	6
	Phone interviews	6						
Netherlands	-	-	Interviews	4	Interviews	7	Interviews	5
Slovenia	Face-to-face interviews	2	Focus group	8	Focus group	8	Focus group	6
Total		**18**		**28**		**43**		**31**

N = number of interviewees / focus group participants.
In Iceland only two focus groups were carried out as one focus group included both programme partners and policy actors.

Service users

A total of **18 service users** were interviewed as part of the Wave 1 qualitative strand. These 18 service users were drawn from five of the six partner countries: **no clients in the Netherlands** agreed to be interviewed, probably a consequence of the fact that all eight clients were detainees. Almost half (**eight**) of the interviewees were from **Lithuania**, four were from Flanders, and the Czech Republic, Iceland, and Slovenia conducted two apiece. All eighteen interviews were conducted individually rather than in groups: 11 took place face-to-face and seven (one in Flanders, six in

Lithuania) were carried out by phone. More details on these interviewees can be found in the national reports.

Programme Staff

Most of the qualitative data from programme staff were collected through **focus group discussions**; the exceptions to this were in the Czech Republic where two staff members were interviewed face-to-face in separate interviews, and in the Netherlands where interviews with this group of stakeholders, and also with programme partners and policy actors, were mostly conducted one-to-one. This decision was made to limit group size, to limit participant time investment (no journey to a central location) and to enable the possibility of responding flexibly to the relevant participant's agenda. **Slovenia** interviewed the greatest number of programme staff: eight in total, all attending one focus group. Of the six staff participating in the Flemish focus group, five were counsellors and one a programme coordinator.

Programme Partners

There are no programme partners in the Czech Republic, as all partnership work to date has taken place on an informal basis. In Lithuania, data from programme partners and policy actors was collected in interviews and not in focus groups, as this was easier to schedule. In **Iceland**, because of overlaps between programme partners and policy actors in this small country, and existing partnerships, **one focus group** was held for all partner and actor stakeholders (six individuals).

Policy Actors

In Slovenia, focus groups were selected to gather qualitative data as these afforded the opportunity for sharing comments, views, and opinions between people who, in contrast to the situation in Iceland, rarely meet. Again, in the Czech Republic no focus groups were conducted: data from policymakers (three) was gathered through face-to-face interviews.

2.3 Data collection methods

To ensure the collection of robust data and the consistency of instrument administration across the six countries, IOE created an **evaluation manual** containing guidelines for the use of the data collection tools. Version 1 of the manual (November 2015) included protocols for two quantitative instruments used in ongoing data collection. Version 2 (March 2016) added guidelines for the administration of the Wave 1 Topic Guides and other instruments, as well as guidance for completing the national reports. Future iterations of the manual will include protocols for administering Wave 2 instruments and writing the final national report.

Due to **different implementation timeframes and challenges** across the six countries, data collection began at different points: April 2015 (Flanders), January 2016 (Czech Republic), February 2016 (Iceland, Lithuania, the Netherlands) and March 2016 (Slovenia). The originally established **cut-off date for Wave 1 data collection** was 8 April 2016. However, in two countries, the Czech Republic and the Netherlands, it was felt that due to rollout challenges and other unexpected delays, it would be more useful to **extend** data collection by one month, to 8 May 2016.

Monitoring data

No one approach was used in the collection of monitoring data. The choices local teams made were shaped by the individual contexts in which they work, the time available during guidance sessions and the structure of those sessions, and the need to strike the right balance in limiting **administrative burdens** on counsellors and **cognitive burdens** on clients.

Monitoring data in the **Czech Republic** were collected by the counsellors and were recorded into the printed templates. Data from these templates were then entered into Excel. In **Flanders**, monitoring data were gathered by the clients' counsellors and were registered in their **local data registration systems**. For the most part, extra fields for the variables required by the evaluation were added to existing systems and counsellors were given instructions on how to complete these fields. At the cut-off date for data collection, in April 2016, the data were transferred from the local databases to the database developed by the IOE.

Quantitative monitoring data in **Iceland** were collected electronically with the **online survey software**, Qualtrics. During guidance sessions, counsellors filled in the information gathered from clients using an online survey link and a specific individual client number. The structure of the survey was set using the data monitoring template. Different questions were used for the initial interview and subsequent interviews. Once the session was over the counsellors submitted the survey and the answers were registered automatically and simultaneously made accessible to the local evaluators. Using an online survey link for administering the monitoring data gathering and the satisfaction survey was the ideal option from the Icelandic perspective as it both **simplified data collection and registration and also ensured data protection**. It was thought that clients might feel their **anonymity** would be better protected using an electronic survey than if they were asked to put their questionnaire into an envelope and hand it over to a staff member at the programme site where they just had the guidance session.

In **Lithuania** monitoring data were collected during the guidance session by asking each service user specific questions from the data monitoring instrument or by the counsellor filling in information during or after the session. All answers were then entered into an Excel file by local evaluators. In the **Netherlands** an online instrument for data monitoring was used. The **online monitoring survey** was conducted and the data were entered by client managers during an intake session among all clients who have low basic skill levels according to the basic skills quick scan. The advantage of using an online instrument is that all the data that are entered are available for analysis by researchers in a central, secure place.

Local evaluators in **Slovenia** designed **three paper-based questionnaires** based on the monitoring data template: one with questions for the first counselling session only; one with questions to be answered at each counselling session, and one with questions for the last counselling session only. The counsellors filled these in during the counselling sessions and afterwards input the data into the data monitoring template.

Client Satisfaction Survey

In **Flanders** client satisfaction survey data were collected through an **online** tool, with the survey completed anonymously by clients immediately after their first session. In the **Netherlands** clients whose quick scan indicated that they had low basic skills were asked to complete an online client satisfaction survey at the end of the intake session (if necessary with the client manager's support). In Iceland the client satisfaction survey was administered using the online survey software Qualtrics. After the first or second interview clients were shown into a room with a computer, separate from where the interview took place. They took the survey using an anonymous survey link. Assistance was optional and given, if needed, by a staff member at the programme site but not from the counsellor that just had the session with the client. Once clients had completed the survey they submitted their answers which were then automatically registered and simultaneously made accessible to local evaluators. For evaluators in Iceland, an electronic survey represented a more effective way of reassuring clients about anonymity than a paper-based survey did.

In the Czech Republic clients completed the client satisfaction survey in paper version distributed at the end of each session. Questionnaires were printed for the clients, as it was felt that offering the survey in this format would be easiest for clients. All of the questionnaires were filled by the clients themselves, without any help. Data from the questionnaires were then entered into Excel. After each session in Lithuania each service user was asked to fill in a paper-based client survey questionnaire about their experience of the guidance. Completed client satisfaction questionnaires were collected in a sealed box. All answers were then entered into an Excel file by local evaluators. The Slovenian survey was also paper-based.

2.4 Data analysis

In this **mixed methods evaluation**, a number of analytical approaches were used. Quantitative data were analysed using mainly **descriptive statistics**, e.g. frequencies, averages, group comparisons and cross-tabulations. For this Wave 1 report, most of the investigation relies on descriptive statistics, as **GOAL programme participant numbers are as yet too small** for any in-depth inferential statistical analysis.

Raw data from national monitoring data collection, client satisfaction survey and programme staff survey was merged into one database and used for all the analysis in cross country reports. Where some variables needed **coding and banding** this was done from the raw data rather than using existing codes from the national datasets, in order to check the data and its consistency across all six countries.

Qualitative data from focus groups and interviews were analysed using mainly thematic analysis around the topic guides that were explicitly linked to the main aims and objectives of the project. In addition some typology analysis and group comparison analysis were also used.

Methodological challenges

Programme set-up challenges

By far the most significant programme challenge to date is the challenge the teams experienced in getting their services up and running and, in particular, of bringing the target group to the services: this was a significant challenge in four of the six countries (no significant problems emerged in Flanders and Lithuania). Looking across the four countries that struggled with service-user numbers, some themes emerge:

- **Defining the target group**
  One aim of the GOAL programmes is that the guidance should aim to move service users towards taking "one step up", that is, gain an educational qualification at one higher level. More loosely it might refer to taking a step forward in employment, or relate to improvements in aptitudes or attitudes. This expectation, however, is one that may be too challenging for particularly disadvantaged clients, such as those in Iceland. Here, clients have struggled to achieve even basic steps such as showing up for their appointments. There may therefore be a need to expand GOAL's conceptualisation of "one step up" to include smaller steps such as showing up, or showing up on time. Recruitment was delayed in Iceland because due to lack of agreement on eligibility for the programme.
- **Characteristics of the target group**
  Considerable emphasis in the Icelandic project plan was placed on delivering services to a group of people that has to date been inactive and extremely difficult to reach. Achieving this proved to be more difficult than anticipated; not only was it hard to get clients to participate in the project in the first place, but keeping them in the project after they have agreed to take part and show up for the initial interview was also difficult.
- **Need to recruit and establish partnerships/networks for referral**
  The project team in the Netherlands experienced particular problems in recruiting organisations (from which clients would be drawn) to the programme. The major stumbling block to date has come in persuading organisations that there is a **direct** benefit to them of using the basic skills quick scan with their clients and evaluating its use. For many of the organisations that were approached by Stichting Lezen en Schrijven (the Reading and Writing Foundation), the GOAL requirements represented an administrative burden they were unwilling to take on for the perceived benefits it would bring them.
  In Slovenia, networks have proved to be large and complicated to set-up.

In essence, these challenges expose the **vulnerability or contingent nature of this type of guidance programme**. Services that **depend on other organisations for referrals** must work hard to establish and maintain relationships with these organisations. In particular, (see Chapter 5 for more details) in order to bring organisations on board, either the direct benefits to that organisation, where these exist, or the indirect benefits in terms of achieving a shared common goal (for example, moving people from unemployment to employment) must be clear – and, from the partners' perspective,

these benefits must outweigh the drawbacks of partnership, e.g. the administrative burden. Guidance service providers must also take steps to ensure that the information provided about the service by these organisations is clear, up-to-date, and appropriate for the target group.

Although none of these challenges is a methodological challenge for the evaluation as such, they have had **implications for the evaluation**. Where partnerships and networks took time to establish, such as in Slovenia, this delayed the launch of the guidance programme, limiting the data collection fieldwork period.

There have also been challenges (of various sizes) regarding the make-up of the recruited clients. The Lithuanian client group sample is predominantly male; this appears to be partly because males in Lithuania have lower educational attainment than women in Lithuania, and because one of the intervention sites is an adult education institution offering vocational programmes in traditionally male occupations. Although this presents no problems in data analysis, it has led programme developers in Lithuania to reflect on the clients the service currently reaches. Slovenia is targeting older adults in one its two locations, but this group are underrepresented in their Wave 1 dataset.

Data collection challenges

Evaluators from Flanders reported that staff members at one of the programme sites needed time to build up experience and familiarity with the data monitoring system. (Existing registration systems at de Stap were not suitable for the collection of GOAL data.) **Flemish counsellors felt that the data registration system required too much time during the session**, so both de Stap and de Leerwinkel developed their own forms to make notes during the sessions. They then entered the data in the electronic system after the session. This placed additional burdens on counsellors.

Initial resistance to the volume of monitoring data teams were required to collect by IOE was not unique to Flanders. Although these fears have to a large extent proved to be unfounded, they do draw attention to the fact that under modern managerial and workload efficiency pressures, it is **difficult to add an extra task into the workload**, especially where it is unclear to the organisation how this additional work will bring them direct benefits.

Several countries reported that it was a challenge for some **service users**, especially those with poor basic skills, to evaluate their experiences. Lithuanian evaluators reported that clients with low levels of education found it challenging to summarise, analyse and reflect on their experiences. In the Czech Republic, no service users had had any prior experience of guidance in adulthood, meaning they cannot compare their experience of the GOAL service with any baseline.

Challenges of collecting data on programme impacts

Because **programme rollout typically took longer than expected**, many clients were still in an early stage of counselling, and as a result **little outcome data is available**. For example, all the clients in Iceland and most of those in Slovenia were still in the guidance process at the Wave 1 cut-off date, meaning that it was not feasible to measure even relatively short-term programme impacts. In some

countries the programme model allowed for one guidance session only, and follow-up data from these clients could not be collected during the Wave 1 timeframe.

While outcome data will become more readily available over the rest of the project, **some target groups may be particularly difficult to collect outcome data from**. In the Netherlands it was not possible to arrange any follow-up interviews with detainees in Wave 1. Other countries have expressed an interest in recruiting prisoners/detainees, but this may present not recruitment challenges (see the experiences of Czech Republic and Iceland) but also challenges relating to observing longer term impacts.

Data analysis challenges

At the national reporting level, **countries with small service-user samples** (Czech Republic, Iceland, and the Netherlands) were unable to carry out anything other than descriptive analysis.

The differing levels of success in reaching low-education adults in the GOAL project's first phase does have implications for data analysis at the cross-country level: the **total number of Wave 1 service users for Flanders is greater than that for the other five participating countries combined** and in the Netherlands the number is very small. There is therefore the danger than any insights offered about the Wave 1 service users are primarily relevant to only one country rather than the entire project. Thus any **comparisons at a country level and also between target groups have to be made with caution**.

2.5 Key methodological findings

A key finding is that in most of the participating countries the **data monitoring template proved to be a far more useful tool than was originally envisaged** by the local programme developers and evaluators. Concerns were raised at the design stage about the amount and level of information being requested, especially given the vulnerability of the target group. These concerns included the justifiable fear that collecting monitoring data might interfere with the flow of the guidance. In practice, however, this did not happen. Indeed, the national reports indicate that not only did the data monitoring template not intrude on the counselling process, it **facilitated and enhanced guidance sessions**, adding a level of structure that was helpful and deepening the counsellor's understanding of their clients. The exception to this favourable feedback is Flanders, where counsellors felt that the data monitoring instrument required the inputting of too much information that was not directly relevant to the counselling process.

The other significant critique of the evaluation's data collection tools relates to **qualitative interview schedules**, which were felt by some to be **too broad ranging and time consuming**. Flanders, Iceland and Slovenia struggled to administer the qualitative interview schedules in a focus group setting, as it was too long.

2.6 Methodological implications

As outlined in Section 2.1 above, the **methodology chosen for the GOAL evaluation was shaped by the complexities of the project design**, chief among these being that six different programmes are being implemented in 12 different locations to adults that face multiple challenges in their daily lives not just their education and careers.

For the most part, this interim evaluation report contains evidence that the evaluation design is producing useful evidence on **programe and policy processes and mechanisms**, which will allow researchers to draw meaningful insights at the national and cross-national level by the time of the project's conclusion. However, as explained above, a number of challenges have arisen during Wave 1 that have a bearing on both the quantity and breadth of the dataset. One evaluation challenge in particular should be highlighted. A recurring theme in this Wave 1 report is that the GOAL programme in the **Netherlands is very much an outlier**; it is not an elaborate programme of guidance, as in the other five countries, but a quick scanning and referral process. So whereas the more comprehensive programmes can, to a large extent, absorb the requirements of the evaluation research (e.g. the extensive data monitoring template), doing so is more problematic in the Netherlands, where the evaluation components have represented an administrative burden that seems too large for such a light touch intervention.

Looking forward to Wave 2, the evaluation teams will continue to collect service user data via the data monitoring tool and the client satisfaction survey. Qualitatively, Wave 2 analysis will focus on addressing and exploring the key issues arising in the Wave 1 findings. In addition, each country will seek to collect longitudinal follow-up data from a minimum of 30 clients per country, in order to investigate programme impacts. The follow-up survey instrument will be designed in autumn 2016. In the instrument design process, the IOE and local evaluation teams will build on lessons learned in Wave 1, e.g. the importance of clearly communicating the purpose of data collection to key stakeholders, especially programme staff. Initial resistance to aspects of the data monitoring instrument underscores the importance of such communication, particularly in an initiative such as GOAL wherein the evaluation serves not just to assess the programme at the end of its life but also to provide a resource to support programme improvements along the way.

3 Programme Participants and Stakeholders

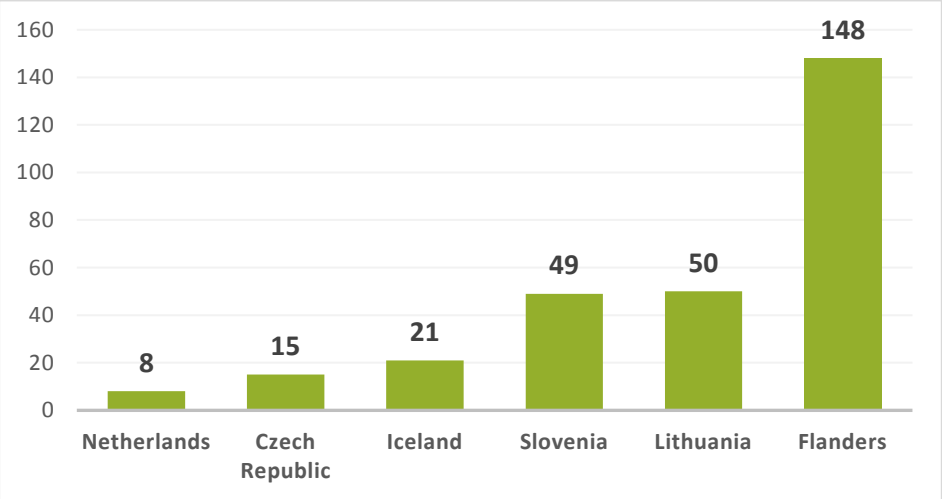
This chapter provides descriptive data on the GOAL service users and staff in the six participating countries. These data are drawn from quantitative and qualitative data gathered during Wave 1. The intention in this chapter is to develop a picture of: a) the target client group in each country, and b) GOAL staff. In doing so, we seek to provide context for the programme's objectives, successes and challenges. Programme partners are discussed in Chapter 5.

3.1 Service users

Socio-demographic characteristics

Before presenting any descriptive analysis of the quantitative service-user data, it is important to remember the imbalances in the samples at a country level (see Figure 3.1). On the one hand, Flanders provided (at least some) data on 148 service users (and full data on around 90), while on the other we have data on only eight service users from the Netherlands. Therefore, it will at times be necessary to consider the data both in aggregate (all six countries) and without the outsize influence of Flanders.

Figure 3.1. *Number of service users in each country (N=291)*



Target Group

The data monitoring template asked counsellors to record the target group which best represents the service user in the context of their guidance session. Only one answer could be selected, although in practice many service users "belong" to more than one category. As Table 3.1 illustrates, **67% of the Wave 1 service users are early school leavers**. This does however, reflect, the fact that all the service users from Flanders, who make up 51% of the entire sample, were classified as early school leavers, as this is the target group of the service in that region (Table 3.22). The other sizable subgroup was that of "**job-seeker/unemployed**" – almost one in five of the service users across the

six countries was placed in this category. As in Flanders, almost all service users in the Czech Republic were classified as early school leavers, but as national reporting makes clear, nine of the 13 early school leavers in the Czech Republic are also unemployed, and in Flanders, 58% of the sample is unemployed and 28% inactive. In Lithuania, the two programme sites are education and training centres offering courses to early school leavers and job-seekers/unemployed; similarly, in Iceland the Education and Training Services Centres primarily offer services to these two cohorts.

Table 3.1. *Target groups*

	N	%
Job-seeker/unemployed	53	18
Early school leaver	194	67
Migrant/refugee/asylum seeker	6	2
Detainee	7	2
Over-50	15	5
Employed (& low-educated)	16	6
Total	**291**	**100**

Client data from the Netherlands were only gathered in one site: a prison. All clients in the Netherlands, bar one, were therefore classified in the monitoring data as "**detainees**" and no other countries delivered counselling sessions to prisoners (see Section 5.2 for more on this).

Table 3.2. *Target groups, by country (in absolute numbers)*

Target group	Country					
	CZ	**FL**	**IS**	**LT**	**NL**	**SI**
Job-seeker/unemployed	2	-	5	23	-	23
Early school leaver	13	148	12	21	-	-
Migrant/refugee/asylum seeker	-	-	-	-	1	5
Detainee	-	-	-	-	7	-
Over-50	-	-	4	3	-	8
Employed (& low-educated)	-	-	-	3	-	13
Total	**15**	**148**	**21**	**50**	**8**	**49**

Gender

In the Wave 1 GOAL sample as a whole (see table 3.3.) **male service users (58%) outnumber female service users** (42%). In Iceland, two-thirds of clients are male (see Table A.1 in Appendix A). In Lithuania, all but five of the fifty clients are male, as the intervention sites through which the guidance services are offered attract considerably more males than females to their educational (second chance) and vocational courses. In the Netherlands, all clients are male (as all were detainees in a male prison). In Flanders there was less imbalance, but male service users still slightly outnumber female (55% and 45%).

In the Czech Republic (60% and 40%) and Slovenia (71% and 29%) there were more female than male service users in the Wave 1 sample.

Table 3.3. *Characteristics of service users: Gender*

	N	%
Male	169	58
Female	122	42
Total	**291**	**100**

As table **Fout! Ongeldige bladwijzerverwijzing.**3.4. shows, **different target groups have different gender balances**. The group of jobseeker/unemployed has a higher proportion of male service users, but among the employed (and low-educated) and migrant/refugee target groups there is a much higher proportion of female service users.

Table 3.4. *Characteristics of service users: Target group by gender*

Target group	Male		Female	
	N	%	N	%
Job-seeker/unemployed	37	70	16	30
Early school leaver	111	57	83	43
Migrant/refugee/asylum seeker	2	33	4	67
Detainee	7	100	-	-
Over-50	8	53	7	47
Employed (& low-educated)	4	25	12	75
Total	**169**	**58**	**122**	**42**

Age

Looking across all six countries, we can see that the vast majority of GOAL service users in Wave 1 were aged **35 years or under** (217 of 286), with the most common age range being between 19 and 25 years old.

Table 3.5. *Characteristics of service users: Age (missing data N=5)*

	N	%
18 and under	18	6
19-25	126	44
26-35	74	26
36-55	59	21
55-65	9	3
66 and older	1	-.3
Total	**274**	**100.3**

Note: percentages do not add to 100% because of rounding

As with target groups, this profile is determined in large part by the Flemish sample – overall, **79% of clients in Flanders were aged under 26**, including all but three clients at de Stap – although the observation that most service users were in the younger age bands holds good for most countries (see Table A.2 in Appendix A). So, in Lithuania, for example, 72% of service users were aged under 35. Half of clients in Iceland were aged 26 to 35. Most (60%) clients in Slovenia were aged between 26 and 45, despite the plan to target adults aged over 50 in one of the intervention locations: only eight

clients were registered in this target group. No service users in the Czech Republic were aged over 45; eight of the 15 clients were aged between 36 and 45.

Analysing data on age in more depth, Lithuanian evaluators note that younger service-users sought guidance primarily to aid with job-seeking; exploring educational opportunities gained more importance as a motivation at a later life stage. Researchers speculate that younger people are driven by the desire to find a job that quickly secures them an income and only later, when that job does not satisfy their personal needs or interests, do individuals start thinking about new career paths and learning new skills.

As the data summarised in table 3.6. demonstrate, in Wave 1 female service users tend to be slightly older than male service users.

Table 3.6. *Characteristics of service users: Age by gender*

Age bands	Male		Female	
	N	%	N	%
18 and under	10	6	8	7
19-25	83	50	43	36
26-35	38	23	36	30
36-55	28	17	31	26
55-65	7	4	2	2
66 and older	-	-	1	1
Total	166	100	121	102

Note: percentages do not add to 100% because of rounding up

Residence

Most service users in Wave 1 were citizens of the country in which they live: 86% were nationals. The next most common residence status was refugee.

Table 3.7. *Characteristics of service users: Residence status (missing data N=4)*

	N	%
National/citizen	247	86
EU national	9	3
Non-EU national with residence permit	10	4
Asylum seeker	5	2
Refugee	16	6
Other	1	-.3
Total	**275**	**101.3**

Note: percentages do not add to 100% because of rounding

However, it should be noted that all 16 service users who are refugees in the sample, and four of the five asylum seekers, are in Flanders. Most countries are providing guidance for citizens only. This is the case for all the sample in Iceland and the Czech Republic; 96% of clients in Lithuania were Lithuanian and 90% of those in Slovenia were Slovene.

Table 3.8. *Characteristics of service users: Residency status by country, percentages are given in brackets*

	CZ	FL	IS	LT	NL	SI
National/citizen	15 (100)	114 (79)	21 (100)	48 (96)	5 (63)	44 (90)
EU national	-	6 (4)	-	1 (2)	1 (13)	1 (2)
Non-EU national with residence permit	-	5 (3)	-	1 (2)	-	4 (8)
Asylum seeker	-	4 (3)	-	-	1 (13)	-
Refugee	-	16 (11)	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	1(13)	-

Home Language

In the Wave 1 dataset as a whole, almost three-quarters (72%) of service users were native speakers of a main language/s of the GOAL project country.

Table 3.9. *Characteristics of service users: Home language (missing data N=10)*

	N	%
Native speaker	203	72
Linguistic minority	78	28
Total	**281**	**100**

As the data summarised in Table 3.10 demonstrate service users who are native speakers tend to be slightly older than service users from linguistic minorities.

Table 3.10. *Characteristics of service users: Age by home language*

	Linguistic minority		Native speaker	
	N	%	N	%
18 and under	2	3	15	8
19-25	43	56	77	39
26-35	18	23	56	28
36-55	13	16	45	23
55-65	2	3	6	3
66 and older	-	-	1	1
Total	**78**	**101**	**200**	**102**

Note: percentages do not add to 100% because of rounding

Looking across the six countries (see Table 3.11), most GOAL service users in the Czech Republic, Iceland, and Slovenia were native speakers of the language of the country they lived in. This was not the case in the Netherlands, where only three of the eight clients spoke Dutch as their native language, or in Flanders, where Dutch was the native language of 62% of the sample. Service users in Flanders had a total of 18 different first language backgrounds. In Lithuania, 58% of service users spoke Lithuanian at home, 28% Russian, 12% Polish and 2% English, a reflection of the languages spoken by the general Vilnius population.

Table 3.11. *Characteristics of service users: Home language, percentages are given in brackets*

	CZ	FL	IS	LT	NL	SI
Linguistic minority	-	45 (32)	1 (5)	21 (42)	5 (63)	6 (12)
Native speaker	15 (100)	95 (68)	18 (95)	29 (58)	3 (38)	43 (88)

Education and employment characteristics

Highest educational level

The GOAL project is specifically targeted at adults without upper secondary education, and **78% of the Wave 1 sample have lower secondary education or less** as their highest educational level (see 3.12**Fout! Ongeldige bladwijzerverwijzing.**). The remaining 22% have completed higher levels of education, including 54 service users with upper secondary education and three clients with tertiary level education.

No service user in Flanders has completed e ducation at a higher level than lower secondary (see Table A.3 in Appendix A). In Lithuania, 36% of service users have achieved upper secondary education. In Iceland, researchers reported that clients who had completed vocational education at the upper secondary level were often unable to continue working in the profession in which they had been trained and were engaging in counselling as part of vocational rehabilitation. Rates of clients with vocational upper secondary education in Slovenia are high (35% of service users), a reflection of levels within the general population.

Table 3.12. *Highest Educational Level (missing data N=6)*

	N	%	Cumulative %
Not completed primary education	8	3	3
Primary education	36	13	16
Lower secondary education	178	63	79
General upper secondary education (gymnasium)	20	7	86
Vocational education (upper secondary level)	34	12	98
Post-secondary education, non-tertiary	6	2	100
Tertiary education (bachelors, masters and doctoral degrees)	3	1	101
Total	285	101	

Note: percentages do not add to 100% because of rounding

Current education and learning

Out of all the Wave 1 service users, **75 (26%) were involved in learning at the time of their guidance session**, and out of those slightly more than one third (28 clients) were working towards a qualification.

In the case of the Netherlands, six of the eight service users were currently involved in education: this is directly related to their status as prisoners who can access training programmes through the prison's education department (see Table A.4 and A.5 in Appendix A). Iceland also reported that a high proportion (71%) of service users were currently involved in education. For these clients, these

educational programmes were unlikely to be formal (13 of the 15 individuals were not working towards a qualification) and included various courses designed to prepare individuals to go back to study.

Just under half of Lithuanian service users were engaged in education and training; and of these 22 clients, only a small minority (four clients) were working toward a qualification. At the other end of the scale, 84% of clients in Slovenia were not involved in education, and of the 16% who were, only two service users were working towards a qualification. In Flanders, also, only a small minority were in education at the time of their guidance sessions (23 clients in total), although over half of these (15) are working towards a formal qualification.

Employment status

Over half (57%) of the Wave 1 GOAL clients were unemployed. In the Czech Republic this was true for all but three of the 15 clients, a reflection of the key role in referral played by the Labour Office. In Iceland there were also only three (of 21) service users in any kind of employment; similarly in Flanders, unemployed and economically inactive service users (84%) vastly outnumber employed ones (14%) (see Table A.6 in Appendix A).

A fifth of service users are registered as economically inactive, that is, not retired and not looking for a job. This includes all eight clients from the Netherlands (prisoners).

Around two thirds (64%) of the Lithuanian sample were unemployed or economically inactive.

In Slovenia, 55% of the client sample are unemployed. Analysis suggests that those in the sample with higher level of education are more likely to be unemployed than those with lower levels of education (primary or lower secondary).

Table 3.13. *Current employment status of service users at the first session (missing data N=5)*

	N	%
Employed full-time	40	14
Employed part-time	10	4
Self-employed	8	3
Unemployed	164	57
Retired	2	1
Inactive (not retired and not actively looking for a job)	56	20
Other	7	2
Total	287	101

Note: percentages do not add to 100% because of rounding up

Data from Wave 1 (see Table B.1 in Appendix B) suggest there is **no strong connection between educational level and employment status** for service users. This may be because the project overall has had a focus on a relatively low skilled group of people but their employment status was not a primary criterion for them to be selected into the project.

There were some differences among target groups with regards to their educational status. However, the numbers for some groups were too small to draw any conclusions (see Table B.2 in Appendix B).

Unsurprisingly, younger service users had lower educational level; however, the data do not allow us to conclude if these are generational differences or just a natural association between education and age (see Table B.3 in Appendix B).

Previous guidance

On aggregate, **39% of service users had some previous experience of adult guidance**. None of the Wave 1 clients in the Czech Republic had any previous experience of receiving such guidance. Only two of the eight clients in the Netherlands and eight of the 50 clients in Lithuania had received guidance previously. In Flanders and Iceland, however, around half the service users had previous experience of guidance.

Table 3.14. *Previous guidance received by country*

		No		Yes	
		N	%	N	%
Country	Czech Republic	15	100	-	-
	Flanders	74	50	74	50
	Iceland	10	48	10	48
	Lithuania	42	84	8	16
	Netherlands	6	75	2	25
	Slovenia	29	59	20	41
	Total	**176**	**60**	**114**	**39**

Note: 1 service user in Iceland did not know if he/she received any previous guidance

This highlights an important contextual difference amongst the GOAL countries, which may have an impact on the uptake of guidance and the impact it has. **Neither the Czech Republic nor Lithuania have a tradition of adult guidance**; furthermore, both national reports draw attention to a cultural resistance to counselling/guidance and, certainly in the Lithuanian context, among men in particular. In the Czech Republic this is further complicated by the links between the GOAL service and the Labour Office. In this environment the career counselling can appear as a mandatory service to clients, with receipt of benefits contingent on attendance (although this is not actually the case). This perception can impact both on what clients expect can be achieved through the sessions, and also the responses they give to data monitoring questions about goals, attitudes and expectations, as social desirability may be a strong influence.

Self-efficacy

In the initial guidance session clients were asked to answer three questions concerning their own judgment about their self-efficacy, i.e. their self-perceived ability to achieve desired outcomes in life. Each question was made up of two statements, one presenting a more positive view and the other a more negative view. The positive statement gave the client a score of 1 point for that question and

the negative one gave them a score of 0 points; thus the scores for the whole scale could range from 0-3 points, with 3 representing a client who chose the positive statement for all three questions and who thus had the highest possible score on the self-efficacy scale. The lowest possible score was 0.

Table 3.15. *Self-efficacy scores*

	N	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
0	7	2	4	4
1	36	12	19	23
2	51	18	27	50
3	97	33	51	101
Total	191	65	101	
Missing data	101	35		
Total	292	100		

Note: percentages do not add to 100% because of rounding up

Across the six project countries, only seven (4%) of the 191 clients for who we have data gave three negative answers and thus scored 0 on the scale. Half of the service users (51%) gave three positive answers, scoring 3 on the scale.

Table 3.16. *Self-efficacy scores by country*

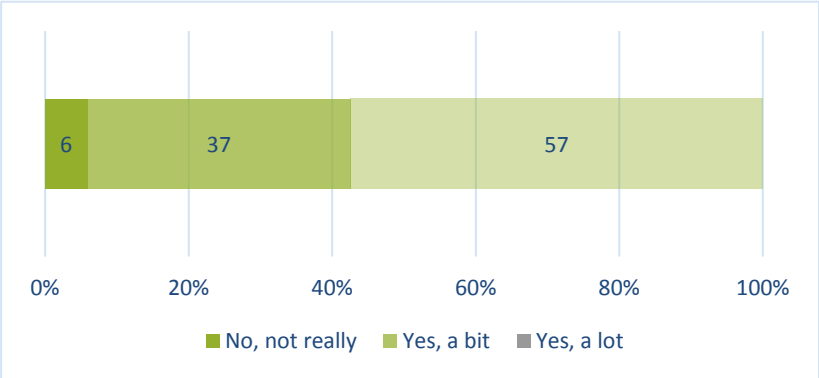
		CZ		FL		IS		LT		NL		SI		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Self-efficacy score	**0**	-	-	2	4	1	5	3	6	-	-	1	2	**7**	**4**
	1	3	20	13	27	8	38	5	10	-	-	7	15	**36**	**19**
	2	7	47	12	24	5	24	16	32	2	25	9	19	**51**	**27**
	3	5	33	22	45	7	33	26	52	6	75	31	65	**97**	**51**

At first glance, these self-efficacy scores may seem higher than might be expected give the multi-problem backgrounds of many in the target group. Lithuanian evaluators speculated that results for that country might be influenced by a stereotype in Lithuania that it is unacceptable, especially for males, to recognise and show own weakness in public. Higher than expected self-efficacy scores for this target group may also potentially be explained by selection bias, as **many GOAL clients are motivated** enough to choose to seek help and come to guidance sessions.

Attitudes to learning

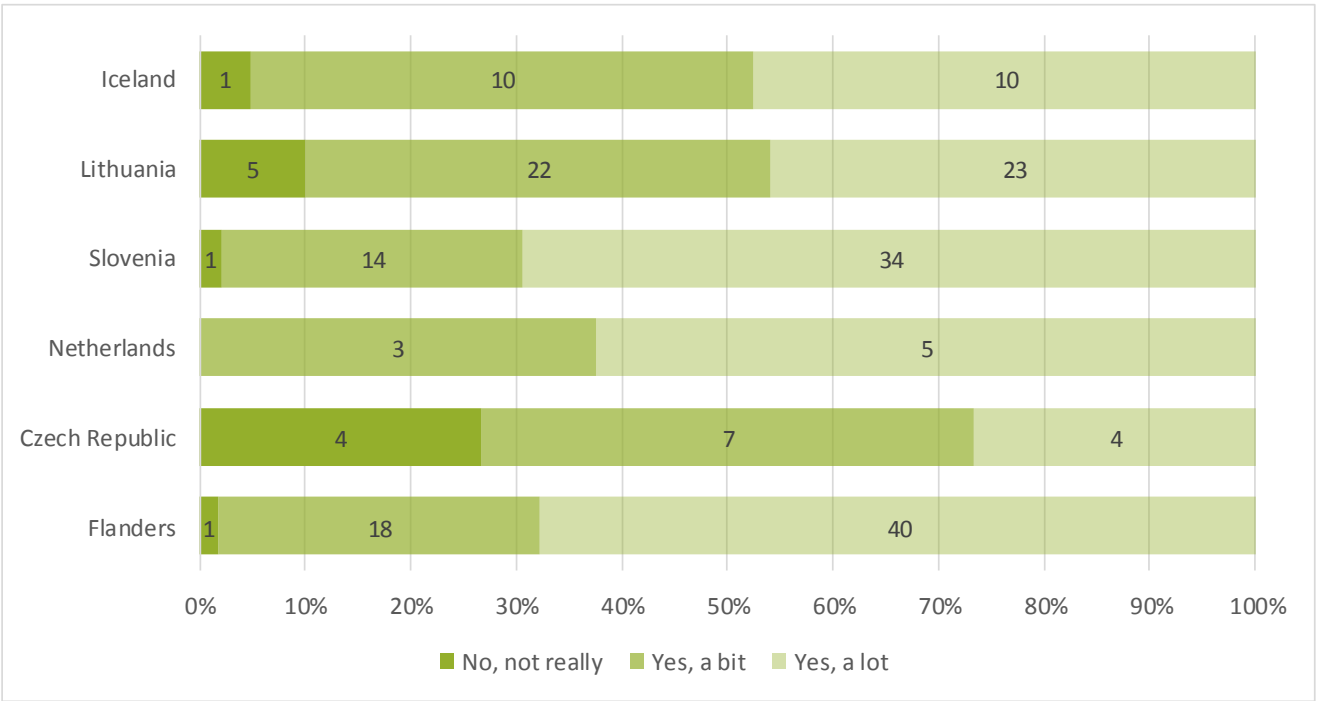
In their sessions service users in the six project countries reported on their enjoyment of learning (see Figure 3.2). Slightly more than a half (57%) of the service users agreed that they liked learning a lot, a further 37% reported that they liked learning new things a bit and only 6% said they did not like learning new things.

Figure 3.2. *% Do you like learning new things, service users' responses at first session (N=181)*



A very **high proportion of service users in most countries reported they liked learning new things** a lot or a bit; however, Lithuania (10%) and the Czech Republic (26%) had a much higher proportion than other countries of service users who said that they did not liked learning new things (see Figure). Evaluators in the Czech Republic speculate that there was little interest among their client sample in education for education's sake: clients wanted to learn only where this learning was part of their route towards employment.

Figure 3.3 *Do you like learning new things, service users' responses at first session by country (in absolute numbers)*



Learning goals

Service users whose guidance focused on educational opportunities were asked if they had specific learning goals. Answers are presented in Table 3.17. Note that clients could choose more than one response, thus the final column adds up to more than 100%. No clear association emerged between learning goals and age (see Table B.4 in Appendix B) although evaluators in Flanders did report that although the young people in their sample wanted to obtain a diploma, their previous negative experiences mean that they are disinclined to embark on this goal within a school setting.

Table 3.17. *Do you have specific learning goals? (N= 182)*

	Responses		% of Cases
	N	%	
Yes, I want to achieve a qualification of any sort	56	19	31
Yes, I want to achieve a specific qualification	64	21	35
Yes, I want to improve my skills in general	44	15	24
Yes, I want to improve my skills in a specific area	49	16	27
Yes, I need this training for my current job	16	5	9
Yes, I need this learning to find a job	60	20	33
No, I do not have any specific objectives	11	4	6
Total	300	100	165

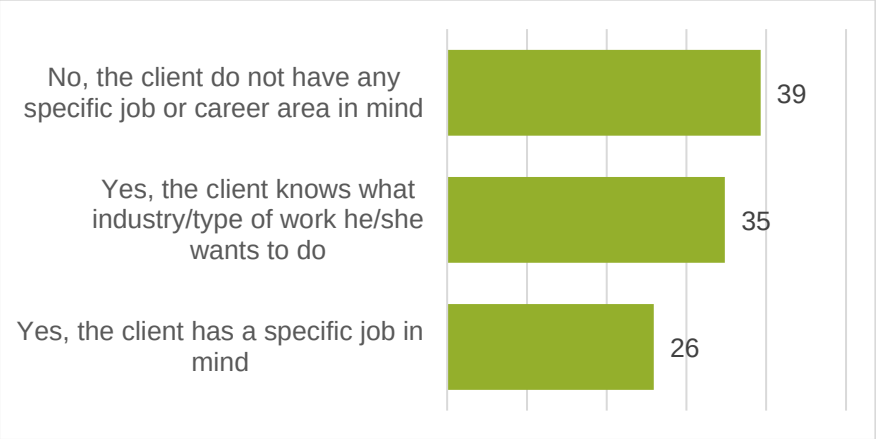
There were some **gender differences**. Male service users were more likely than females to be more specific about the qualification they wanted to achieve (see Figure 3.4.). A higher proportion of male service users wanted to achieve a specific qualification whereas a higher proportion of female service users wanted to achieve a qualification of any sort, but were more specific about an area in which they wanted to improve their skills. However, there was no clear association between learning goals and qualification level (see Table B.6 in Appendix B). The data could not provide evidence for any association between learning goals and employment status as the number of service users in some groups was too small (see Table B.7 in Appendix B).

Figure 3.4. *Specific learning goals, % by gender*

Career goals

Amongst service users whose guidance focused on jobs, **most did not have clear career goals** (see Figure 3.5). Only around one quarter (26%) of service users had a specific job in mind and around one third (35%) knew what industry they wanted to work in and/or the type of work they wanted to do. The remaining clients (39%) did not have any career or specific job in mind. Again, in the Czech Republic, economic motivation appears to be the primary factor behind clients' engagement with the service: there is little evidence to date that education is a goal in and of itself.

Figure 3.5. *% Does your client have clear career goals? (N=112)*



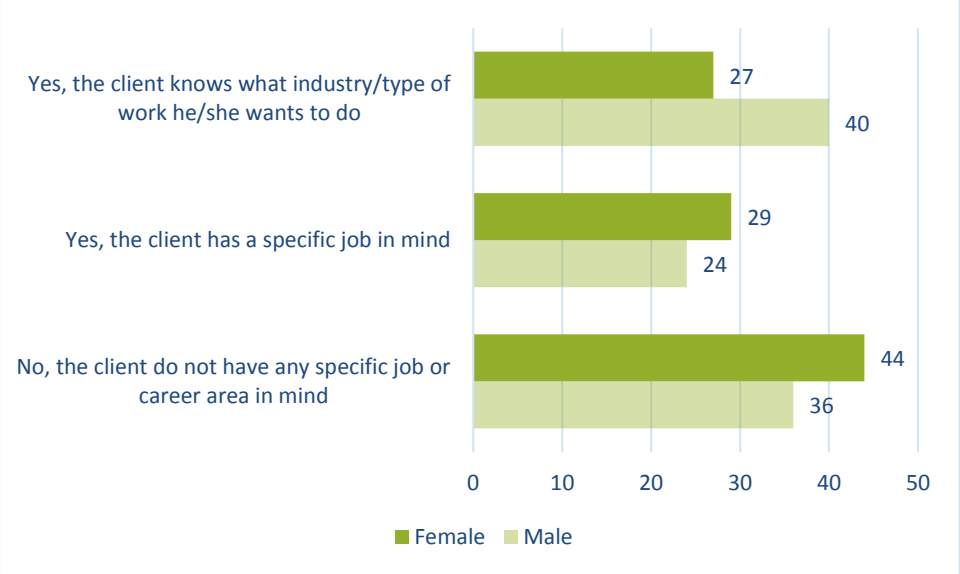
It is noteworthy that a slightly higher proportion of younger service users had more specific ideas about their career, e.g. what job they wanted to do or what industry they wanted to work in.

Table 3.18. *Clarity of career goals by age*

		No, the client do not have any specific job or career area in mind		Yes, the client has a specific job in mind		Yes, the client knows what industry/type of work he/she wants to do	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Age	**18 and under**	2	50	2	50	-	-
	19-25	14	33	12	29	16	38
	26-35	14	39	10	28	12	33
	36-55	8	36	5	23	9	41
	55-65	5	71	-	-	2	29
	66 and older	-	-	-	-	-	-

Male service users had more specific ideas about what job they wanted to do or what industry and/or type of work they wanted to do (see Figure 3.6)

Figure 3.6. *% Clarity of career goals by gender*



The data did not provide any evidence for an association between career goals and target groups nor between career goals and employment, as the number of service users in some groups is too small for analysis. There was also no clear association between clarity of career goals and qualification level (see Tables B.8, B.9, B.10 in Appendix B).

3.2 Programme staff

All staff working on GOAL were asked to complete a pro forma which gathered information on some demographic characteristics, on their job role, and on their qualifications and training. No quantitative data were collected from programme staff in the Netherlands as the nature of the intervention being used there makes this information less relevant, both in itself and in comparison to the other countries.

In this chapter, we report on programme staff's demographic and employment characteristics. Chapter 6, which focuses on counsellor competences, reports on staff's experience, education and training.

Gender

Most GOAL staff are female: 24 programme staff are female and five are male. All four programme staff in Lithuania are women, likewise in Iceland. In Slovenia, seven of the nine counsellors are female and two are male. Flanders follows the same pattern: six of the seven staff are female.

Table 3.19. *Programme staff: gender by country*

		Female		Male	
		N	%	N	%
Country	CZ	3	75	1	25
	FL	6	86	1	14
	IS	4	100	-	-
	LT	4	100	-	-
	SI	7	70	3	30
	Total	**24**	**83**	**5**	**17**

Age

Across the six countries, the **average age of programme staff is 43 years old**, with the youngest being 26 years of age and the oldest 71. Only seven programme staff out of 29 (24%) are 30 or younger (see Table 3.200). **The two countries that were the most different from one another were Slovenia and Flanders**: in the former, all staff were over 40 years old whereas in the latter no staff were.

Table 3.20. *Programme staff: age by country*

		30 and under		31-40		41-50		over 50	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Country	CZ	-	-	2	50	-	-	2	50
	FL	6	86	1	14	-	-	-	-
	IS	-	-	2	50	-	-	2	50
	LT	1	25	-	-	2	50	1	25
	SI	-	-	-	-	7	70	3	30
	Total	**7**	**24**	**5**	**17**	**9**	**31**	**8**	**28**

3.3 Key findings

The **typical GOAL counsellor** is a female in her 40s. A **typical GOAL service user** is male, aged under 35, a citizen of the country in which he is receiving guidance, and educated to lower secondary level only.

The demographic characteristics of the Wave 1 GOAL sample show that **in two of the six countries (Czech Republic, Lithuania), the group of service users are relatively homogenous**. The Flemish sample displays more heterogeneity than that of any other partner country. This heterogeneity may require counsellors to have great flexibility and strong interpersonal competences. Tailor-made guidance and counsellor flexibility are key.

It is worth noting that, despite the general homogeneity in most countries, the Wave 1 samples also hint at meaningful **intra-country differences** between the client bases at each pilot location; these could have a bearing on effective service delivery. For example, clients at the Olomouc site in the Czech Republic, an area marked by higher rates of unemployment, were more likely to be motivated and have clearer career ambitions than those in Most. In Lithuania, the two Vilnius sites attract different client groups and face different challenges in meeting service user needs.

In Iceland the service user group can be characterised as having **multiple complex problems**: some of the service users in the Czech Republic and Flanders also fall into this category. At the more vulnerable end of this scale, they generally lack good personal support systems and are likely to suffer from self-doubt, low self-esteem and low self-worth. These problems present multiple barriers that impact on the service user's ability to act on the guidance. And for the most vulnerable clients, the problems they face in daily life need to be addressed before specific educational guidance can effectively begin. This has significant impacts on counselling resources, and also effects the focus of the counselling sessions.

3.4 Key implications

Implications for programme development

Whereas Iceland is currently focusing on **very disadvantaged clients**, other countries are targeting less challenging groups, i.e. "**low-hanging fruit**". In Lithuania, for example, the process whereby clients come to the service means that it is more motivated people who turn up. **Differences such as these across countries mean that it may be difficult and perhaps even misleading to compare programme outcomes**. In contrast to Iceland, where it is a struggle to even get clients to turn up to meetings, programme staff in Lithuania said that it is easy to work with their clients, as they are motivated and want to improve their lives.

The Lithuanian reporting raises the issue of **low basic skills** and how training in literacy and/or numeracy, and no other types of education and training, may be the first priority for some clients. That is, addressing basic skills issues may be a prerequisite to further learning and progress. This

focus on basic skills is, in effect, the programme theory underpinning the GOAL intervention in the Netherlands). This implies that scanning for low literacy and numeracy may be a desirable component of future programme development in countries other than just the Netherlands.

Implications for policy

The Lithuanian example raises the question of **what can be done at a policy level to bring less motivated adults to this type of service**. This is a particular challenge in the case of low-educated adults, who experience difficulties not only in finding the relevant services, but also in expressing their interests.

The challenges associated with particularly disadvantaged clients, as in Iceland, may have implications for guidance-related policy. It is possible, for instance, that guidance services for particularly hard to reach groups should limit their focus to pre-educational and pre-employment elements such as punctuality, motivation and self-esteem.

Implications for evaluation

As will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 10, the differing needs of client groups across GOAL countries is likely to have implications for assessing programme outcomes. The aim of GOAL is to help clients take the next step up on their educational and/or employment pathway. For many clients, that step may be obvious and easily recorded, e.g. enrolling in a course. For clients such as those in Iceland, however, **the 'next step' may be something as seemingly small as making a slight gain in self-esteem or punctuality**. Such gains are more difficult to document and quantify.

4 The GOAL guidance service

This chapter provides an overview of descriptive information on the GOAL guidance service in the six participating countries, in order to develop our understanding of how the service has been used in the initial stages and why. By analysing quantitative and qualitative data on the GOAL activities and processes to date, the chapter offers preliminary insights into what appears to be working well and less well in the guidance service.

Looking across Europe as a whole, the culture of **adult guidance is underdeveloped**, especially among adults who are traditionally less likely to engage in work-related and other forms of learning, such as those with low literacy and numeracy skills. There is a perception – which to some extent is still borne out by practice – that guidance is almost exclusively a careers-focused service offered in schools at or near the point where students are completing their compulsory education.

According to the ELGPN[9], **guidance within adult education typically takes three forms**:

- *Pre-entry guidance* which supports adults to consider whether to participate in adult learning and what programmes might be right for them.
- *Guidance as an integral part of adult education programmes*. Some adult education programmes are strongly focused on career planning or on the development of employability and career management skills: in these cases, lifelong guidance is often built into the core of the programme.
- *Exit guidance* which supports graduates of adult education programmes to consider how they can use what they have learned to support their progress in further learning and work.

4.1 Guidance activities and processes

Quantitative findings

Reasons for seeking guidance

The monitoring data collection included a question for service users about their reasons for seeking guidance; this was asked during the first counselling session. The most popular reason (see Table 4.1) was "exploring educational opportunities" (75%) followed, with a significant gap, by "finding links between personal interests and occupational/educational opportunities" (37%). A further 22% of the service users mentioned getting assistance with job seeking.

Older service users were more likely than younger users to **seek validation of prior learning** (see Table B.16 in Appendix B). Whereas only 6% of clients aged 35 and younger sought validation of prior learning, 14% of clients aged 36-55 did so, as did 56% of clients aged 55-65. The desire to **explore educational opportunities showed an inverse U-shaped curve with age**. Exploring educational

[9] Hooley, T. (2014) The evidence base on lifelong guidance: A guide to key findings for effective policy and practice. European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network.

opportunities was an objective for 67% of 19-25-year-olds, rose to 84% for 26-35-year-olds, and fell slightly to 76% for 36-55-year-olds.

Table 4.1. *Client reasons for seeking guidance (multiple choice question answers do not add to 100%)*

	Responses		% of Cases
	N	%	
To explore educational opportunities	150	35	75
To validate existing competences/prior learning	22	5	11
To find links between personal interest and occupational/educational opportunities (Interest assessment)	75	17	37
To get assistance with learning technique/strategies	27	6	13
To find financial resources for learning	21	5	10
To get assistance with job seeking	44	10	22
To get assistance with writing a CV	19	4	10
To get information about different institutions and their roles	38	9	19
Because of personal issues	18	4	9
Other	21	5	10
Total	435	100	216

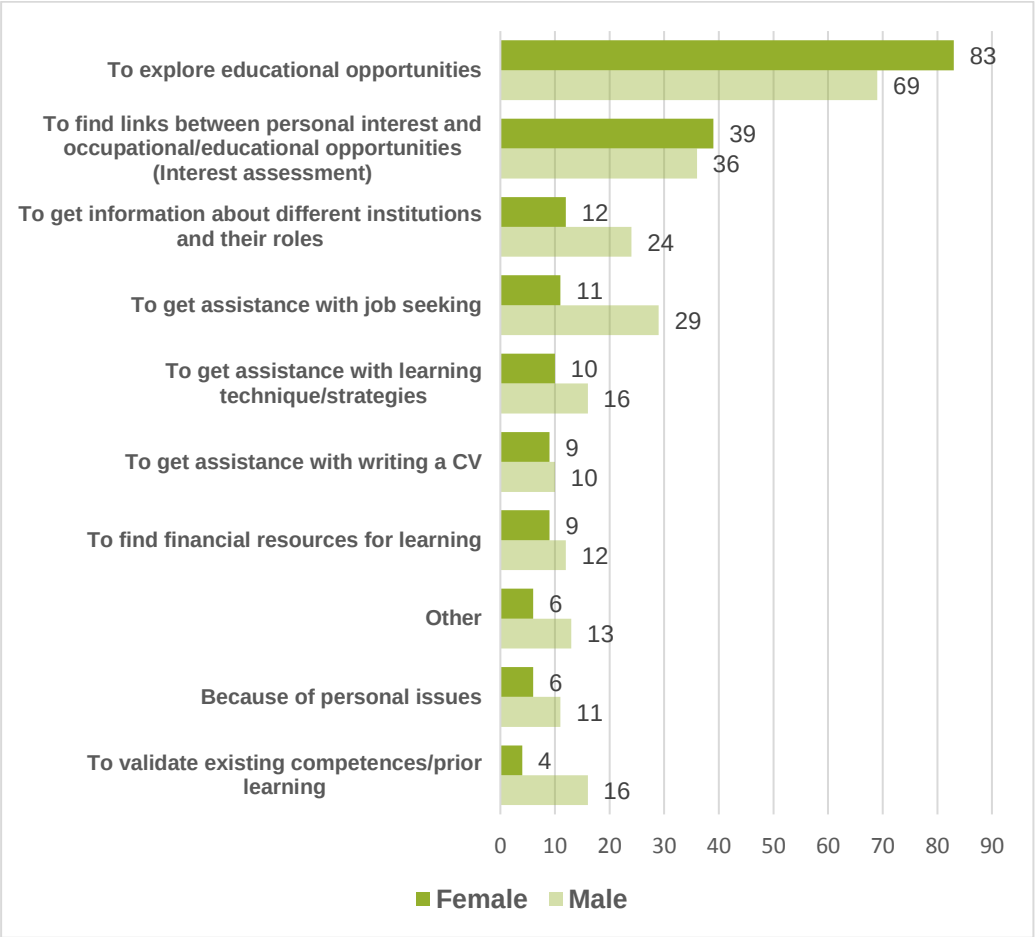
Excluding the Netherlands, which had a very small sample size, a high proportion of clients in all countries sought to explore educational opportunities, as shown in Table 4.2. The other reason that was common across all countries (excluding the Netherlands) **was finding links between personal interests and educational/occupational opportunities**. However, in no country was this reason as common as exploring educational opportunities. Clients in Iceland were the most likely to seek to validate prior learning, with 33% of clients citing this as a reason. In contrast, this objective did not arise in Flanders. Clients in Iceland were also the most likely to seek guidance to address personal issues. Clients in Flanders were the most likely of those in any country to seek information about different institutions and their roles.

Table 4.2. *Client reasons for seeking guidance by country*

		Country					
		CZ	FL	IS	LT	NL	SI
To explore educational opportunities	N	11	53	14	32	2	38
	% within country	73	90	67	64	25	79
To validate existing competences/prior learning	N	1	-	7	6	-	8
	% within country	7	-	33	12	-	17
To find links between personal interest and occupational/educational opportunities (Interest assessment)	N	6	33	10	16	-	10
	% within country	40	56	48	32	-	21
To get assistance with learning technique/strategies	N	-	3	12	9	2	1
	% within country	-	5	57	18	25	2
To find financial resources for learning	N	4	-	9	7	-	1
	% within country	27	-	43	14	-	2
To get assistance with job seeking	N	2	6	10	21	2	3
	% within country	13	10	48	42	25	6
To get assistance with writing a CV	N	1	-	9	5	-	4
	% within country	7	-	43	10	-	8
To get information about different institutions and their roles	N	-	31	2	4	1	-
	% within country	-	53	10	8	13	-
Because of personal issues	N	-	-	9	8	-	1
	% within country	-	-	43	16	-	2
Other	N	1	3	5	2	4	6
	% within country	7	5	24	4	50	13

There were some **gender differences in reasons for seeking guidance**. Male service users were more likely to select validation of prior learning, getting assistance with job seeking and getting information about different institutions and their roles as their reason for seeking guidance, while female service users were more likely to select exploring educational opportunities (see Figure 4.1.).

Figure 4.1. *Reasons for seeking guidance by gender*



As further data exploration suggests (see Table B.18 in Appendix B) early school leavers were more likely to select exploring educational opportunities and finding links between their personal interests and occupational/educational opportunities. Not surprisingly, unemployed/job seekers were more likely not only to cite exploring educational opportunities, but also seeking a job as their reasons for coming to GOAL. Other target groups had samples that were too small to draw any reliable conclusions. The data do not provide any evidence at this stage for an association between qualification level and reasons for seeking guidance. Nor are there data that would suggest a clear relationship between employment status and reasons for seeking guidance. One of the reasons for this might be the small sample sizes for most employment status groups.

Previous barriers to improving education or career

Service users cited a broad range of reasons why they had not improved their education or career more up to this stage in their lives. **No single reason or set of reasons stood out**, but the most commonly cited factor, not being able to afford education or training, was cited by 25% of respondents, as shown in Table 4.3. Other leading causes were lack of motivation (20% of

respondents), "other personal reasons" (19%), negative prior experiences with schooling (17%), lack of confidence (16%), mental or physical health problems (15%), and being too busy taking care of family (15%).

Table 4.3. *Barriers: What sort of things have stopped you improving your education or your career up till now? (multiple choice question answers do not add to 100%)*

	Responses		% of Cases
	N	%	
Insufficient basic skills (e.g. cannot read or write, poor reading and/or writing skills)	9	2	4
Low country's main language proficiency	18	4	8
Lack of prerequisites (entrance requirements)	11	2	5
I was too busy at work	29	6	13
I was too busy taking care of my family	32	7	15
Cost of education or training was too expensive/I could not afford it	54	12	25
Lack of information about courses	13	3	6
No suitable courses available	8	2	4
Courses offered at an inconvenient time/place	15	3	7
Negative prior experience with schooling	37	8	17
Learning disabilities (e.g. ADHD, dyslexia)	15	3	7
Age	7	2	3
Health problems (incl. mental and physical health)	32	7	15
Lack of confidence	35	7	16
Lack of motivation	43	9	20
Lack of support from family	23	5	11
Lack of support from employer	6	1	3
Lack of transport or mobility	13	3	6
Cultural or religious obstacles	2	0.4	1
Criminal record in the past	3	1	1
Other personal reasons	42	9	19
Other	23	5	11
Total	470	100	217

Further data analysis (see Table B.12 in Appendix B) reveals that **female service users were more likely to mention cost of education and being busy taking care of their family, as well as lack of support from family,** as barriers for improving their education and career, whereas a higher proportion of **male service users mentioned negative schooling experiences**, health problems and other personal reasons. The data also show that younger service users are more likely to mention negative experiences at school and lack of motivation as their barriers for improving education and career, while a higher proportion of older service users mention their age, language proficiency and being busy at work as something that stopped them from advancing their education and career until now.

As exploration of data suggests (see Table B.13 in Appendix B), **early school leavers** are more likely to mention cost of education, lack of confidence and negative prior schooling experience as their barriers for improving their education and career. **Job seekers/unemployed** are more likely to mention lack of motivation and other personal reasons.

The quantitative evidence does not suggest any clear association between employment status and barriers for improving education and career, one of the reasons being small sample sizes for most employment status groups. The data also do not demonstrate a clear association between qualification level and barriers to improving education and career.

Contact Type

Across the six countries, 98% of the first counselling sessions and 97% of all subsequent sessions were **individual face-to-face sessions** (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.4. *Type of contact for the first and subsequent sessions*

	First session		Subsequent sessions	
	N	%	N	%
Phone	1	-	1	1
Email	-	-	1	1
Text	-	-	-	-
Face-to Face individual	285	98	141	97
Face-to-Face group	6	2	3	2
Other	-	-	-	-
Total	**292**	**100**	**146**	**100**

Length of session

Most of the first sessions in all six countries were relatively long: **81% were 31 minutes or longer and 51% lasted between 31 and 60 minutes** (see Table 4.5). All first sessions in the Netherlands were under 20 minutes, a fact explained by the quick scan-based model used in that country, for which a maximum of twelve minutes is allocated. Slightly more than half (53%) of the first sessions in Slovenia were 30 minutes or under.

Table 4.5. *Length of the first session by country*

		under 20 min		21-30 min		31-60 min		61 min and above	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Country	**Flanders**	13	9	5	3	61	42	67	46
	Czech Republic	-	-	-	-	12	80	3	20
	Netherlands	8	100	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Slovenia	11	22	15	31	20	41	3	6
	Lithuania	-	-	5	10	41	82	4	8
	Iceland	-	-	-	-	12	57	9	43
	Total	**32**	**11**	**25**	**9**	**146**	**51**	**86**	**30**

It is interesting to note that in all three countries in which more than one session took place, **subsequent sessions were fairly long**. 81% of all subsequent sessions were 31 minutes or longer and 46% lasted between 31 and 60 minutes (see table 4.6.).

Table 4.6. *Length of the subsequent sessions by country*

		under 20 min		21-30 min		31-60 min		61 min and above	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Country	Flanders	10	8	9	7	55	44	51	41
	Slovenia	-	-	6	40	8	53	1	7
	Iceland	-	-	4	44	5	56	-	-
	Total	**10**	**7**	**19**	**13**	**68**	**46**	**52**	**35**

Focus of session

Data on the focus of the session comes from two sources. The first is the **Client Satisfaction Survey**: when completing this survey all clients were asked to indicate the focus of the session. Table 4.7. provides an aggregate overview of client responses, while Table 4.8. shows the country by country breakdown. The client satisfaction survey data indicate that most of the sessions focused on learning (86%) followed by a focus on jobs (49%), with 15% focused on validation of prior learning (VPL). (Clients could choose an option for a focus on jobs *and* learning, meaning that the potential total of focuses exceeds 100%.) Validation of prior learning took place in only three countries. In Iceland 62% of sessions focused on VPL, in Lithuania and Slovenia this percentage was lower: 24% and 19% accordingly. Further analysis of these data (not shown here) indicate that 12% of the sessions across all countries focused solely on jobs and 51% on learning including VPL, while the rest (37%) listed jobs and learning as a joint focus.

Table 4.7. *Focus of the session. What did you talk about with your counsellor today? Client satisfaction survey data. Multiple choice data.*

		Responses		Percent
		N	%	of Cases
Focus of the session	**Jobs**	115	33	49
	Learning	200	57	86
	Validation of prior learning	35	10	15
Total		**350**	**100**	**150**

Table 4.8. *Focus of the session by country (% in brackets)*

		Focus of the session		
		Jobs	**Learning**	**Validation of prior learning**
Country	**CZ**	10 (56)	17 (94)	-
	FL	33 (40)	79 (95)	-
	IS	16 (76)	18 (86)	13 (62)
	LT	34 (68)	33 (66)	12 (24)
	NL	5 (71)	7 (100)	-
	SI	17 (32)	46 (85)	10 (19)

Counsellors were also asked to note the focus of the session during monitoring data collection, but as an **open-ended response**. The primary factor underlying this approach rather than offering a set

list of responses for clients to choose from was early consultation with programme stakeholders, who suggested that **clients themselves are not always fully cognizant of the range of focuses within each session**, and may for example choose only one, even if the session covered several key areas. Evaluators thus collected data from counsellors as well. However, **collection of this data was somewhat challenging**, at least in some countries. As agreed in the instrument development meeting held in London in October 2015, there was no predetermined list of session focuses. That is, rather than there being a generic multiple-choice list used across all six countries, each country was free to open-code its own range of focuses. The aim of this process was formative: as the six countries could not agree on a predetermined list of focuses, it was felt to be best to use Wave 1 data collection to ascertain the range of focuses arising in each country, with hopes that a generic list, e.g. containing a range of core shared focuses alongside a small number of country specific focuses, could be agreed for use in the second half of the evaluation.

A by-product of this process is that it is **not feasible at this stage to report a cross-country range of counsellor-reported focuses**, as the range of focuses differs substantially across the six GOAL nations. For example, Lithuania reported only two focuses: discuss learning opportunities (66%) and searching for work/employment (34%). Iceland reported nine focuses from clients' first sessions (a total of 21 sessions), with the most common being: personal issues/barriers (67%), education (62%) and general well-being (38%). Comparison of these two countries highlights another difference across nations: whereas Lithuania limited itself to one focus per client, Iceland allowed counsellors to choose all focuses that applied to the session. In Iceland, the counselling model involves multiple sessions, thus this country has also reported data for the focus of 22 subsequent (i.e. second or later) sessions. In these sessions, the most common focuses were: personal issues/barriers (56%), general well-being (44%), education (33%) and learning techniques (33%).

Route to guidance: type of referring organisation

Service users had a **broad range of different routes into GOAL**, as shown in Table 4.9, the most common routes were referral from employment/unemployment services (23%), self-referral (20%), referral from educational support services (17%), and referral from social welfare services (15%).

Table 4.10 shows referral routes by country.

Table 4.9. *Type of referring organisation*

	N	%
Self-referral	57	20
(Un) employment services	66	23
Employer	8	3
Social (welfare) services	44	15
Educational institutions (e.g. schools, colleges)	20	7
Educational support services (incl., other adult education centres)	49	17
Integration/migration services	9	3
Youth services	5	2
Socio-cultural institutions	2	1
(National) prison institution	8	3
Rehabilitation institutions	18	6
Other	6	2
Total	292	102

Note: percentages do not add to 100% because of rounding

Table 4.10. *Type of referring organisation by country*

	CZ		FL		IS		LT		NL		SI	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Self-referral	3	20	17	11	-	-	15	30	-	-	22	45
(Un) employment services	10	67	37	25	1	5	13	26	-	-	5	10
Employer	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	16
Social (welfare) services	-	-	32	21	10	48	2	4	-	-	-	-
Educational institutions (e.g. schools, colleges)	-	-	8	5	-	-	10	20	-	-	2	4
Educational support services (incl., other adult education centres)	-	-	35	23	3	14	10	20	-	-	1	2
Integration/migration services	-	-	9	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Youth services	-	-	5	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Socio-cultural institutions	2	13	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
(National) prison institution	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	100	-	-
Rehabilitation institutions	-	-	2	1	7	33	-	-	-	-	9	18
Other	-	-	4	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	4

Qualitative findings

A number of service-related themes arose during qualitative interviews and focus groups with programme clients, staff, partners and policy actors. These themes cover a broad range of areas, from the foundations of the GOAL guidance services, through client needs, different guidance approaches, and clients' onward journeys as they seek to realise the objectives of the counselling.

Beginning with the foundations of the guidance services being provided through GOAL, two countries (Flanders and Lithuania) were building on and seeking to further **fine tune previous guidance efforts** aimed at GOAL target groups. Two countries (Iceland and Slovenia) were building on previously existing guidance services, but were **expanding the services** from less disadvantaged groups to GOAL target groups. The Netherlands was expanding a previously existing service (the basic skills quick scan) to new regions and partners. The Czech Republic was launching a new initiative.

A key theme across all countries was the need for a **custom-fit service** tailored to the unique and often complex needs of GOAL clients. Counselling approaches appear to be **professional but also highly personalised**. For example, whereas guidance sessions or journeys might follow a rough general structure, individual pathways showed great variety. **A comparison of the pathways of two clients in Flanders is instructive**. Client A needed only a small amount of guidance and support. He discovered his interests quickly, and acted on his own initiative to begin an educational programme. In this client's first session, he discussed his challenging background and his negative previous experiences of school. His counsellor explained the variety of options he could pursue in order to attain a diploma of secondary education, and the two of them discussed the feasibility of these options. The most interesting option to the client was adult education; the client also appear to have an interest in the ICT sector. After the first counselling session, the counsellor gave the client "homework": he was asked to use an online interest assessment tool to explore his interests. By the time he showed up for his next guidance session, the client had already shown a high level of self-initiative, contacting an educational institution that offers a course in web design. Between sessions 2 and 3, the client attended an information session at the school of his choice and had taken the necessary tests to see what subjects he could be exempted from on the basis of prior knowledge. At the third session, he and his counsellor agreed that he would enrol on the course. It was agreed that this motivated and self-reliant client needed no further counselling.

In contrast, Client B had attended five sessions at the time of reporting, with the possibility of attending more. This client was far less sure of the direction she wanted to take, and suffered from a number of physical and psychological health problems. For Client B, the counselling thus had a strong focus on establishing the building blocks needed for progress in life, e.g. building her self-esteem, getting professional help to deal with psychological problems, and learning to talk about her problems with others. Sessions were not spaced evenly, but were instead scheduled around the client's needs and motivation. For example, session 2 took place only one week after session 1, but session 3 did not take place until three months later, with session 4 happening one month after that. By session 5, the client had discovered, perhaps to her surprise, that she had strong academic ability,

both in general subjects and languages. Building on this development, the client took and passed an entrance exam to study to be a “poly-lingual secretary”, a course she was very excited about. Even by this point (session 5), however, the client still needed motivational support from the counsellor. In contrast to Client A, who appeared to be highly self-reliant, Client B still appeared to struggle with some aspects of motivation and self-belief, even in the face of success.

These two clients differed in a number of key ways, and these differences affected the pathway and focuses of their respective guidance sessions. However, these two clients were similar in that they were pursuing educational objectives and appeared to be at a stage in their life where such objectives could feasibly be attained, with the right support. Clients in some other countries are more vulnerable. **In Iceland, for example, the GOAL target group is highly disadvantaged, and this has attendant impacts on the focuses of guidance sessions and the progress that is made**. In Iceland, which like Flanders has a multi-session counselling model, guidance sessions tend to focus on more basic, pre-educational steps such as developing motivation, showing up to meetings, and coming to believe that it is possible to have a sense of direction in life. Whereas a key emphasis in Flanders is developing self-reliance, clients in Iceland are starting from a lower base, and counsellors must thus focus on more basic steps, such as **developing self-esteem, in the hopes that self-reliance and active steps into education or employment will come later**. In all countries, the counselling model appears to be based on **acknowledging clients' starting points**, customising services to their needs, and helping them to take steps forward. However, the more vulnerable the target groups, the smaller the steps tend to be. These issues are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 9, Service Outcomes.

Across the six countries, there were notable similarities and differences regarding session types, the number of sessions that individuals attended and the typical length of sessions. Descriptive information on these issues was provided earlier in this chapter. The qualitative interviews and focus groups revealed some of the factors underlying these differences. For example, at most sites across the six countries, **session length** does not appear to be predetermined; within reasons, clients appear to receive as much counselling time as needed. Lithuania, however, provides an interesting case study of a country where the two national sites differ in terms of their approach to session length, with one site having a relatively open policy on this issue and the other site sticking strictly to 45 minute sessions, as these fit in with the broader schedule of the educational institution in which counselling takes place.

4.2 Key findings

According to clients, the primary reason for seeking guidance was **exploring educational opportunities**, and objective cited by three-quarters of service users. Sessions were most likely to focus on learning, followed by jobs and then validation of prior learning. Almost all sessions were individual face-to-face sessions.

Perhaps the most salient theme across countries was the need to provide clients with a **custom fit service** which met clients at their own individual starting points and then sought to address their unique and often complex needs. Thus, whereas guidance sessions might follow a rough general structure, individual pathways showed great variety.

In some countries, particularly Iceland, the GOAL target group is highly disadvantaged. This has a significant effect on the focus and goals of counselling sessions. Whereas clients in countries such as Flanders might focus on developing self-reliance in addition to progressing in their educational pathway, clients in Iceland needed to focus on more rudimentary aims, such as developing a basic level of self-esteem and future orientation. For **particularly disadvantaged clients**, these basic steps are necessary before larger steps can be taken in education or employment. Counsellors in Iceland refer to this process as "planting seeds" that may later grow.

4.3 Key implications

Implications for programme development

The initial findings from GOAL raise some questions about the amount of **cross-country learning** that can take place in terms of programme development. Programmes can learn important lessons from one another in a number of areas (e.g. tool development and counsellor training); however, it may also be the case that programme context, particularly the level of client disadvantage, may make it difficult to transfer other lessons from one country to another. For example, the Flanders counselling model appears to be well developed and accurately tailored to the target group. It remains to be seen how many of the strategies used in Flanders would prove beneficial for Iceland's more disadvantaged clients.

Implications for evaluation

Wave 2 of the evaluation will explore in greater depth the relationship between programme contexts, particularly client disadvantage, and the **mechanisms, strategies and processes developed and refined by counsellors** as they seek to help clients achieve desired outcomes.

5 Partnerships and Networks

This chapter provides in-depth background information of the partnerships and networks that have been developed to support the work of the GOAL programmes. It also provides a preliminary assessment of the quality and value of these partnerships and networks.

5.1 Existence and scope of partnerships and networks

One of the five GOAL intervention strategies focuses on partnerships and networks, with countries devising strategies both to improve their existing partnerships and networks and to develop new ones. Given the characteristics of the GOAL target group, which often mean marginalisation from career services and educational institutions, and that they have multiple needs that require multi-agency support, partnerships and networks may be key to ensuring positive outcomes for service-users. In this respect, as the Lithuanian national evaluators argue, well-functioning partnerships are critical to the success of the GOAL services. At Wave 1, the main objectives of partnerships relate to referral and participation: finding low-educated adults and motivating them to get involved in adult education and training. In emphasising the importance of partnerships and networks, GOAL aims to help all partners to achieve their results: to help people get back into wider society, to get enrolled in education or training, to get a profession, or to return to or progress in the labour market.

In most of the participating countries, two different types of partnerships are relevant to GOAL: those which existed prior to the launch of the project, and which are now being developed further, and those which have been developed specifically for the project. Despite existing relationships, some countries (Iceland, Slovenia) have found that establishing cooperative partnerships with other organisations has taken more time than anticipated. Evaluators from Flanders noted that although both de Stap and de Leerwinkel have a broad network, partnerships are hard to develop and maintain when the guidance service organisations are not structurally embedded. Furthermore, networking and establishing partnerships ask for an investment of time that staff rarely have given their coaching duties.

Table 5.1 provides an overview of the partnership and network arrangements in the six countries. It appears that to date most partnerships were in existence before the GOAL programme began.

Table 5.1. *Overview of Partners and Networks*

	Partners	**Networks**
Czech Republic	• Labour Office • Agency for Social Inclusion	• National Guidance Forum
Flanders	• Provincial Government of East-Flanders • City of Ghent • Provincial Government of West Flanders • Public Centre for Social Welfare (OCMW) • Pupil Guidance Centres • Adult Education Centres • Public Employment Services (VDAB) • deSOM • IN-Gent	• Project Advisory group • Steering group, Word Wijs!
Iceland	• Samvinna • Fjölsmiðan • Efling-trade union • Reykjavík city welfare • Prison Services	• Multilateral network on social welfare
Lithuania	• Lithuanian Labour Exchange • NGOs • Employers	
Netherlands	• Reading and Writing Foundation • Aksept • The Municipality of Emmen • Penitentiary Institution (PI) Lelystad • Penitentiary Institution (PI) Achterhoek	• Regional literacy networks
Slovenia		• Central Slovenian Network (10 partners) • Savinjska Network (9 partners) • National Advisory Committee (in progress)

The partnerships listed in the above table do not all exist on the same footing. In the Czech Republic neither current partnership is formalised through a signed contract. In the Netherlands, the prisons that are piloting the basic skills scan are not part of any regional networks, although they have their

own internal networks which mean that literacy classes can be offered in house. The Dutch organisations that do belong to regional networks, however, sign agreements to contribute towards preventing low literacy and to address low basic skills, and the networks are structurally embedded. Likewise, in Slovenia, the process of establishing the two regional networks was marked by partners signing an agreement network in which goals and common tasks are listed and formal lines of communication established.

In national reporting, local evaluators from Flanders classified five broad types of partners relevant to their programme, and these hold good for the other countries. These types of partnership are: 1) Local policy; 2) Welfare; agencies 3) Education; 4) Work; and 5) Migration and civic integration.

1. **Local policy**

By local policy partners, the Flemish evaluators referred to provincial government in the regions where GOAL programmes are being implemented, which partner with the service as part of their local education and training strategy.

In the Netherlands there is a strong emphasis on building regional networks focused on addressing low basic skills. This basic infrastructure, as described in the national *Count on Skills* action programme, comprises amongst others:

- A Literacy Point, which acts as local or regional contact point for the literacy network. All regional information about literacy training will be collated here, the target group will be able to contact the point with any questions, and courses and events can be organised.
- The basic skills quick scan will be used by organisations such as temporary employment agencies, the UWV (Employee Insurance Agency), Service Points for Career Orientation and Guidance and care providers to identify services users with low literacy more quickly and to refer them to an appropriate literacy training.
- A range of training for literacy volunteers, development of training and testing materials.

On GOAL, organisations can make use of these networks from the *Count on Skills* programme if they are already in place, but also need to identify which organisations are relevant within those networks. These partners can provide clients (e.g. a municipality refers clients to the reintegration company) and also act as partners they can refer their clients to (e.g. libraries, or education centres).

2. **Welfare agencies**

In the Czech Republic, the Agency for Social Inclusion is valued for its knowledge of the local terrain and plays a role as an intermediary between the GOAL service and other agencies working with the target group in order to facilitate referral. In Flanders the Public Centre for Social Welfare (OCMW) also has a key role to play in referral, and staff from the OCMW are attending information sessions about GOAL in order to persuade them to refer low-educated clients with educational needs or questions.

With Reykjavík city welfare, Mímir hopes to get participants into the project and make a connection with other counsellors to build a network that could help both parties in the future and potential service users. The partnership in Iceland with the prison service aims to create cooperation through referrals of service users to the GOAL project, and to link these participants to education.

As the Lithuanian report points out, partnerships and collaborations with NGOs can be the most fragmented of the partnership types, and the ones that are most vulnerable to the vagaries of project-based funding. Nonetheless, partnerships with social welfare institutions and NGOs probably represent the best way of reaching out to those low-educated adults who are least motivated to engage with the GOAL service.

3. Education

In Flanders, the GOAL team are working with support services in schools and in adult education institutions. Partnerships with the former are focused on preventing school drop-out, whereas partnerships with adult education centres emphasise the importance of adults receiving independent advice.

In the Netherlands, schools are part of the regional networks. For example, the Municipality of Emmen has established a local network in Emmen with the library, the social work department and the regional community college. The partners have opened two Literacy Points and collaborate to get more adults with low literacy into coaching or reintegration trajectories. The municipality subsidises the network and has an advisory role.

4. Work

In several GOAL countries, partnerships with employment services and labour offices are the most intensive ones. The main role these partnerships appear to play is in referral. In the Czech Republic, for example, the Labour Office distributes promotional and information materials for the GOAL programme and shares their expertise with the programme staff: two-thirds of the Wave 1 clients in the Czech Republic were referred by the Labour Office. In Flanders, collaboration with VDAB and through this with SBS Skills Builders, an organisation working specifically with young adults (18-25 years) to guide them towards a job, is focused on creating a more structural referral process for low-educated clients with general or specific educational needs.

The GOAL project in Iceland is working with Samvinna and Fjölsmiðan, two organisations than specialise in vocational rehabilitation, as well as Efling, a trade union. The partnership between Samvinna and MSS aims to continue and deepen cooperation on individualised services for the future; that with Fjölsmiðan aims to provide educational guidance to young people.

In the Netherlands, two GOAL pilot participants (Aksept and Municipality of Emmen) are organisations in which intake and referral interviews are conducted in the context of working towards employment and/or benefits.

5. **Migration and Civic Integration**

In Flanders, deSOM refers foreign language newcomers with an interest in further training or education to de Leerwinkel and IN-Gent, the integration office, refers newcomers with educational questions to De Stap.

5.2 Perceived quality of collaboration within networks

From the perspective of GOAL

According to analysis by the Lithuanian evaluators, the following factors influence the quality of collaboration/ partnerships: clear goals of partnership, clear objectives and roles of partners, shared interests of all parties, willingness to cooperate, and availability of funding.

Although the partnerships in the Czech Republic are non-formal, they appear to be operating well, as evidenced in the fact that the referral process appears to be working, especially in terms of the volume of client referrals from the Labour Office. By the same measure, partnerships in Flanders are also functioning well: almost three-quarters of all service users are referred to the GOAL services by the employment service (VDAB, 26%), welfare services (22%) and educational support services (CLB, 24%). Partnerships with educational institutions are less productive. In Iceland, partnerships in Wave 1 can be characterised by good will – to date, there has been considerable energy and enthusiasm for the possible benefits that partnership might bring:

> *'I think they [staff members at Reykjavikurborg] just felt that it was their duty to lend us a hand and that this commitment was established among the administrators and then was transmitted to lower levels within the organisation'*. (GOAL programme staff member)

The Icelandic experience has been enhanced by the geographic closeness between partnerships – some partners even share a building with the GOAL service. The fact that Iceland has a small population, concentrated in a few areas of settlement, is likely to impact strongly on what is found out about the strengths (and weaknesses) of partnerships and networks in that country.

Programme staff in Flanders emphasised that for partnerships to work well there needs to be financial investment to maintain and extend the network. The Icelandic report also draws attention to the fact that cut backs to partners' funding also pose threats to collaboration. To a great extent partnership only work as well as the level of commitment from the partner organisations lets them. In Lithuania it was more of a challenge to get partners to be sufficiently active in information sharing, perhaps because the potential benefits of the partnership were not as clearly stated as they could have been. Attempts to address this will be made in Wave 2.

Partnerships are valuable to the various GOAL programmes because, as well as lines of referral, they offer the possibility of information sharing and mutual learning, both at a broader level (about the target group in local and national contexts) and at the client-specific level. However, partner organisations do not always agree about the relevance, quality and added value of the GOAL service.

The Flemish national report draws attention to the fact that some potential partners may be focused on a hard outcome like getting *any* job, rather than on the guidance, education and training needed to get an *appropriate* job. There is also likely to be conflict with partners, most obviously educational institutions, which offer similar services, or courses they think clients should be steered towards. In these circumstances independence is not always valued.

The national report for the Netherlands suggests that the most effective regional networks are the ones where: there is an influential and enthusiastic driving force, the urgency of the problem is recognised, clear agreements are made and, according to one interviewee, there is commitment at strategic, tactical and operational levels.

In terms of establishing new partnerships, there have been some negative experiences. In the Czech Republic, attempts were made to establish partnerships with prisons but the GOAL service was in conflict with educational programmes run in-house. In Iceland, workloads at GOAL and at the partner organisations are heavy, which can impact on the frequency of partner meetings and the level of commitment that can be made to the partnership.

An interesting characteristic of the networks established in Slovenia is that in conceptualising the networks, it was stressed that it should be the counsellors and operational staff who work with the clients who participate in the network, not managers.

Partner and policy perspectives

Partnerships will ideally offer benefits to all partners, not just the GOAL service. Data from Iceland confirm that with regard to this target group, there is an acknowledgement from partners and policy actors that a holistic solution is required to the multiple problems that clients face, thus necessitating collaborative working: sharing of information, knowledge and experience should lead to more efficient services for the target group.

In Lithuania there is a perception from partner and policy stakeholders that the fragmented nature of adult education services in that country works against effective partnerships. For example, employment offices are under the responsibility of the Ministry for Social Security and Labour, educational institutions are under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Science, municipal welfare offices belong to the municipal level, and all these institutions do not always cooperate with NGOs. One Lithuanian policy actor suggested that there is a need to create a central focal institution in adult education that would foresee and address national and regional challenges and would have good networks with regions. In the Netherlands, there is already a strong policy focus on one particular area of adult education: literacy and numeracy skills, and GOAL is seen as contributing to this policy.

According to the Slovene evaluation, the main factors for the effectiveness and quality of collaboration/partnerships are:

- clearly defined goals and tasks of the partnership, of each partner, and of the coordinator

- defined forms of operating.
- common activities, e.g. training workshops, promotional activities, exchange of information, and exchange of tools.
- evaluation and follow-up of the results of GOAL and of the partnership/networking.

A key aspect is coordination: working across organisations to reach the target groups and to provide guidance that will help the individual in other organisations or settings.

5.3 Potential sustainability of collaborative networks

In the Czech Republic, all partnership and network arrangements are non-formal. The positive experiences of these partnerships raises the question of how important formality is to partnership success. In Slovenia, for instance, the perception is very much that a high level of formality is required in order to enhance the sustainability of the network. Moreover, it is felt in Slovenia that the project should be managed systematically, and that network coordinators should inform partners on what they should do to fulfil their tasks.

The national report from Flanders draws attention to the fact that because the intervention sites, de Stap and de Leerwinkel, are funded locally and not structurally, this works against long-term partnerships: they cannot be embedded in existing structures in the way that (for example) schools are. Funding was also likely to prove important in Lithuania: because of the public procurement procedures that apply to public institutions, not all partners (e.g. training/counselling institutions) are eligible for funding, and this puts a partnership under a test.

In Iceland, experiences to date strongly suggest that the level of commitment to the common goal of bettering the educational and vocational chances of the target group will in itself sustain the partnerships. As the Lithuanian report points out however, cooperation requires time and energy. When no clear results and outcomes for both sides from partnership are present, often partnership becomes formal, but not motivating and not providing any good results.

5.4 Key findings

The Netherlands' approach to GOAL differs radically from the approaches of the other partner countries. The diffused nature of GOAL in the Netherlands means that the programme is particularly dependent on the establishment of strong partnerships, with partners themselves administering the skills scans and then referring potential clients on to another organisation. Whereas in other countries GOAL is a discrete service that works with partners, in the Netherlands GOAL is more of a process distributed across a network of organisations. This has clear implications for programme development: partners must be convinced of the benefits of contributing to GOAL, despite the administrative and other burdens this creates for themselves.

The main findings from Wave 1 with regard to partnership centre on the importance of communication. For a partnership or network to work effectively, and for there to be a chance of a

sustained working relationship, partners must be clear about the objectives of the collaboration and must buy-in to these aims. Furthermore, partners need to be convinced that the collaboration will bring benefits to them, or to their clients, that make the considerable time, staff and financial investments worthwhile. For some types of partnerships, such as those geared principally to aiding referral processes, these shared benefits are perhaps clearer than where partnerships involve working with agencies from other sectors to offer holistic solutions to the target groups' needs. This communication can be supported by evidence of the guidance service's achievements, and the level of need.

The main barriers to effective partnership working will be seen at the operational level, particularly where there is competition between partners over finite resources, or where the partnership lacks people of energy and enthusiasm to sustain it.

For the most part, the six interventions based around partnership working appear to be going well, and there is the anticipation that a number of collaborative relationships have started from a solid foundation that means they are likely to be sustained after the end of the GOAL project.

5.5 Implications

Implications for programme development

Key to developing programme partnerships is understanding the existing landscape and where efforts should be placed. In developing sustainable partnership, good communication of the purpose and the value of guidance is clear. From the programme perspective, this communication can help make the case for the existence and funding of the service. For existing and potential partners, such communication can highlight the benefits and added value that such a service can bring to their own organisation. Evidence from the national reports suggests that expectations should be set, but care taken to ensure that these expectations are realistic, otherwise there is a threat to sustainability. A potential first stage in this process is making it clear that the GOAL programme is well-defined, so that its remit, and the boundaries of its aims, is clear to potential partners. There is likely to be a need for sensitivity in this process, as there may be some overlap between services: where this is the case counselling may run the risk of being institution-centred rather than client-centred. The time taken to do this work should not be underestimated, and more than one national report emphasises the importance of trust in the process.

Implications for policy

Policy actors in Slovenia identified two key policy obstacles for the GOAL project: the lack of financing of guidance in adult education and a lack of networking at policy level. It will be important to develop suggestions and potentially guidelines through GOAL about how to overcome such obstacles and strengthen the role of guidance as a key component of lifelong learning for low-educated adults. A key question here is: How can national policymakers support partnerships and networks at the local level?

6 Counsellor competences

This chapter focuses on guidance counsellors: on their job roles and the competences that are required to do that job effectively. This strand of the GOAL project focuses specifically on interventions which seek to define the competences guidance professionals need to work effectively with low-educated adults. Two of the partner countries, Lithuania and the Netherlands, are not specifically piloting interventions on counsellor competences as part of their GOAL programme; nevertheless, Wave 1 data from these countries contain relevant insights from related activities.

As a 2008 report on Adult Learning Professions in Europe (Research voor Beleid, 2008) summarised, those working in counselling and guidance services in adult learning may focus on career guidance (in relation to finding a job), study counselling (in relation to study choice and planning and coaching of the study process) or more personal guidance (in relation to people's personal problems and questions). The GOAL project involves staff working in study counselling and, to a lesser extent, career guidance, and programmes do not, on the face of it, seek to address service users' personal guidance needs. This said, and as the national Wave 1 evaluation reports bear out, clients from the target group often come from multi-problem backgrounds and face challenges in several aspects of their daily lives. Sometimes it is impossible for progress in either education or careers to take place before these problems are addressed. In this respect, as the Slovenian and Icelandic national reports highlight, guidance programmes for this target group involve more personal counselling than traditional educational and vocational guidance interventions, which are weighted more heavily toward information giving.

The QAE framework developed by the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network lists three criteria relevant to practitioner quality – possession of recognised qualifications relevant to the careers sector; engagement in CPD, and membership of a careers professional association.

As described in Chapter 3, the vast majority of counsellors worked on the GOAL programmes are educated to tertiary level and have on-the-job experience: most also have experience of working in some capacity with both the target group and the partner and policy stakeholders.

In the Czech programme model, all counsellors receive GOAL-specific training prior to starting work on the project. According to the counsellors, this training was valued for the information it provided about current trends and methods in career guidance with respect to target group (personal values, communication values, approaches, use of certain tools etc.) and its lessons were implemented in the guidance sessions. In Wave 2 of the GOAL evaluation, this training will be examined in more depth, for insights that may be useful to other countries.

On the subject of counsellor competences, the GOAL project in the Netherlands is once again an outlier. The basic skills quick scan which the Dutch programme focuses on is designed to be administered by staff working in a range of job roles at a range of levels and no additional training in

its use is required. This said, and as the Dutch report makes clear, most staff who are administering the scan are qualified to at least degree level albeit across a range of subject areas.

6.1 The job of the counsellor

Context

Both the Needs and Strengths Analysis and the national Wave 1 reporting show that there is no standard approach across the GOAL countries to the professionalization of those working in adult guidance and counselling services. To some extent, lack of professionalization can be a reflection of the attitudes of policymakers to adult education in general: where adult education is a marginalised and/or underfunded field, there is little impetus to develop professional standards for staff. Moreover, where, as in Lithuania, the adult education sector is fragmented, there is no clear agreement on where responsibility for developing professional standards lies.

In the Netherlands there are no formal criteria for guidance practitioners and thus a great divergence in quality between various service points. Effectiveness is strongly dependent on the quality of the individual practitioner, but there is currently no policy focus on the overall quality of these practitioners, or minimum quality standards.

In Lithuania there are no national standards or competence profiles for adult counsellors. These do exist for counsellors working in employment offices, however. GOAL programme staff in Lithuania emphasised that their professional development is very much dependent on their personal initiative: there is no systematic training for adult guidance professionals, nor are there country-wide support measures. Previous initiatives to develop training have been linked to projects funding guidance services; these efforts have not been sustained when this funding ends.

In Slovenia there is no competence profile for counsellors in adult education and no formal, comprehensive study programmes from higher education institutions, although there are modules on counselling offered as part of education programmes such as study courses on Adult Education and Career Development. This said, the Slovenian Institute of Adult Education has developed initial training for counsellors working in adult education guidance centres, and a training programme has recently been offered by the National Employment Office (in 2015, there were 59 participants). More formal structures are in place in the school centres, as guidance counsellors working in schools are required to have a degree in a relevant subject. Guidelines for school guidance services specify that counsellors spend 65-85% of their time on guidance work and list the tasks in which they should be competent, although do not define the actual competencies.

Career counsellors in Iceland are particularly well supported in terms of professionalization of the role. Counsellors in this country require a license to practice, and a job description and ethical guidelines, developed by the Association of Career Counsellors, are in place at the national level. A Masters-level programme for career counsellors has also developed competence standards, which are in line with European and American documentation. The Education and Training Services Centre

in Iceland holds biannual national meetings to improve and develop new ways to reach and counsel low-educated adults, where counsellors can gain insights into new methods and tools and exchange good practice. Short courses are also available and managers are positive about staff taking up these and other opportunities.

Counselling activities

As shown in Table 6.1, GOAL staff across the six countries are all on either permanent or fixed term contracts, with 76% on the former. No counsellors were employed on casual or temporary contracts.

Table 6.1. *Programme staff: contract type by country*

		Permanent		Fixed-term		Casual		Temporary		Other	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Country	**CZ**	2	50	2	50	-	-	-	-	-	-
	FL	3	43	4	57	-	-	-	-	-	-
	IS	3	75	1	25	-	-	-	-	-	-
	LT	4	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	SI	10	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Total	**22**	**76**	**7**	**24**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**

Table 6.2 provides a full-time/part-time breakdown. 76% of programme staff are employed full-time, with 17% being part-time and 9% being either sessional or hourly-paid.

Table 6.2. *Programme staff: contract type (hours) by country*

		Full-time		Part-time		Hourly paid/Sessional	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Country	**CZ**	2	50	1	25	1	25
	FL	4	57	3	43	-	-
	IS	3	75	1	25	-	-
	LT	3	75	-	-	1	25
	SI	10	100	-	-	-	-
	Total	**22**	**76**	**5**	**17**	**2**	**7**

Across countries, counsellors differed substantially in various aspects of their work history and situation, as shown in Table 6.3. (Note that the Netherlands is not included in this discussion, as that country's GOAL activities do not include counsellors per se.) Counsellors in Slovenia tended to have been employed by their current organisation for a relatively long time, averaging just under 17 years in their current organisation. At the other end of the scale, counsellors in Flanders averaged just over one year with their current organisation.

There was more consistency across countries with regard to the average number of hours worked: in all countries except the Czech Republic, this ranged between 32 and 40 hours per week. However, this consistency in terms of total hours worked was not matched in terms of how much time was spent on adult guidance and counselling activities. In three countries (Czech Republic, Lithuania and Slovenia), counsellors spent less than 12 hours per week on adult guidance and counselling activities.

In Flanders, counsellors spent an average of 19 hours per week on these activities, i.e. just under two-thirds of their total working time. In Iceland, counsellors devoted almost all their working time to adult guidance and counselling activities (36 out of 39 hours per week).

It should be noted that "adult guidance and counselling activities" is not synonymous with "GOAL": staff can and do provide adult guidance services to groups beyond the GOAL target groups. As shown in Table 6.3, staff across the six countries devote 29% of their working time to GOAL, with this percentage ranging widely across countries, from a low of 9% in Slovenia to a high of 68% in the Czech Republic.

Table 6.3. *Programme staff: time spend on different activities*

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
How long have you been employed by this organisation?	**CZ**	4	4.5	3.4	0	8
	FL	7	1.3	1.6	0	4
	IS	2	7.0	8.5	1	13
	LT	4	6.5	4.7	1	12
	SI	10	16.6	6.8	8	34
	Total	**27**	**8.6**	**8.1**	**0**	**34**
For how many hours on average each week are you employed by this organisation?	**CZ**	4	15.8	17.6	5	42
	FL	7	32.3	10.4	18	40
	IS	4	38.8	1.3	37	40
	LT	4	35.5	9.0	22	40
	SI	10	40.0	0.0	40	40
	Total	**29**	**34.0**	**11.4**	**5**	**42**
Approximately how many hours each week do you spend on any adult guidance and counselling activities?	**CZ**	4	3.8	3.5	2	9
	FL	7	19.2	6.4	12	30
	IS	4	36.3	4.3	30	39
	LT	3	8.3	10.2	1	20
	SI	10	11.2	11.9	0	40
	Total	**28**	**15.4**	**13.0**	**0**	**40**
Percentage of time spend on any adult guidance and counselling activities	**CZ**	4	45.6	46.9	5	100
	FL	7	62.3	19.6	40	100
	IS	4	93.8	12.5	75	100
	LT	3	21.5	24.8	5	50
	SI	10	27.9	29.9	0	100
	Total	**28**	**47.7**	**35.8**	**0**	**100**
Approximately how many hours do you spend on GOAL project activities each week	**CZ**	4	6.8	3.2	2	9
	FL	7	14.0	7.5	8	30
	IS	4	10.0	0.0	10	10
	LT	4	4.8	3.6	2	10
	SI	10	3.4	4.1	1	15
	Total	**29**	**7.5**	**6.2**	**1**	**30**

Percentage of time spend on GOAL activities	**CZ**	4	67.9	45.4	19	100
	FL	7	48.2	28.3	20	100
	IS	4	25.8	0.9	25	27
	LT	4	12.9	8.1	8	25
	SI	10	8.5	10.4	3	38
	Total	29	29.3	30.5	3	100

One key issue emerging from Wave 1 is the amount of time GOAL staff spend on counselling activities, and what other duties are expected of them in their role. Overall, programme staff spend around half of their time (48%) on adult guidance and counselling activities every week (from 0 to 100%) and 30% on GOAL project activities (from 3% to 100%). In the Czech Republic, the four GOAL counsellors receive no support with administrative tasks; three of the four are employed on GOAL on a very part-time basis (around ten hours each per week). This limited resourcing has major implications on a project which requires reaching out to and maintaining contact with clients who face financial barriers coming to the service (see Chapter 8 for further discussion). In Lithuania, there was also no administrative support for counsellors, and all have as their main job role something other than GOAL counselling: for three of the four counsellors in this country, 10% of their time or less is spent on GOAL. In Iceland each of the four counsellors spends approximately 10 hours each week (28% of their time) on GOAL project activities. Data from Slovenia suggests that the amount of time staff spend in counselling duties is not related to the type of centre (school or adult) that they are employed by.

Defining competences

In the Netherlands it is the personal attributes and social skills of the staff administering the basic skills quick scan that seems most critical, particularly in cases where poor literacy skills might cause the client to feel embarrassed or ashamed. One interviewed staff member remarked: '*If [the clients] sit behind the computer and can't read a word, then that is a painful moment*'.

In Slovenia, the adult guidance centres defined counsellor competences in 2013 and also described duties and tasks (for these, please see the Annexes to the GOAL Needs Analysis Report: http://projectgoal.eu/index.php/publications). In GOAL, the Slovenia approach is to take these competences as a starting point to establishing the set of competences specifically required to work with low-educated adults. This work will also include what other tasks and demands for additional knowledge there are.

In Flanders an interesting approach was taken to defining counsellor competences. During the GOAL pre-evaluation stage, programme staff from Flanders developed a list of the competences counsellors require. During the Wave 1 focus group, staff were asked to rate the competences in this list in terms of importance. The results are shown in Table 6.4. Knowledge of the educational landscape in general and adult education in particular was deemed the most essential competence.

With exception of the networking capability, there was little disagreement about the most and least important competences.

Table 6.4. *Most and less important counsellor competences, as assessed by counsellors in Flanders*

a counsellor …	# most important	# less important
… has general knowledge of the educational landscape and specialized knowledge of the field of adult education	6	0
… can work independently	3	0
… is an excellent networker, in particular in the field of education, welfare and employment	3	2
… is easily able to make social contact, in particular with (young) adults	1	0
… handles ask for help adequately	1	0
… has a passion for coaching	1	0
…is a team player	1	0
… is easily able to empathise	1	1
… has experience in coaching and dissemination of information (concerning training and education)	1	3
… can take hold off clients	0	0
… delivers precise work, with the eye on registration and reporting	0	4
… is able to judge human nature	0	5

6.2 Degree to which counsellors achieve competence standards

In most countries, in Wave 1, work on defining competence standards was in its initial stages and thus it is not possible to reflect at this stage in the evaluation on whether the competence standards are being achieved. However, as discussed later in this chapter, a number of questions in the client satisfaction survey and the qualitative interview allowed stakeholders to reflect on various aspects of the counsellor's job. The very positive responses from clients suggest that across the six countries, counsellors do have the necessary competences for their job role – the task will come in defining and formalising these. Before summarising those responses, we first look at findings from a survey administered to all programme staff.

Programme staff experience, education and training

As shown in Table 6.5, counselling staff's average years of experience in adult counselling ranged from two in Flanders to 12 in Slovenia. Aggregating all GOAL countries (with the exception of the Netherlands, for the reasons discussed above), the average years of experience in adult counselling was seven.

Table 6.5. *Programme staff: years of experience in adult counselling*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
CZ	4	4.5	3.7	0	8
FL	7	2.0	1.9	0	5
IS	4	4.8	5.6	1	13
LT	4	9.5	7.1	5	20
SI	10	12.0	5.6	0	18
Total	**29**	**7.2**	**6.2**	**0**	**20**

On the whole, GOAL counsellors are very well educated: 64% are qualified to the Masters level, with another 21% qualified to degree level (Table 6.6). The majority of counsellors (52%) have a degree in Education (Table 6.7). As shown in Table 6.8, 66% of counsellors also have a specific guidance/counselling qualification.

Table 6.6. *Programme staff: education level by country*

		V (EQF) - diploma		VII (EQF) - university degree		VIII (EQF) - master level		IX (EQF) - PhD level	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Country	**CZ**	-	-	2	50	1	25	1	25
	FL	-	-	2	29	5	71	-	-
	IS	1	25	1	25	1	25	1	25
	LT	-	-	-	-	4	100	-	-
	SI	1	11	1	11	7	78	-	-
	Total	**2**	**7**	**6**	**21**	**18**	**64**	**2**	**7**

Table 6.7. *Programme staff: education subject by country*

		Education		Psychology		Other	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Country	**CZ**	3	75	-	-	1	25
	FL	3	43	-	-	4	57
	IS	3	75	1	25	-	-
	LT	-	-	2	50	2	50
	SI	6	60	-	-	4	40
	Total	**15**	**52**	**3**	**10**	**11**	**38**

Table 6.8. *Programme staff: specific qualification in educational, employment or career guidance/counselling by country*

		No		Yes	
		N	%	N	%
Country	**CZ**	1	25	3	75
	FL	3	43	4	57
	IS	1	25	3	75
	LT	3	75	1	25
	SI	2	20	8	80
	Total	**10**	**34**	**19**	**66**

Ongoing training in the form of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is an essential part of ensuring and further developing counselling competences. Across the five countries discussed in this section, 79% of staff had engaged in CPD in the past two years (Table 6.9 and Table 6.10), with the number of days of CPD over that period ranging from zero for 21% of counsellors to a high of 60 for one counsellor in Flanders. In this case, the counsellor is taking a course in French to increase his competences for a 'Recognition of foreign diplomas' project.

Table 6.9. *Programme staff: participation in Continuing Professional Development relevant to their guidance and/or counselling role by country in the past two years*

		No		Yes	
		N	%	N	%
Country	**CZ**	-	-	4	100
	FL	1	14	6	86
	IS	-	-	4	100
	LT	1	25	3	75
	SI	4	40	6	60
	Total	**6**	**21**	**23**	**79**

Table 6.10. *Programme staff: Continuing Professional Development in the past two years, number of days by country*

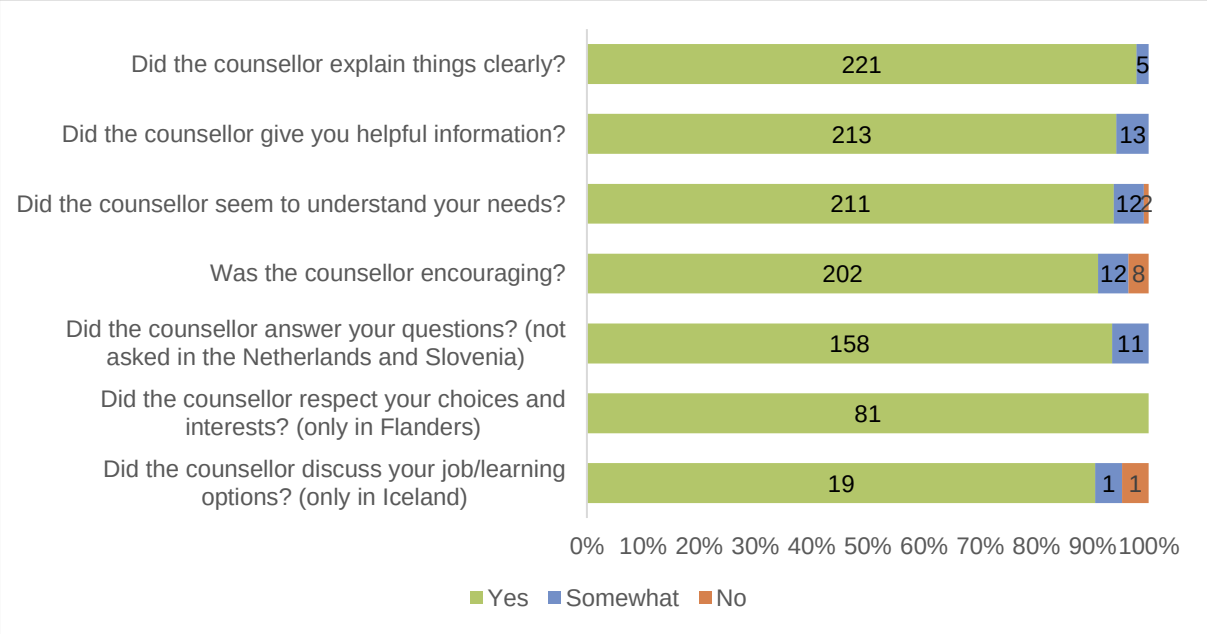
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
CZ	4	5.5	1.7	4	7
FL	6	18.0	22.3	2	60
IS	4	12.8	15.2	2	35
LT	3	10.3	4.5	6	15
SI	6	14.3	11.7	2	28
Total	**23**	**13.0**	**14.0**	**2**	**60**

Service user perceptions

The client satisfaction survey asked service users about several aspects of their counsellor's competences, for example, "Did the counsellor explain things clearly?" For each question, service

users could tick a box indicating an answer of 'yes', 'no' or 'somewhat'. The evaluation team opted for this simple three-point scale (as opposed to a more detailed five-point scale) as one of a number of steps aimed at making the client satisfaction survey as user-friendly and non-demanding as possible – steps that were felt to be essential given the limited reading skills of many programme participants. The number of questions service users faced, and the wording of the questions varied slightly between the participating countries because of programme differences, although four questions featured in all six user surveys.

Figure 6.1. *Evaluation of the counsellor by service users*



As illustrated by Figure 3.1, programme clients were very positive in their feedback on the counselling they received. Across the six countries, no clients answered "no" to the question "Did the counsellor explain things clearly?" and only five (of a total of 226) answered "somewhat" instead of "yes". Results were very similar for the question "Did the counsellor give you helpful information?". No service users answered 'no' and 13 qualified the answer as "somewhat".

Negative answers were very rare, and where they did occur with even moderate frequency – for the question "Was the counsellor encouraging?" – they likely reflect the counsellor being honest with the client about next and necessary steps to take in order for the client to achieve his or her goals. For example, service users in Lithuania were a little more negative than in the other participating countries in response to the question "Was the counsellor encouraging?" Six of the fifty service users there answered 'no' and six answered 'somewhat'. The response in Lithuania was also slightly more negative than the other countries to the question "Did the counsellor seem to understand your needs?" This said, the answers were still emphatically positive, and when asked if overall they were satisfied with the service, 98% of clients said they were. Overall, at least 89% of the questioned clients in the Czech Republic gave 'yes' answers to the different questions about counsellors'

professional competency. None of the seven clients in the Netherlands who completed the survey answered 'no' to any of the four questions: overall 71% of clients answered 'yes' and 29% answered "somewhat". In Iceland, too, there were no negative answers to the raft of questions on counsellor competences. Overall, at least 95% of clients in Flanders gave yes answers about the counsellors' competences. A country-by-country breakdown of Figure 6.1can be found in Annex A, Figures A.1-A.7.

In Slovenia nine clients provided additional comments (translated below) on the service in an open response box, eight of which focused on the work of counsellors, for example:

- 'The counsellor was very friendly, very much helped me to solve problems. One big compliment for her!'
- 'So far, everything is great.'
- 'Very well, I released, it was an open conversation.'

Twenty-six clients in Flanders filled in this open question: 17 of those comments (that is, more than two-thirds) concerned the competence of the counsellor. All clients stressed the positive experience of those clients with their counsellor:

- Ten clients stressed that they appreciate how their counsellor explained things clearly.
- Five clients emphasised the friendly and motivating approach of their counsellor.
- Two clients underlined the custom fit service they got.

In interviews, service users in Slovenia emphasised the personal approach used by counsellors as a particular strength of the service, and personal qualities such as kindness, being a good listener, being motivational and taking time with the client. Clients in Flanders particularly valued that the service was customised to their own particular circumstances. Although it was not mentioned explicitly, the interviews strongly indicate that the counsellors make accurate assessments about their clients and chose the appropriate degree of involvement.

Staff and other stakeholders' perspectives

Programme staff in Iceland pointed out that although they have considerable training and experience in working with low skilled and low-educated adults, meeting the needs of the particularly vulnerable and challenged subgroup targeted by the GOAL projects there required different interview techniques and tools, including those developed in other sectors such as welfare or employment. Effective use of both would be facilitated by additional training.

As discussed above, staff and Flanders ranked the competences they felt were important for GOAL guidance and counselling. Slovenian programme staff identified a number of competences that a good counsellor requires to work with low-educated adults:

- Good communication skills (verbal and non-verbal)
- Social skills, including empathy, warmth and optimism,

- The ability to motivate
- A good education and knowledge of different approaches of counselling,
- Flexibility to adapt to different client groups
- Experience of working with different client groups
- Knowledge of tools and their use,
- Knowledge of formal and non-formal adult education and training
- Information-search skills
- Organisational skills
- Promotional skills
- Ability to acquire clients.

With reference to communication, a key challenge that emerges from the Slovenian national report is that of language. Staff in both the adult guidance and school centres stated that they were in need of the additional knowledge and skills that would allow them to work more effectively with migrants who do not speak Slovene. Currently services are reliant on translators, which, of course has implications for financial resourcing.

The GOAL service offered in Flanders puts particular emphasis on the personal relationship between the client and the counsellor: this close working relationship, based on trust is a function of the counselling model used there, where the counsellor has a portfolio of clients that he or she is responsible for. The downside of this, according to staff in Flanders, is that counsellors can potentially become somewhat isolated from their colleagues, certainly at the formal level, thus impacting negatively on the peer exchange of experience and expertise that is crucial to stay up-to-date on the educational sector.

Programme staff in Flanders identified three particular challenges they face:

1) In order to give the best advice, counsellors need to have up-to-date knowledge about two complex fields, education and social welfare
2) Client cases are complex and it is not easy for counsellors to identify and prioritise the areas that are relevant in terms of education and training. For a counsellor it can be difficult to maintain the boundaries between GOAL counselling and a broader personal coaching.
3) Developing professional competences requires additional time and effort in what is already a demanding job.

6.3 Key findings

A consensus emerges from Wave 1 reporting that competence standards for adult guidance professionals are an essential component of a high-quality guidance service. To work with low-educated adults, counsellors require a broader skillset that the formal educational and career counsellor competence profiles, as well as skills specific to working with the target group. There is no

agreement as yet on how much this should be achieved through formal training, and how much through informal practices.

Across all six reports, emphasis was placed on how important personal skills were to guidance counsellors working with low-educated adults. Although the guidance services on offer are explicitly designed to help the target group with their education and their careers, in practice, the complex lives many lead, and the obstacles they face in multiple areas, mean that a counsellor's ability to understand, to empathise, and to not be judgemental are critical to the guidance process.

As reported above, one major obstacle to counsellor's professional competency is the multiple roles they have to play in their job, including administrative tasks. Those working in schools rather than adult education institutions may face more challenges getting time release for training.

In countries where professional standards for guidance professionals are lacking or undeveloped, such as Lithuania, there was a general consensus from stakeholders that national counsellor competence standards would be beneficial and a vital step towards achieving common standards for quality and competences of guidance specialists.

Emerging from the Slovenia report is a reminder that within the broad target group of low-educated adults are smaller subgroups, some of which may require counsellors to have different competences. In order to achieve this, knowledge of the group (for example, Roma clients) is key to an effective service, as well as knowledge of other stakeholders with an interest in the cohort. Information exchange between professionals is likely to be critical to defining and developing competences.

6.4 Implications

Implications for policy

Where adult education is a marginalised and/or underfunded field, there is little impetus to develop professional standards for staff. Moreover, where, as in Lithuania, the adult education sector is fragmented, there is no clear agreement on where responsibility for developing professional standards lies

Implications for evaluation

In Wave 2 more work will be done to contextualise the professional role of the guidance counsellor in each of the six countries, particularly with regard to Licence to Practice and national competences standards.

Data from Wave 2 should enable researchers to explore connections between counsellor competences and client outcomes.

As cross-country evaluators, IOE would like in Wave 2 to explore the possibility of running an exercise similar to that carried out in Flanders in the other partner countries – peer identification and review of the key competences counsellors require.

7 Guidance tools for low-educated adults

This chapter provides descriptive information on the tools which the GOAL counsellors in the six partner countries use to support and enhance their GOAL guidance programmes and offers some preliminary analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of these tools in terms of impact and quality. In the Wave 1 evaluation, no quantitative data on tools were collected from clients or from counsellors; the findings presented here are based on national reporting of qualitative interview data only.

The range of tools that support staff and clients in adult guidance is broad and can include:

- Traditional, paper-based resources and newer online and digital tools.
- Tools to diagnose and assess levels of skills, including basic skills.
- Tools to support the validation of prior learning (VPL) processes.
- Tools for evaluation and self-evaluation (such as interest inventories, tools for making action plans, goal-setting pro forma).
- Tools that help counsellors to reflect; professional development tools for counsellors.
- Information tools (internal and external sources), including both those which inform the counsellor and those which can be used to disseminate information to clients (such as job-search tools, college websites).
- Data monitoring tools and registrations systems, where analysis of the variables can be used to develop the programme and track outcomes.
- Tools that help to structure the guidance session such as scripts for interview. Data monitoring templates can also support this aspect of the counselling.
- Tools that help clients with job-search, such as tools to assist with CV writing.

From this range, a number of the GOAL partners are seeking to develop a toolbox of resources that can support guidance services for low-educated adults. In Iceland it is hoped that group counselling sessions will be developed based on the need of the target group where there will be room for using the tools listed in a "package" (see appendix for a list of tools used with the target group).

Guidance tools play an essential role in all the GOAL guidance programmes, but nowhere are they more central to the GOAL intervention than in the Netherlands. Unlike the other countries, the GOAL programme in the Netherlands has the use of two tools as its core purpose. The most important of these is the basic skills quick scan (*Taalmeter*), an online tool which organisations can use to identify quickly and easily adults who may have difficulty reading. The quick scan is comprised of five reading assignments with a total of 24 different questions. Each reading assignment has 19 different versions. Participants have up to 12 minutes to answer the questions. Once the time has elapsed, the basic skills quick scan stops automatically.[10] The basic skills quick scan tests the general literacy level of an individual but does not determine the precise level of basic skills. It does, however, give a good indication of whether someone may have low literacy or low basic skills. The scan is being used as

[10] See www.lezenenschrijven.nl/hulp-bij-scholing/Taalmeter

standard with all clients of the partner organisations, except prisons, where participation is on a voluntary basis. The principle behind the use of the quick scan in adult guidance is that identifying clients who may have problems with literacy at the start of the guidance process represents a way of ensuring that interventions for those clients are more effective.

The second tool used in the Dutch intervention is a road map tool, which provides an overview of all basic skills courses (both formal and non-formal) that are available in a given region. Data on its use are not yet available to evaluators.

7.1 Guidance tools for low-educated adults

It is helpful to think of the GOAL guidance tools chosen as falling into a number of types. Some tools which GOAL counsellors are using have been specifically developed for this evaluation, most obviously the data monitoring instrument; others are either generic counselling tools or tools from another sector/domain that are being adapted for use with the target group. It is probably fair to say that not all "tools" are always recognised as tools, because their use is so routine in guidance work.

Tools to support counsellors

Data monitoring/registration

Most guidance services keep registration data on service users and, for those countries where their GOAL programme built on existing services, some data monitoring systems were already in place. In the national Wave 1 reports, there is general agreement that the process of collecting monitoring data for the GOAL evaluation meant that the IOE template functioned as an additional guidance tool and one which it would be beneficial to integrate into future programmes.

In Slovenia for example, counsellors report that the level of detail they are required to enter into the data monitoring template means they have to take more time for clients. Through this process they learn more about clients. As an added-benefit, the Slovenian teams used the questionnaires they developed from the template in English versions with migrants or other foreigner clients with a limited understand of Slovene.

Counselling methodologies

In the Czech GOAL project, a counselling methodology, "Career Guidance Counsellor Assistant", was developed by experts. This methodology contains the structure of the guidance process, sets up the cooperation with clients, the plan for examining solutions, semi-structured steps in career guidance, feedback, and self-reflection. It also contains theoretical approaches to career guidance (context and goal of career guidance), that the principle behind the conversation with clients is based on mutual respect, the types of questions that might occur during interview, mapping the possible conflict situations and their solutions, storytelling tools, clarification of life experience, road maps for clients etc.

Policy documentation

The national report from Flanders draws attention to the fact that policy documents can support the work of counsellors and counselling services.

Interview techniques and scripts

As part of the development of its GOAL programme, the team in Lithuania developed a semi-structured interview script for use with service users. The aim here is that the script should help to counsellors to establish a good and close working relationship with the client.

Tools to support validation of prior learning

These tools support counsellors through the validation stages.

Tools to support clients

Across countries (with the exception of the Netherlands, whose intervention is centred on a specific set of tools), counsellors emphasised the importance of taking a client-centred approach to tool use. As observed in Flanders, not every tool is as useful for every counsellor with every client, and a great deal depends on the profile and needs of the service user. For example, Flemish counsellors have found through previous experience that clients with a poor personal network tend to benefit more from relatively frequent 'micro-contacts' via phone or text messages, whereas clients with well-developed personal networks are less in need of such contacts.

Information tools

Online information sources on educational courses and careers, including the websites of government ministries, employment offices, and educational institutions, feature strongly in the list of tools used by the six partner countries. Most countries are also drawing on traditional information sources such as leaflets, brochures and other publicity materials

Self-reflection and self-evaluation

Worksheets and print options, such as cards and pictures, or surveys and questionnaires to help clients identify their needs and goals. In this type of tool, interest inventories are especially valued by programme staff in Iceland and clients in Lithuania, where interest tests helped to identify possible choices in a professional field. With the target group of low-educated adults it is important that all tools are simple and understandable, short and informative. Programme staff from Slovenia pointed out that given some of the target group have limited digital skills, paper tools can often be more appropriate than online ones.

Portfolio work/CV building tools

These type of tools aim to build the clients' resources, thus aiding with job-seeking.

Action plans

These documents identify for clients the steps that the need to take in order to achieve their goals. They may also include strategies for anticipating and overcoming any barriers to reaching these goals.

Use of tools

Given that many of the partner countries were in early stages of programme implementation when Wave 1 data were collected, with many clients having received only one guidance session, the full range of available tools have not been used thus far.

The Slovenian report contains a finding that holds true for most of the GOAL partner countries: there is a good range of tools available to counsellors, but many of these require adaptation to better suit the GOAL target group; there are fewer tools outside of the project that have been developed specifically with low-educated adults in mind.

In practice, counsellors in countries including the Czech Republic, Flanders, and Iceland report using a combination of tools with clients, selecting those best suited to the clients' individual situation. This can be seen in areas such as contact methods, with some clients being more responsive to contact by phone or email than face-to-face, and interview scripts being deemed inappropriate for some clients. Another aspect of this would be the ways in which tools can be used with migrants who are not fluent in the language of their host country. In general, the GOAL projects argue against sticking rigidly to set tools and to using them in set ways, instead preferring a custom-fit approach.

For clients who are able to be more specific about their goals, it is easier to select the most useful tools.

This highlights two key factors: both the importance to the GOAL programme in most of the six countries (excepting the Netherlands) of customising the service to the individual client, and the importance of the counsellor's professional expertise in judging which tools will work best with that individual client. When clients are able to be more specific about their goals, counsellors may find it easier to select the most appropriate tools.

7.2 Impact of guidance tools

Aside from reflection on the use of the data monitoring template, across the six countries, there have been few attempts to date to systematically assess the impact of tools on counsellors, clients or the service more generally. For example, it was not possible for local evaluators in the Czech Republic to measure the impact of guidance tools in Wave 1. In Wave 2, programme staff members will evaluate the impact of tools through feedback, questionnaires and self-reflection. The Lithuanian evaluators reported that counsellors had been supported in their use of new tools during Wave 1 and that no problems were experienced by staff, in large measure due to their experience and training.

Iceland has made some attempts to evaluate the tools counsellors are using through a peer review process. A method group has been established with stakeholders to identify the best tools for the particularly vulnerable target group. Through that method group a list was made with a description of tools to use. This list is now being used by counsellors and will be analysed further as more service

users participate in the project and counsellors gain more experience of what works best with this group of service users.

In the Netherlands there is as yet no clear understanding of the impact of using the basic skills quick scan as part of GOAL. Initial results have highlighted, however, that the use of the scan and its results can raise sensitive, personal issues for clients, which impact on the discussion that follows.

7.3 Quality of guidance tools

Some attempts were made in Wave 1 to gather feedback from clients on the tools that were used in their guidance session. No negative comments on tools were raised by clients in any country in either the client satisfaction survey or the qualitative interviews. Qualitative data from Flanders shows learners were appreciative of the information tools and the communications tools that were used:

> *'During the first session, my coach showed me some websites from schools where adults can follow courses. I hardly knew this kind of school existed. I would never have been able to find those sites by myself.'*

> *'From time to time, I receive a text message from my coach. That helps me to remember the appointments we made. But it's also nice to know that my coach isn't only involved when we have a personal appointment with each other. These messages motivate me to progress.'*

From the staff perspective, assessment of tool quality is based on their professional expertise and reflection on use of the tools in practice, with various clients. This informal approach to monitoring tool quality is the norm across countries, with few, if any, formal systems in place. For example, there is no formal process in place to monitor the effectiveness of the tools in Iceland. However, counsellors are not left "on their own" in terms of reflecting on tool quality: tools are reviewed and discussed informally with peers at steering group meetings. Slovenia, likewise, has no formal process, but at the heart of the plan for effective implementation is peer exchange between programme staff, both in sharing good practice and exchanging tools. A potentially intriguing question for the next stage of the evaluation is to gather counsellors' perspectives on whether a more formal system of quality assurance of tools would be an improvement on informal systems such as these, or would instead be a hindrance, both through the expansion of programme bureaucracy and through reducing the role of counsellor judgement in taking a custom-fit, client-centred approach to tool selection and use.

In the Netherlands, the quick scan tool has already been tested and widely used outside of GOAL. On the whole, its use on GOAL, although limited to date, has supported the belief that it is a high-quality tool that is quick and easy to use. This said, the digital format poses problems for clients with limited ICT skills, and the time limit for taking the test can be challenging, not least because it causes bottle-necks.

In Lithuania, the main challenge to quality in respect of tools is that the current programme model includes only one guidance session, thus limiting the use of tools, particularly those that require more time, or would be suitable for more motivated clients.

As this suggests, the effectiveness of guidance tools, here and in the other countries, is partly dependent on the training that staff receive in their use. As the Flemish national report points out, budget and time constraints present a challenge to the quality implementation of tools. In Iceland where the profession of career counsellor is licensed and professional development programmes are in place, the training offer includes courses in using formalised tools (e.g. interest inventories), and insights into new tools are provided by meetings of the counsellor network through cooperation with the Education and Training Services Centre, in addition to the GOAL method group referred to above. In the Netherlands, instruction is given by the partner organisation's Stichting Lezen en Schrijven (Reading and Writing Foundation) contact, prior to initial use of the basic skills quick scan.

The range of tools used by the GOAL counsellors makes it clear that many tools, especially those focused on providing information, come from external organisations and agencies – it is important that information sources are up-to-date if they are to be useful, although guidance services have little or no control over the external content.

7.4 Key Findings

For programme staff in five of the six countries, the data monitoring instrument created by IOE proved to be one of the most valuable tools to counsellors. It would be fair to say that this positive report was contrary to initial expectations as a number of concerns were raised at the development stage about its complexity and the value of some data (for example, the self-efficacy scales). Some of these concerns remain – there is always a danger that the process of gathering the information via the data monitoring instrument may impede the guidance session, and programme staff in Flanders reported to local evaluators that the system is less than user friendly and gathers more information than necessary or even useful to guidance. One possibility is that this might be connected to the fact that clients in Flanders tend to be somewhat younger and perhaps more heterogeneous than clients in other countries. It may also be related to the fact that counsellors in Flanders already had well-developed data collection systems in place before the GOAL pilot was launched. In some countries counsellors have tackled challenges such as these by completing some fields themselves after the end of the session, or, where multiple sessions are planned, by omitting some fields from the initial session.

On the whole, however, a number of countries argue in their national reports, that rather than detracting from the guidance session, collecting the monitoring data has enhanced their work. The Icelandic evaluators report that the tool is very effective in gathering important and detailed information about the service user. Rather than being intrusive, collecting these personal data has opened up conversations about the barriers clients have experienced in the past, and what and

where he or she would like to do in the future. According to programme staff in Iceland the questions on "self-assertiveness" and positive psychology have been most effective for clients.

Whatever the experience of different countries with the data monitoring instrument, a key point remains: the GOAL pilot is not a test of the effectiveness of this instrument; rather the data monitoring instrument is a tool used to measure the effectiveness of GOAL, while also being a tool to use within GOAL. Should the GOAL pilot lead to longer-term programme implementation in some or all countries, it would be expected that the data monitoring instrument would be modified to make it ever more focused on its role as a counselling tool, and less on its role as an evaluation instrument.

Turning to the tools used to date, there are very few findings in Wave 1 that contain insights at anything other than a general level. No individual tools have been analysed in terms of their strengths and weaknesses.

In the Czech Republic, for example, it has been identified that an important aspect of ensuring quality in the use of tools is that guidance staff are given specific training before they begin work on GOAL services. Moreover, staff training would help counsellors to make judgements about which tools from the toolkit are more effective with particular clients.

In Iceland, establishing a method group with stakeholders that interact with the target group on regular basis was very effective. It was especially useful how the group was used to bring forth and identify best practice tools with the target group of the GOAL project.

7.5 Implications

Implications for programme development

Findings to date from a number of countries suggest that counsellors need a portfolio, or toolbox, of different tools, from which they can select those that best suit the individual client's needs and goals. This is in keeping with the individualised approach followed in most countries. As the Icelandic report emphasises, the adjustment of tools according to individual needs is a continuing process. Increasing knowledge about the target demands continuing development and adjustment of tools. Networking amongst specialists can be very beneficial in this process.

The downside of this, however, is that there is a risk that there will be so much diversity that it could be difficult to structuralise support for counsellors and evaluate where there is a need for better or more tools. Flanders has taken a step in the direction of systematisation by mapping tools.

Also, where partnerships and networks are small, or not sufficiently active, this may limit the possibilities for exchanging tools and learning about good practice.

It has become clear from partner meetings that all the national teams see that benefits can be drawn from exchanging experiences and resources on guidance tools, perhaps more so than on any of the intervention strategies.

Implications for evaluation

In Wave 2, there should be a more explicit focus on tools in the evaluation methodology and the impact of the lack of formal structures for evaluating tools used during the GOAL project should be addressed. It may be the case that more informal processes are preferred; however, should this be the case, it would be necessary to understand and develop the conditions through which informal processes can themselves by encouraged and built into the structure of counsellors' work, rather than being dependent on individual initiative

The data monitoring system has not been embraced as eagerly by counsellors in Flanders as in some of the other participating countries.

In the Netherlands, work needs to be done to better understand the future implications related to issues such as referrals and next steps for clients.

Measuring the impact of individual tools on clients is a difficult exercise, particularly with this target group, many of whom lack the cognitive skills or the experience to assess the tools.

8 Outreach

This chapter provides analysis of the outreach strategies adopted by the GOAL programme in the participating countries including a description of the challenges involved and preliminary analysis of the strategy's successes.

By 'outreach' the GOAL project refers to strategies for bringing the guidance programmes to the target group, for example, by setting up drop-in services in locations that are easier for marginalised clients to access, and strategies for bringing the target group to the guidance programmes, such as establishing referral structures, or awareness-raising measures. Outreach may occur through **'reaching out' to the target group** directly, but it also will occur through **'reaching into' organisations** that serve the target group. At its core, outreach in GOAL aims to identify and attract those adults who would not normally engage with either counselling services or further education and training.

Context

For most of the GOAL countries, outreach activities to increase the amount of referrals is focused on **employment services, welfare services and educational institutions**. In Flanders, 75% of clients came to the service through one of these three routes. After these three main sources, collaboration with NGOs and other agencies is an additional way of reaching out to clients.

A strong theme from the Icelandic report is the importance of communicating with precision, both internally and externally, who the service is aimed at, in order to establish a common understanding. Initial misunderstandings of this in the Icelandic project, which were then compounded by the aim of working with particularly vulnerable adults, mean that for programme staff in Iceland, outreach has been a key project challenge to date.

Lithuania is not specifically tackling outreach as one of its intervention strategies, although some insights from the project are nonetheless offered below. The concept of outreach in the Netherlands is different to that used in the other five countries. The pilot organisations there are outreach organisations in themselves, that is, clients come for different purposes to the organisations (e.g. to get assistance with finding a job) and are asked to take the basic skills quick scan. In order to reach out to more service users with low literacy – the core of the Dutch GOAL intervention – the GOAL project will expand the type of identification site and screen people who potentially have low basic skills in an accessible setting.

8.1 Outreach challenges

The GOAL team in the Czech Republic identified three outreach challenges, most of which are pertinent to each of the six programmes:

1. ***Challenges related to the characteristics of the target group, namely that as people who are marginalised from both education and the labour market, they are harder-to-reach and harder to engage.***

As the Flemish report notes, the fact that many clients come from a **multi-problem background** means that it is easy for more practical or pressing difficulties to crowd out the motivation to engage in educational or career counselling. Another aspect of the challenge is that, with a history of educational failure, and low self-esteem linked to this, low-educated adults can be highly reluctant to come to guidance services. An important subgroup will be unknown to the mediators such as welfare or employment services on which outreach strategies rely.

More than any of the other five countries, programme developers in Iceland aimed to work with **hard-to-reach groups**: adults who had not previously sought guidance on their own initiative and had not actively engaged in any programmes within other institutions. Reaching out to these adults and engaging them in the programme has proved extremely challenging. Programme staff report that those low-educated adults who are chronically inactive often have problems that need to be resolved before they can start to think about educational or career opportunities. As a result a great deal of time has been spent **'chasing after' clients**. 'No shows' are very common both in the first interview and subsequent interviews. Behind every client that participates in the project there are countless phone calls, e-mails and text messages.

One reason that the Lithuanian programme appears to have met with more success in recruiting clients in Wave 1 may be that the majority of clients there can be regarded as motivated, because they demonstrated initiative and showed up for the guidance session. Despite their low level of education, they reported that they have learning goals and like to learn new things. A challenge remains to prepare institutions providing guidance services for work with unmotivated low-educated persons coming from a deprived background and to establish sustainable partnerships with NGOs and municipal welfare services because in Lithuania they are the most active in serving this target group.

As reports from Lithuania, the Netherlands and the Czech Republic emphasise, seeking guidance is still taboo with some client groups in some countries.

2. ***Challenges related to resources, both in terms of financial resources, such as investment in promotional and information materials, and staff time, where they must take their message and their service to external organisations.***

Where capacity is limited, those who are hardest-to-reach are most likely to be excluded from outreach activities and strategies. In Flanders, it was found that distributing folders and leaflets on the streets and in public places, was too time and resource intensive.

Programme staff in Iceland reflected that the service would benefit from having more staff working on recruiting new participants for the project, as this task has turned out to be much more time consuming than was originally anticipated. Moreover, as the GOAL project model in Iceland requires participants to commit to up to ten interviews, there may have been a benefit to offering some kind of financial reward (in the form of gift certificates, for example) for participation, although this is unlikely to be a sustainable strategy.

In the case of the Netherlands, organisations need to feel the urgency and see the importance of addressing low basic skills. An important barrier is the effort and time and the accompanying lack of financial resources that are needed for any screening and follow-up process. For instance, one of the participating organisations stated that there were limited resources available for education and that they preferred people to actively register for this themselves (and thus be motivated) instead of diluting the available resources across people identified via screening. Services to support adults with low literacy in the Netherlands are heavily reliant on volunteers.

3. ***Challenges related to accessibility, particularly where the target group are unable, because of lack of funds or lack of transport, to travel to the guidance service.***

Accessibility challenges appear to have been felt particularly in the Czech Republic, but the Icelandic national report also drew attention to the fact that transportation to and from the programme sites can be costly if clients are to come for many interviews and are in a bad financial situation:

> *'There is one client that comes to see me, he cannot afford the bus fare [..]. He walks and was soaking wet when he came, I had to put his clothes on the oven. He had promised to come and was determined to follow through'.* (GOAL programme staff member)

Conversely, proximity to the service, is one way of overcoming the challenge of engaging marginalised adults to the service. And in projects working with prisoners, such as in the Netherlands, practical restrictions such as travelling time do not play a role; issues such as transfer or release for concluding the process however are unique to that situation.

In addition to these three challenges, in Iceland challenges were experienced when working directly with firms, to try to encourage them to let their low-educated employees access the service. To date, upper levels of management have shown little interest, which is understandable considering the guidance takes place during working hours, and that increasing an individual's skills may lead them to change job. The benefits of participation and collaboration can be very vague when it comes to

company managers and their staff members, but according to the programme staff the benefits of participation for the management need to be very clear.

> '*The companies need to see how participation and collaboration benefits them, it needs to be presented in that way'*. (Goal programme staff member)

The implications of this challenge to date seem to be **that interesting companies and managers is sometimes too much of a challenge** for the counsellor and extra effort is needed from higher levels, including the policy level.

8.2 Outreach strategies

Strategies

Given the challenges outlined in Section 8.1, **mediation by partners** such as public employment services, welfare services, the migration office, or a pupil guidance centre is crucial to outreach, and the strategy most successfully pursued by the six GOAL teams in Wave 1. Data from Flanders are a reminder that these **referral pathways are only as good as the referral systems set up in the partner organisations**. Where a staff member may be unaware of the GOAL service, or where an organization has not been adequately informed, **potential clients can slip through the net**. Programme staff reported that it is difficult to be known at all levels within the partner organisations. When organisations are less than familiar with the GOAL service they do not instinctively or automatically refer adults with (sometimes vague) questions on the topic of training and education.

In Lithuania the monitoring data show that a third of clients self-referred to the service (30%), a third were referred by unemployment services (30%), and a fifth by educational institutions and educational support services (20%). All the clients in Iceland have come through these referral routes. Strategies aimed at **engaging directly with employers** have not proved successful, and in most cases represented an unrewarding investment of time and energy by programme staff. (Interestingly, in Slovenia going directly into companies and delivering guidance there is proposed as a potential outreach solution.) A personal approach, where counsellors try to directly engage with people who they know might benefit from the service (for example, adults who have dropped out of courses at the partner Lifelong Learning Centre), has also brought negligible results.

Outreach locations: taking the service to the client

In Flanders, guidance sessions have been organised at the offices of some programme partners, meaning that GOAL can be accessed by adults who are already using the services of the partners. This has the advantage of offering the guidance in a familiar and convenient location.

In Wave 1 little work was carried out in Slovenia on developing and providing outreach guidance in other locations. Mostly clients came to the institution where counsellors work. The exception was in Velenje, where the counsellor from the ISIO centre went to a company which is a network partner and had guidance for their low-skilled workers. The national report draws attention to some

potential pitfalls in taking the service to an alternative location. Due to staffing limitations counsellors are not present in all locations where they are needed and not often enough; if the characteristics of the local environment differ from the environment where the service is usually based, the counsellor is less familiar with the traits of the local environment and thus the needs of adults; and not all outreach locations have suitable premises for guidance activity.

Promotional materials

The GOAL programme in the Czech Republic has developed a **website** to publicise the service, although this is not seen as a primary way to attract clients in the target group. Five hundred leaflets have been distributed and offered to labour offices and other stakeholders and contact points. Flanders, too, has a website and has produced **leaflets, brochures**, and other materials. Those outreach materials are used as **tools to support outreach strategies** rather than being outreach strategies by themselves. The perception of programme partners in Slovenia was that for the GOAL target group, printed, written materials were insufficient.

In Lithuania, information campaigns were organised in the local employment offices and information about the availability of GOAL services was disseminated within partner institutions and in the sites.

Promotional events

In the Czech Republic, counsellors have introduced the GOAL programme at a number of events held at vocational schools in Olomouc. In Flanders, counsellors have presented information on GOAL at study orientation events and job fairs.

The Slovenian report emphasized the importance of the **personal connection with the counsellor** to effective outreach. In their experience, clients are more motivated to enter to guidance if they meet counsellor personally before entering to guidance, thus promotional events, rather than just promotional materials, are important.

Impacts

Self-referral in the Czech Republic is very limited: only three of the fifteen Wave 1 clients were not referred to the service by one of the two programme partners.

In Iceland, the impacts of trying to reach out to a particularly vulnerable group, with a programme that involves a model with multiple guidance sessions, have been felt primarily in terms of the effort taken to persuade clients to engage and persist in the programme. This has had significant **resource implications**.

The national evaluators in Flanders were the only team to raise the subject of too much outreach success, perhaps as they are the only team outstripping their targets for client numbers. Where promotion of the service is extensive, especially given that it is a free service for users, there is a danger that **demand may outstrip supply**. Given the limited resources it is not possible to expand any of the GOAL programmes to reach extensive numbers of service users.

8.3 Key findings

Effective outreach strategies are heavily dependent on ensuring that referral partners are familiar with the GOAL service and with what it can deliver for their service users. However, **getting to the stage where partner organisations automatically refer client to GOAL** requires a very significant investment of time and energy. In this context it seems important that the GOAL programme has some level of **official or structural recognition** in the local policy and programme landscape.

Service users in the GOAL target groups typically lack 'readiness' and perseverance. What the GOAL project in Iceland has shown is that if a person is in a place in their lives that hinders them from committing to counselling and looking into learning, then they are unlikely to come to sessions or benefit from the programme, no matter how many phone calls or text messages they receive. Programme staff in Iceland have even offered to meet clients at their preferred location, to little avail.

8.4 Implications

Implications for programme development

In the Czech Republic, the barriers clients face in accessing the regional guidance centres mean that **resource expenditures**, both in terms of staff time and finances, are high, and may impact negatively on other aspects of the service. These issues may also impact on **programme sustainability** and/or the choice of viable target groups.

According to the programme partners in Iceland, the aim of the project – i.e. **to find new ways to reach a highly disadvantaged target group** – is very inspiring. They also feel that this objective has not been fully accomplished, largely because the vast majority of Wave 1 clients have been referred to the project by partner organisations and other means of reaching out to them have not been successful. They feel it is important that all parties involved look into the reasons for this and hopefully gain more knowledge that will benefit the target group and guidance in general.

Across countries, future programme development will need to **make realistic estimates of how much resource is needed** to bring clients to the programme. This may involve some organisations making bigger commitments to gather a certain number of clients for the project.

Implications for policy

The relatively high cost per client to this point, for example, in relation to the need for advisers to travel to clients, may have implications for **policymakers' ability and willingness to support GOAL** or similar programmes in the future, after EU funding has ceased.

Implications for evaluation

In Wave 2, more detailed information on **outreach efforts and costs** should be captured. In the second stage of the evaluation, it would be useful to capture **data on the amount of effort that goes into recruiting clients** and ensuring that they show up to sessions.

Some thought should be given to whether outreach strategies would be strengthened if the referral organisations were provided with data on client **outcomes**.

9 Service outcomes

This chapter looks more closely at outcomes for service users. By service outcomes, this report refers both to **hard outcomes**, that is, measurable outcomes such progression to employment or education, and **soft outcomes**, which may be harder to quantify, such as improved confidence or changes to attitudes.

As the Flemish national report points out, some stakeholders, and policymakers in particular, measure the success of a programme in terms of hard outcomes: in the case of GOAL in Flanders, the measurable service outcomes are **the proportion of clients registering on a course of education or training**, and, in time, the proportion of clients gaining a diploma or a qualification. In other GOAL programmes there is also an interest in the proportion of clients going into **employment**.

These measurable outcomes are not without their drawbacks. Firstly, there are practical considerations – following the outcomes of former clients beyond their participation in the programme requires cooperation and data sharing with educational institutions. Second, there are likely to be exogenous **factors confounding the relationship between counselling and longer-term outcomes**, such as progress in the labour market and/or achievement of educational qualifications. Many possible factors might cross a client's educational track, such as an interesting career opportunity, or negative factors such as personal health or family problems. In some cases, the guidance may actually make a client aware that embarking on an educational course is not the right option for them at the current time; in such cases, non-enrolment on a course does not mean that the guidance has failed.

In the final analysis, the outcomes of guidance may be most felt in **results that are less easy to measure, such as growth in self-reliance**. There is, however, a tendency for policymakers to see these results as side-effects rather than as a valuable outcome and/or a necessary stepping stone for some guidance clients.

9.1 Outcomes of guidance

Quantitative findings

Exit data overview

The data monitoring template included a number of fields in which information on guidance outcomes could be recorded. Data are recorded at the first session and (where relevant) all subsequent sessions. For clients who have multiple sessions, not all data fields are relevant to every session, so only relevant data is collected at each session.

Following the first session, data recorded during and after each session subsequent to the first session allows evaluators to investigate the **short-term impacts** of the guidance. Fields were also included so that counsellors could record exit data during clients' final session. However, because of delays in some programmes' roll-outs, the **cut-off date for Wave 1 of the evaluation** occurred during

what turned out to be a relatively early phase of some programmes' development. This meant that **only 34 clients had exit data** recorded on the monitoring template, and for these service-users there are further missing items.

There were significant variations across the six countries with regard to the number of sessions that were planned in the programme model and how and when exit from the guidance occurs. The 'exit schedule' could also differ between sites within a country. **In Flanders, the point defined as the completion of the guidance differs between the two sites**: de Leerwinkel and de Stap. At the former the client exits the guidance system when he or she signs up to an education or training course. Thereafter, the client's guidance needs are the responsibility of his or her educational institution. At de Stap, however, the GOAL guidance can continue as long as the client feels a need for it. Thus the client may continue to receive GOAL guidance during their educational programme, either for part of their programme or up until the point they gain their qualification.

Looking at other countries, three clients in the Czech Republic had attended two guidance sessions; the remaining 12 attended one session only. All 50 clients in Lithuania and all eight in the Netherlands had one guidance session only – in both cases, this was in line with the national GOAL model, which is based on the completion of one session only. In Flanders the programme model has no set number of sessions, meaning that no data are available on whether the 148 clients completed all the planned sessions or not. Generally, guidance in Flanders concludes at one of three different time points:

- when the client achieves their primary goal (enrolling on a course or obtaining a diploma);
- when the client feels ready to take further steps without help from the counsellor;
- when the client feels that following a course or training might not the most suitable solution for him (according to his particular interests and/or situation).

In Iceland, there are no exit data, as all 21 clients are still regarded as being in the system. This is also the case in Slovenia: the short time period available to the local evaluators for the collection of Wave 1 data means very little information is available on service outcomes as most clients have not yet completed the guidance process. In the Wave 1 dataset for Slovenia there are 49 clients who came to the GOAL service: nine of these clients came twice and two clients came four times.

The Netherlands has little to contribute to findings on service outcomes as so few data are available at this stage. Although, in contrast to other five countries, the focus of GOAL in the Netherlands is principally on the screening and not on any subsequent support/education, in Wave 2, Dutch evaluators plan to collect more information on the number of participants starting and finishing educational activities after referral on the basis of the basic skill quick scan.

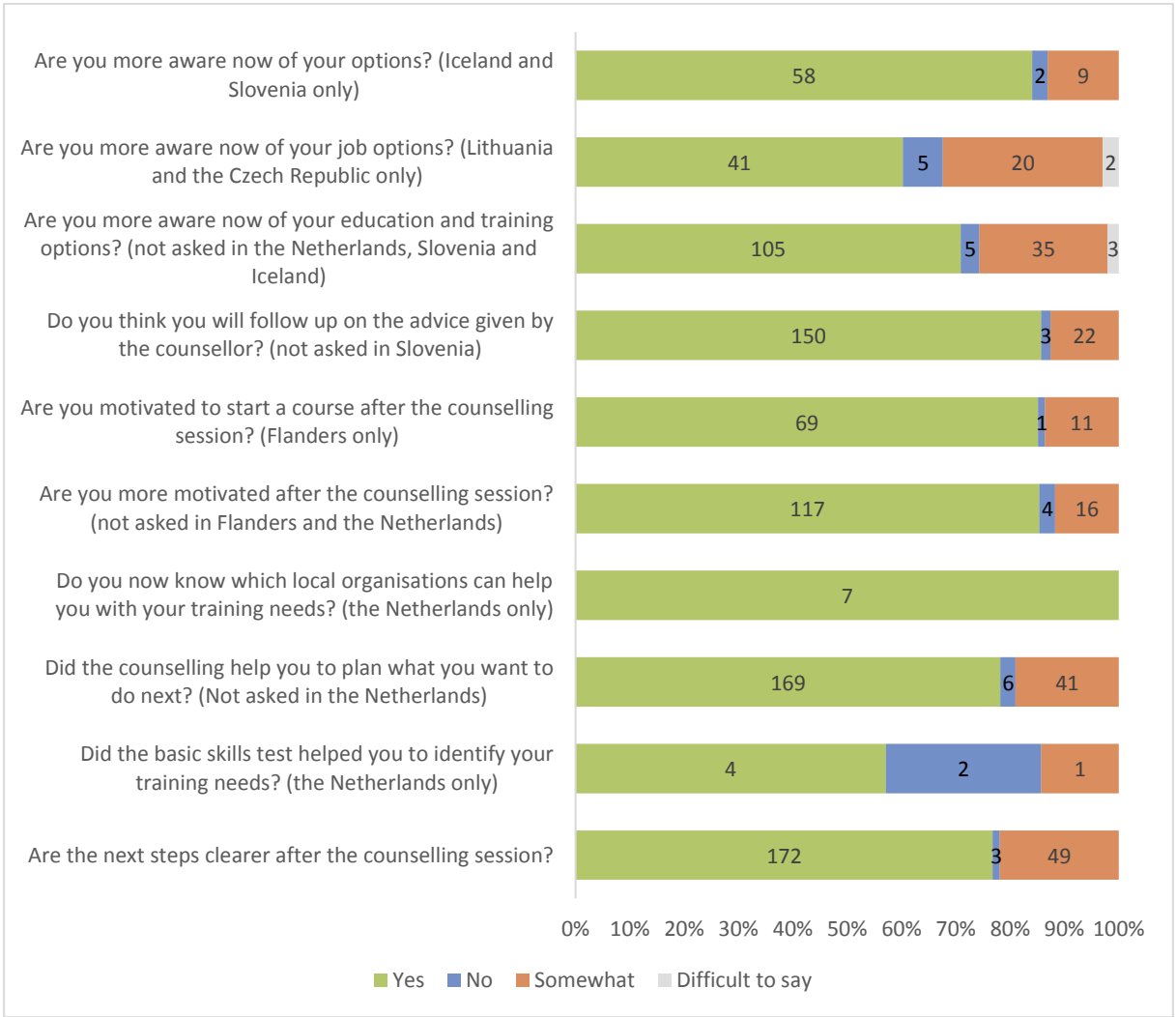
Service User perceptions

The **client satisfaction survey** recorded information from service users on their awareness about the next steps that were available to them, their plans, and their motivation. However, not all of the bank of questions developed by IOE were asked in all six countries: the client satisfaction survey was

adapted to the context and objectives of each programmes. Across the six countries, almost all client satisfaction surveys were completed after the first guidance session, and only then.

As the data summarised in Figure 9.1 shows, **clients perceived their guidance sessions as very positive**. 77% of the clients who participated in the survey in all six countries agreed that the next steps were clearer after the session and 22% reported that the steps were somewhat clearer. 78% agreed that the counselling helped them to plan what to do next and 85% felt more motivated after the session, with 85% of clients in Flanders agreeing that they felt more motivated to start a course. 86% of the clients, in five countries, thought that they would follow up the advice given during the counselling sessions (Slovenia did not ask this question).

Figure 9.1. *Client satisfaction survey results, in absolute numbers*



Further analysis of the data (see Figures A.8 – A.18 in Appendix A) shows that in the Czech Republic two-thirds (67%) of clients said they would **follow the counsellor's advice**, and 22% would follow at

least some of the advice. Only two clients did not intend to follow the advice at all. The counselling session helped clients in the Czech Republic to plan the next steps in 61% of cases, and 56% of clients felt that the next steps were clearer after the counselling session.

In Flanders, all but two clients indicated that they were **motivated** or somewhat motivated to follow the counsellor's advice. Although the results were highly positive, Flemish evaluators did raise some factors that may possibly influence these results:

- Clients come to de Stap or de Leerwinkel on their own initiative, meaning that they are already motivated to start a course or get a diploma.
- By visiting the service, clients have completed a first step in their ambition to start a course or get a diploma. This might make them feel more positive from the outset.
- Even though the survey was anonymous, a certain level of social desirability bias might affect the client's response (especially as the counsellor gave the client personal and often positive attention during the session).

In Iceland, responses in the client satisfaction survey were highly positive with almost all clients reporting that they were clearer about the next steps, their options, and their plans after the session, and that they were motivated to start work on realising their plans.

The majority of clients from the Netherlands reported that the basic skills scan had helped them identify their training needs and identify organisations that could help them.

In Lithuania, clients assessed the outcomes of the guidance sessions positively. After the counselling session they felt that the next steps were clearer (70%) and the counselling helped them to plan what to do next (70%); they felt more motivated (84%) and more aware of education and training and jobs options (60% and 58% respectively); and they were determined to follow up on the advice given by the counsellor (78%).

Compared to the youngest group of clients (that is, those aged 18-25), those aged 26 and over tended to be more positive about the outcomes of session (see Table B.29 in Appendix B). Lithuanian evaluators speculate that clients in their mid-20s and up may be more aware of their objectives, and are thus more active during counselling sessions, and more inclined to find answers to questions about their future. Analysis of 'focus of the session' data suggests that clients who cited only one focus of the session had a more positive perception of session outcomes than clients who cited more than one session. That is, clients whose sessions (according to them) focused either on learning or jobs provided more positive outcome feedback than clients whose sessions focused on learning and jobs (see Table B.31 Appendix B).

Results of the session

Variables on the results of the sessions were also part of the monitoring data collection, with the fields filled in by counsellors after each session. Across the six countries, the **most common session results** were: the client being informed about what they could study and where (48%), the client

gaining information on formal qualifications (46%), and the client gaining information about formal education courses (42%). As these percentages suggest, **many sessions had multiple results**. As indicated in Table 9.1, slightly less common results included: the development of a personal action plan (29%), getting information on short courses (20%), and getting information on overcoming barriers (20%).

Table 9.1. *Results of the session (multiple choice question, thus answers do not add up to 100%)*

	First session		Subsequent sessions	
	N	%	N	%
Being informed about what can study and where	130	48	42	31
Information on formal qualifications	123	46	37	27
Information about formal education courses	112	42	37	27
Information about non-formal learning	19	7	5	4
Information on short time courses	54	20	9	7
Information on retraining courses	14	5	4	3
Development of a personal action plan	77	29	62	46
Career plan / portfolio	13	5	7	5
Interest inventory	50	19	24	18
Given information on how to overcome barriers	53	20	54	40
Given information on how to find financial resources for taking up a study course	46	17	31	23
Help in preparing the documentation for validation of prior learning (VPL)	12	5	11	8
Referral to other professionals/specialists	15	6	10	7
Assessment of key competences	14	5	8	6
Assessment of study skills/ study habits	12	5	21	16
Other	26	10	10	7

In terms of session results, female clients were less likely than males to be informed about what they could study and where they could study (35% of females, 58% of males), and were more likely to receive information about short-term courses (30% of females, 13% of males), and information about non-formal learning (13% of females, 3% of males). Gender differences were small or non-existent in the other categories (see Table B.22 in Appendix B).

Older service users' sessions were more likely to include validation of prior learning and to provide information on short courses, as well as on how to overcome different barriers (see Table B.21 in Appendix B). Sample sizes for educational and employment groups were too small to make any conclusive statements about the relationships between those two characteristics and session results.

Looking at specific target groups, jobseekers were most likely to receive information about what they could study and where (38%), and to receive information on short courses (32%). Early school leavers were most likely to receive information on: formal qualifications (64%), formal education courses (58%); and what they could study and where (57%). Jobseekers were also more likely than other groups to work on the development of a personal action plan (39%) during their counselling session.

Sample sizes for other groups were too small to make meaningful statements (see Table B.23 in Appendix B).

Table 9.2. shows the results of the **first counselling session in each country**, and highlights a few meaningful differences across countries. (In this discussion, we exclude the Netherlands due to its small sample size.) Clients in Iceland and Slovenia were much less likely than those in other countries to get information about: what they could study and where, and about formal qualifications and causes. In Iceland, this is attributable to the highly disadvantaged nature of the target group. As discussed at length in the Icelandic national report, GOAL clients in that country are typically not yet ready to focus on educational steps, and instead need to focus more on personal issues. This need appears to be reflected in the high percentage of Icelandic clients who develop a personal action plan in the first session, and get information about how to overcome barriers. In Slovenia, the primary result from counselling sessions was information on short-term courses, rather than lengthier educational pathways.

Table 9.2. *Results of the first session by country*

		Country					
		CZ	FL	IS	LT	NL	SI
Being informed about what can study and where	**N**	10	71	5	34	1	9
	%	67	56	24	69	13	18
Information on formal qualifications	**N**	10	97	3	2	-	11
	%	67	76	14	4	-	22
Information about formal education courses	**N**	4	96	3	1	-	8
	%	27	76	14	2	-	16
Information about non-formal learning	**N**	-	7	-	-	-	12
	%	-	6	-	-	-	25
Information on short time courses	**N**	2	11	6	2	-	33
	%	13	9	29	4	-	67
Information on retraining courses	**N**	6	2	1	1	-	4
	%	40	2	5	2	-	8
Development of a personal action plan	**N**	3	37	16	18	1	2
	%	20	29	76	37	13	4
Career plan / portfolio	**N**	2	-	1	7	-	3
	%	13	-	5	14	-	6
Interest inventory	**N**	-	23	5	14	3	5
	%	-	18	24	29	38	10
Given information on how to overcome barriers	**N**	-	28	9	6	1	9
	%	-	22	43	12	13	18
Given information on how to find financial resources for taking up a study course	**N**	5	25	1	12	-	3
	%	33	20	5	25	-	6
Help in preparing the documentation for validation of prior learning (VPL)	**N**	-	2	1	-	-	9
	%	-	2	5	-	-	18
Referral to other professionals/specialists	**N**	-	13	-	-	2	-
	%	-	10	-	-	25	-
Assessment of key competences	**N**	1	2	-	11	-	-
	%	7	2	-	22	-	-
Assessment of study skills/ study habits	**N**	-	6	-	6	-	-
	%	-	5	-	12	-	-
Other	**N**	2	2	6	10	3	3
	%	13	2	29	20	38	6

Further analysis of the data suggests that those clients who had more positive attitude towards learning were more likely to: be informed about what they could study and where; be informed about formal qualifications and formal courses; develop a personal action plan; and receive information on how to find financial resources for taking up a study course. Clients who reported

that did not really like learning were more likely to get information on retraining courses and assessment of key competences in their counselling session.

Longer sessions were more likely to have more results (see Table B.27 in Appendix B). The exceptions to this were: receiving information about non-formal and short time courses, and referral to other professional/specialists. These two results were more likely to occur in shorter counselling sessions.

Stakeholder perspectives

Programme staff in Lithuania reported that, from their point of view, the most desirable GOAL outcome is that **clients will start thinking about and planning their future**. An initial observation made by the programme staff in Slovenia relates to the intensity of the guidance: the more times the counsellor meets with the clients, the greater the effects appear to be. The reasons behind this will be explored in Wave 2.

Local evaluators in the Netherlands spoke to three pilot organisations about their participation in GOAL and the outcomes they desired for clients. By participating in GOAL, the pilot organisations hope to get tools for improvement of their low literacy guidance services. One of the interviewed policymakers illustrates this as follows:

> *'We noticed that we had a lot of low literate clients and we wanted to improve our service to them. We participate in the GOAL project because it provides us with a proven method and structural approach'.*

Benefits of guidance

In the Czech Republic the **main benefit of the guidance** to clients came in the form of receiving information about the range of education and training pathways that were open to them. **Before GOAL, many clients are unaware of the opportunities** for them in further education. For example, one client said:

> *'It was very surprising. I though there is only education which takes place in school where I sit as a student, [but] due to this service I have learnt there are courses which leads to certain qualifications much faster. I am very interested in this and I like it'.*

As this client went on to explain, however, the benefits of raising awareness, and also of motivating clients to embark on an educational programme, may be **undermined by the limited availability of free or low cost courses** in the Czech Republic:

> *'On the other hand, the problem is, it costs a lot of money and I don't have enough financial resources to pay for them'.*

Therefore, although the benefits of the Czech guidance are high in terms of **information exchange**, the practical benefits are considerably more limited within the current system. This is also the case in Slovenia, where Wave 1 counselling was taking place at a time when no free educational

programmes were available, meaning that some clients could not enrol on education courses because of lack of money.

In qualitative interviews, GOAL clients from Flanders emphasised two benefits. As in the Czech Republic, the guidance sessions provided information about **previously unknown educational pathways**:

> *'I didn't know it is possible to start an HBO5-education without a diploma of upper secondary school. Without my coach telling me this, I don't think I would ever have discovered this.'*

Moreover, clients appreciated the fact that GOAL **counsellors do not overwhelm them with information**. During the successive sessions with their clients the counsellors give the information relevant to their clients little by little and help them to develop their education plans step by step:

> *'I don't think that my coach gave me too much information. She only told me what was relevant for me. And when I forgot some of the things she told me or asked me to do, she repeated those the next time she saw me.'*

Although no clients have exited the GOAL programme in Iceland, even at the interim stage programme staff were able to report that many **clients seem more confident, self-assertive and motivated**. Some clients have decided to enlist in learning and others have had assistance with making a CV. Some clients have had an interest inventory and a few are on their way to get validation of prior learning.

In Lithuania programme staff mentioned benefits such as more active engagement of clients into projecting their career and increased motivation to learn or work. They also felt that sessions, in particular for younger persons, helped clients to regain self-confidence, to understand the meaning of learning, and to form a positive attitude towards oneself and society.

Staff in the Netherlands expect that the basic skills quick scan will contribute to **identifying low literacy at an early stage**. Previously, low literacy of clients was sometimes discovered in a late(r) stage which negatively impacted on the effectiveness of coaching or reintegration efforts. By conducting early screening for low literacy, service providers expect to be able to improve their services to clients.

In Slovenia, evaluators commented that they **do not expect to see the long-term outcomes which the counsellors are working toward within the life of the GOAL project**. Outcomes such as finishing education will take longer than the pilot will last. During the project counsellors can only see if the client finishes exams and is engaged in the educational work he or she had planned with the counsellor. As in one of the Flemish sites, counselling in Slovenia does not stop with enrolment in an educational course at the counselling institution or when the decision on acquiring a qualification is made. It can continue further into the learning journey.

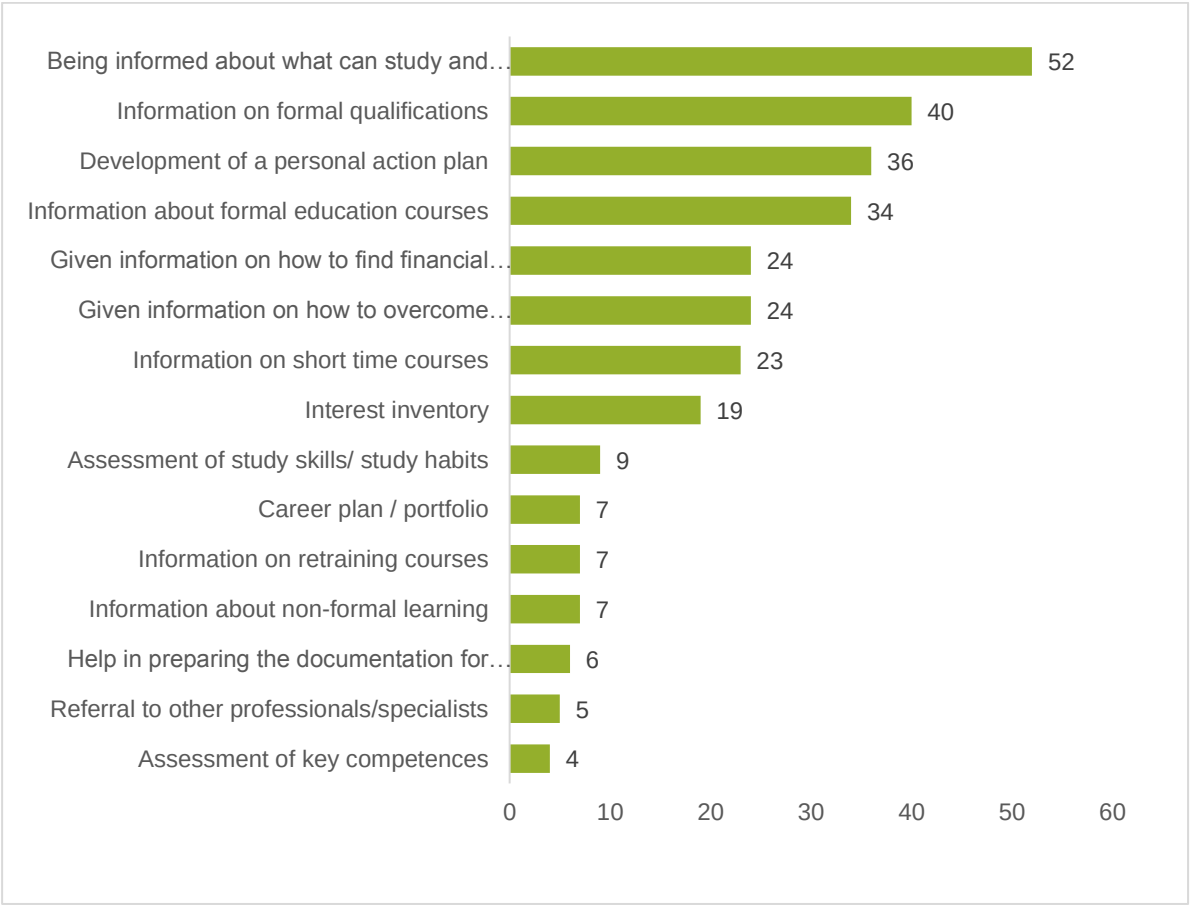
9.2 Meeting expectations

Quantitative findings

The **overwhelmingly positive feedback received from service users** in the satisfaction survey indicates that for most clients, the GOAL **counselling met or even exceeded their expectations**. In reporting this, of course, it should be remembered that **for 61% of service users, GOAL was their first experience of educational or careers counselling as an adult**, and they may not have known what to expect from it.

Analysis of the monitoring data suggests that there is a link between the reasons for seeking guidance and the results of the session; however, the overlap is not total (see Table B.28 from Appendix B). For example, out of those who wanted to explore educational opportunities in Wave 1, 52% got information about what they could study and where, 40% received information on formal qualifications, and 34% received information on formal education courses. However, only 33% of those who wanted to find financial resources for learning were given information on how to find financial resources for taking up a study course.

Figure 9.2. *Results of the session for those who were seeking guidance to explore educational opportunities*



Meeting expectations

Based on the information from interviews and focus group discussions, most clients in Flanders appear to start guidance because they want to have better job opportunities, but find have found that they are unable to improve these opportunities because they do not have a diploma. The service they get at de Stap or de Leerwinkel seems to meet, and even exceed, their expectations. In interviews, clients reported on the unexpected outcomes:

> *'My coach also made me more self-confident. He was the first one in my whole life who told me that I am smart and he let me experience myself that I am capable of realising things which I thought were too complicated to me. Due to my coach, I became more self-confident. I never expected this, but it helps me to progress and to not quit when things get complicated.'*

In qualitative interviews, **clients in Lithuania were very positive about the outcomes of guidance** and did not report any shortcomings or proposals for improvement. They confirmed that they felt their self-esteem had increased and that they were more motivated to make positive changes in their life. This can be considered as **unplanned outcome**. For example, one client during interview stated:

> '*After counselling I understood that I am not such a loser as I previously thought. My counsellor persuaded me that after finishing my education I can find a good job; I hope to continue this way'.*

This was backed up by counsellors saying that: '*Some clients do change after the session. They become more confident, their pressure and anger against others disappears'*.

According to the programme staff In Iceland the guidance in Wave 1 has mostly been aimed **motivating clients and helping them to identify their strengths and interests**. A considerable amount of time during interviews is dedicated to issues such as **general wellbeing and dealing with difficult circumstances in life**, with less time devoted to education and vocational guidance. Most clients want to find opportunities for learning that will lead to increased employability. Some clients are interested in going through validation of prior learning. A common denominator among the clients is the longing to improve their situation and better themselves, but **many clients feel that the barriers are overwhelming** – so Icelandic counsellors must focus on helping clients achieve these more **motivational, attitudinal outcomes** before clients can move on to pursuing educational and/or employment-related objectives.

Programme staff in Iceland also feel that in some cases there are **not many resources available to clients** and the preconditions that are necessary for people to consider further education are not always in place. In these cases, there are barriers that need to be addressed before the service user is able to consider further education. **In many cases the barriers are financial** – people cannot afford

either to fund their education or to pay their bills if they take time off work – but in some cases there are physiological and physical barriers present as well (for example, mental and physical illness, poor living conditions). **Staff are concerned about raising the client´s expectations and then not having the resources or the means to fulfil them**, for example funding that would enable the client to take courses.

The Icelandic report also raises an interesting point about stakeholder expectations. The counsellors feel that the programme partners are eager to assist GOAL but that these partners do not have clear expectations with regard to service outcomes:

> *'I think there is a lot of goodwill towards the GOAL project among the programme partners and they are eager to assist us, but they perhaps do not have specific expectations towards it yet, not really' (GOAL programme staff).*

9.3 Key findings

While it is **too early in the GOAL project to have meaningful cross-country data on long-term outcomes**, it is clear that **almost all clients are very pleased** with the guidance. They report feeling more motivated and surer of their next steps after the session, and they think they will use the advice they were given. Most would recommend the GOAL service to others. Counselling has in most cases involved **encouraging and empowering the clients**, and helped them to understand and build on their strengths. When the session is over clients feel hopeful and motivated. But caution is in order regarding these early findings: **clients' positive experiences of GOAL do not necessarily mean they will achieve their desired outcomes**; for many clients, there are significant barriers – attitudinal, situational, and more – to overcome.

Iceland's target group is a case in point. Because of the extreme needs of Icelandic clients, GOAL in that country has focused primarily on personal issues and attitudinal issues. Counsellors believe the guidance sessions are having a positive impact and that they are planting seeds that will hopefully grow in the future. However, it can be difficult to measure these small forward steps and to assess their value to individuals and society as a whole. To build on the metaphor of '**taking the next step'**, there is a sense that more advantaged clients in some other countries are able to benefit from being shown a **road map** that will help them find their way, and then being helped through key stages of the journey. Iceland's clients, on the other hand, are still **learning to walk**.

9.4 Key implications

Implications for programme development

Guidance staff in Iceland are working more closely with clients, and over a longer time period, than is the case in some of the other GOAL programme models. Thought should be given to how many sessions are offered and when they are offered to this particularly vulnerable group, as there is a

possibility that **if the guidance moments are not close together**, there is a risk of losing what has been accomplished during the previous sessions. Early evidence suggests that GOAL is effective at helping clients address key problems, but that clients face a large mix of personal and other barriers. This has implications for the steps that clients are able to take within the life of the programme.

The main **barriers** the clients face appear to be both personal issues and financial. This implies that collaboration with a diverse group of specialists and expanding resources for the target group needs to be looked at from the policy level.

It is possible that the **one-session counselling model** adopted by GOAL in e.g. Lithuania could have indirect, negative effects on programme **sustainability**. Policy funders may seek hard evidence that the intervention is effective – such evidence is more difficult to gather in a one-session model than in a multi-session model.

Implications for policy

Exchange of information and data to follow-up the educational achievements of clients are also needed: in some of the GOAL partner countries there is no automatic **data sharing** allowed (due to privacy restrictions) between guidance services, other services (employment, social welfare) and educational institutions. In these cases, permitting information management systems to follow up the process of an individual will require serious **policy reformations** in the first instance as well as strong collaboration between different policy domains to align all regulations and implementation systems. This can only be a long term ambition, but would pay numerous dividends. **One benefit would relate to programme monitoring and evaluation**: for example, if it were possible for evaluators to access administrative data, e.g. future employment and educational records, this would reduce the need for longitudinal tracking of clients, and would provide much more robust data on long-term outcomes than is currently available.

Financing of educational opportunities and availability of funding (e.g. scholarships etc.) constitute the main policy barriers to programme success as measured by client outcomes in Iceland, the Czech Republic and Slovenia. Counselling for adult learners can only be effective if combined with other incentives like active employment policy with measures for integrating vulnerable groups back to the labour market. If there is no offer of further training, courses and programmes, or financial incentives, the counselling itself is unlikely to have sustainable effects.

Implications for evaluation

Although clients seem to be convinced about the positive outcomes of GOAL, it will be difficult to measure the full range of guidance outcomes. There is a need to capture data, both quantitative and qualitative, about the **small but important steps** that are most feasible for this target group. As noted above, access to employment and educational data would be extremely beneficial in terms of assessing longer term outcomes.

The one-session programme model creates challenges when evaluating the outcomes of the guidance sessions, and especially where returns on expectations are measured. The collection of **follow-up longitudinal data** from clients who attended one session only represents the best way to measure the outcomes of guidance for these clients.

A relevant outcome indicator is the impact of the screening and referral in the Netherlands on more effective service provision (e.g. the prevention of recidivism, successful reintegration into the labour market etc.). It is important for organisations to experience **added benefit of using the quick scan** for their regular working processes for successful implementation. These effects often occur in the long or medium term and might be difficult to measure within the scope of this research. It would nevertheless be interesting to include this topic (even if only in a qualitative way) in the data collection for Wave 2.

It will be interesting to see whether **client satisfaction levels** dip in Wave 2, if clients are refaced with these questions at or near the end of the guidance process.

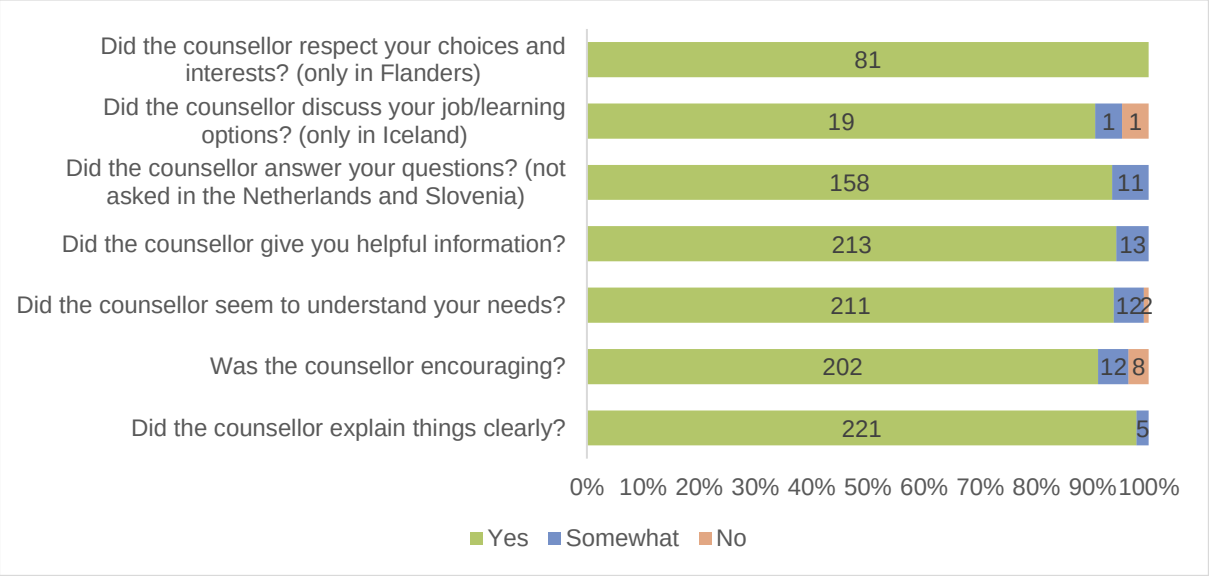
10 Service quality

One of the five intervention strategies piloted in GOAL is the implementation of high-quality guidance services. This chapter provides some preliminary findings on the quality of the guidance service provided by GOAL in the six participating countries. It draws on quantitative data from the client satisfaction survey as well as qualitative data gathered from the range of GOAL stakeholders in interviews and in focus groups.

10.1 Service user perspectives on guidance quality

In general, clients across the six countries were extremely pleased with the service they received from the various GOAL programmes, and those who were asked said they **would recommend the service to others** in a similar situation. 97% of the clients agreed that they were satisfied with the counselling session. As Figure 10.1 shows, most clients (more than 90%) across all countries thought that the counsellors respected their choices (100% in Flanders), understood their needs, and were encouraging. Clients also reported that counsellors answered their questions, explained things clearly, and gave them information they needed.

Figure 10.1 *Client satisfaction survey results*



Some clients were not yet able to **reflect fully on the quality of the guidance**. Qualitative interview data from clients in the Czech Republic suggests that although clients feel more knowledgeable, motivated and confident after the sessions, until these feelings are translated into concrete, practical achievements, there was an understandable reluctance to be wholly positive.

In Flanders, clients identified **two aspects of the service that were particularly valued: the customised approach and the step-by-step approach**. None of the clients who were interviewed felt

uneasy with the personal background questions, because they understood the relevance of sharing the information. In terms of approach, counsellors divided the information and tasks to be done into smaller parts, so that it is easier to manage. This fragmentation prevents the client from being overburdened or frightened by the work involved in starting a course.

The two service users that were interviewed by local evaluators in Iceland **did not have high expectations of the service**. They reported that they did not know what to expect but at the same time were very pleased to participate in the project and were excited to see where it would take them. Both of the interviewees thought it was too early to tell if the guidance had helped them in any way. In open text responses to the satisfaction survey some clients said that they hoped the guidance would help them find out about their talents and how these can be used to find activities they are good at. Other clients said that they were very happy with the counselling and they felt the counsellors were enthusiastic and eager to help them. They wrote very positively about the service:

> *'I felt the counsellor spoke very clearly, was enthusiastic and eager to help me. I also felt it was very easy to talk to her and I was very pleased with the entire interview'*.

Respondents felt the information they were given was useful and the counsellors were very professional. The counsellors spoke clearly, were understanding and explained the next steps that they would take.

> *'Very clear, explained my options and next possible steps. Very happy'*.

The interviewees did not have any comments about possible way in which the service could be improved, largely perhaps because levels of satisfaction were very high, and perhaps also because clients tended to have little or no previous experience of adult counselling. Neither did they make any comments about any possible weaknesses of the service. Both clients who were interviewed at length thought it was too early to comment on this.

The Lithuania clients said that their **expectations for the first counselling session were fully met**. No Lithuanian respondents to the client satisfaction survey suggested any improvements that could be made to the service, and all said they would recommend it to others. According to the Lithuanian clients, counsellors provided the advice and encouragement they needed to fulfil their dreams and objectives. **Personal contact with the counsellor and the counsellor's competences** were highlighted as strengths of the service. Though clients were absolutely satisfied with services received and did not propose any changes, the thoughts expressed by them may provide indirect evidence for the importance of (and the need to strengthen) good personal contact between a counsellor and a client, and may highlight the strengths of face-to-face contact as opposed to group counselling, as well as a need to concentrate a range of services (e.g. guidance and education) in one location. As an illustration, the following thoughts were expressed by two clients:

> '*I was surprised by the sincere and long conversation, I found out many interesting things about myself'.*

'We had a serious conversation, I tried to sketch a detail and they offered a training in the same location. It is good, that I did not have to run from one side of Vilnius to another'.

If Lithuanian clients in the future were to be advised in one location and attend learning in another, the guidance service should ensure a smooth exchange of information amongst services. Low-educated persons may in many cases be highly sensitive to any barriers, and are at increased risk of dropping out when barriers are encountered. There is thus a need for seamlessness between services.

One of the clients interviewed in Slovenia said that it helped her a lot that a **counsellor was kind and open**, had a lot of information and knowledge regarding how to help her learn, , and was good at listening to her and to respecting her needs and wishes. This client said that the counsellor motivated her a lot. The client stressed that for her, "warm", personal contact and the fact that the counsellor took time for her, listened to her and motivated her to start with learning was very important.

10.2 Programme staff perspectives on guidance quality

Programme staff's perspectives and insights

Strengths

Programme staff in Flanders identified **four characteristics that embody the strengths of GOAL**; these characteristics are also relevant for several other countries:

1. **A service that explains the complex education sector**

In Flanders, the education domain is complex: there is formal and non-formal education; education is organised at different educational levels; and education is organised through different networks. This makes it difficult for individuals to get an overview of the educational landscape and to find the most suitable course or training programme. The most vulnerable in society are particularly in need of guidance to become sufficiently informed to make the right choices. As the Lithuanian report makes clear, the competence and experience of counsellors is crucial to this process.

2. **An independent service**

Because de Stap and de Leerwinkel are independent organisations, they are less likely to be biased towards a certain educational institution or field of study.

3. **Personal empowerment of vulnerable profiles**

As mentioned in Chapter 4, GOAL counselling does not just try to get clients into a particular course or training programme. On a more profound level, the counselling must lead to personal empowerment. In that way, guidance and orientation to education is an aim, but a means as well.

4. A custom-fit service

In Flanders the service is personalised to the individual client.

For programme staff in the Czech Republic, direct contact with the client is the most effective counselling tool, with the personal approach valued for and by this target group. It is therefore important to the quality of the service that in addition to their knowledge of the local and national education and training landscape, counsellors have good personal and pedagogical skills. The very fact that someone is interested in their lives can in itself remove psychological barriers for clients.

Weaknesses

In both Flanders and Iceland, programme staff raised the issue of the impact on service quality of dealing with such a vulnerable client group. The size and range of the problems clients face can be overwhelming to counsellors; moreover, **many clients lack a helpful support network** outside of the guidance. For such clients GOAL may be **more a matter of welfare work than provision of education-focused guidance** services. In Slovenia the target groups also present a challenge. Each session can be longer, they often need translators, they need to build trust and that takes time. An obstacle at the moment in Slovenia is that there are not many free of charge education or training programmes for these target groups. In addition, employers are usually not interested in providing counselling in adult education to their employees.

In a number of countries, the service appears to be high quality, but is potential impacts may be undermined by **broader structural challenges**. In the Czech Republic, for example, courses suitable for clients can be identified but cannot be accessed by clients due to financial barriers. In Iceland, by contrast, barriers tend to be more individualised: clients are not in the position to take advantage of learning opportunities because of personal issues e.g. addiction, financial situation and other health issues. When this happens an effective partnership with other organisations that might have solutions to these issues could increase the chance for successful outcomes. Staff in Lithuania referred to a lack of targeted funding for guidance. Education institutions offer guidance on their own initiative and from their own funds, counsellors do it only part time and guidance is not their main activity. Therefore institutions very much depend on project activities and it is very difficult to ensure sustainability of service in terms of follow-up of clients and regular work with specific target groups.

According to programme staff in Iceland, there should not be long **time gaps between the sessions**. The client needs to feel that things have been set in motion and a process has begun. This has sometimes been difficult to achieve because of all the time spent gathering new clients and holding on to those that are already in the project. In Flanders, on the other hand, time gaps may vary from a few days to a few months, depending on the needs of the clients.

A **lack of guidance instruments** was also mentioned. The majority of guidance tools in Lithuania are designed primarily for school age students. In addition, a need for tools that would support a more psychological focus on clients is desired in Lithuania, as this might help provide insights on desirable

careers for clients. Lithuania programme staff admitted to a lack of proactivity in finding new partners and referring institutions, as well as a lack of cooperation with other education institutions. Such a cooperation could result in referring clients to other education institutions in case they need another education opportunity. Both Lithuanian sites suggested that arrangements for client follow-up and development of tools for recognition of prior learning should be focused on more.

From the interviews in the Netherlands with the pilot organisations, it does appear that clients' initial reaction to the **basic skills quick scan** (Taalmeter) is linked to their background characteristics. In prison, clients sometimes are more resistant to testing. Dutch-speaking clients in particular can take it as an **insult** that they have to take a literacy test. In the Municipality of Emmen, however, the first reactions to the quick scan have been positive. The interviewed programme staff member points out that the way in which you introduce the basic skills quick scan influences the clients' reactions.

Slovenia suffers from a national **lack of counsellors**. Stakeholders argued that more services should provide adult guidance and counselling.

10.3 Partner and policy stakeholder perspectives on guidance quality

In the Czech Republic, there is interest in GOAL from policymakers, with the project regarded as a pilot for a **possible national rollout of an integrated service** that builds on what has been learned about developing and implementing a quality guidance programme. In order to improve the quality of the service, however, policymakers argued that there should be more sophisticated measures introduced and financial issues should be addressed.

In addition to the strengths of the service in Flanders as identified earlier in this chapter, partner and policy stakeholders pointed to **ease of access**. Another attraction of GOAL seems to be that it is not a mandatory service.

All the policy actors who were interviewed in Lithuania agreed that the quality of guidance is directly related to the principle that the **client should be at the centre** of the guidance process. They felt that low-skilled adults are a particularly vulnerable group that need special access and methods. The quality of personal contact between the counsellor and client is important in order to **change many clients' negative attitudes towards learning**. Policy actors also felt that it is important to engage clients in multiple sessions, although many clients believe that one session is enough.

Policy actors think that the **network of services** (employment offices, VET schools and adult education centres) is sufficient but not properly coordinated and too fragmented, with insufficient interlinks. Policy actors seemed to agree that education institutions, especially VET institutions, are appropriate to offer guidance provided they have a trained guidance staff. Competence and availability of counsellors was underlined in relation to quality of services. The common opinion was that there is no system for training such specialists.

10.4 Key findings

Many GOAL clients lack a helpful **support network** outside of the guidance. For such clients, GOAL may be the only reliable source of information and support aimed at taking the next steps in education and/or employment. Key characteristics of high quality support and guidance are:

1. A service that explains the complex education sector in an understandable manner.
2. The independence of the counselling advice and information provided: the information is centred on the client's needs, rather than meeting the targets of institutions.
3. An emphasis on the personal empowerment of vulnerable adults.
4. A custom-fit service.

10.5 Key implications

Implications for programme development

Tensions may potentially arise with regard to the relationship between service quality and service **efficiency**, for example with regard to staff time and other costs. These tensions may make it more attractive to focus on easier target groups, i.e. "low-hanging fruit".

Clients may benefit from a service model based on providing **more than one session per client** (on average), as additional sessions may help in the provision of information about next steps, and may help clients to reflect on and negotiate barriers, structural and otherwise.

Implications for policy

Policy actors play a central role in supporting the **development and systematisation of service networks**, e.g. amongst employment offices, VET schools, guidance services and adult education centres. The better coordinated and supported these networks are, the greater the likelihood of high quality services and positive outcomes.

Likewise, better **structural support and funding** would increase opportunities for clients to capitalise on quality services by taking the next steps.

Service quality would likely benefit from more widespread and well supported **training opportunities** for staff. Such opportunities could potentially be **supported and coordinated at the EU level**, which would allow for the cross-country fertilisation of ideas and methods.

Implications for evaluation

To improve policy maker buy-in, there is a need for **more sophisticated measures** of service quality and outcomes.

It would be useful to explore counsellors' perspectives on the challenges and rewards associated with working with more challenging clients. Such clients may require even greater patience than

normal, and may prove frustrating to work with, in part because of pressures on counsellors to achieve measurable educational or employment related outcomes.

11 Conclusions

As discussed in Chapter 2, at the interim (Wave 1) reporting stage it appears that the evaluation methodology is working well, and that the design is appropriate for the complexities of this multi-site, multi-organisation project. The large differences in participant groups and programmes across the six countries are confirmation of the need for a flexible evaluation model which focuses both on programmes and policy. This said, as a consequence of programme set-up delays and low service user numbers in four of the six partner countries, this Wave 1 report has been able to present evidence that is largely descriptive only. Moreover, with most service users either experiencing one guidance session only or still participating in their guidance programme, it was possible to gather very little programme exit data, making it difficult to assess outcomes and impacts.

A consequence of these factors is that the Wave 1 evidence base is limited at this stage in the answers it can provide to the four research questions underpinning the cross-country evaluation. The findings reported in this concluding chapter for each research question are therefore tentative and should be treated with caution; they do, however, identify some themes which are likely to emerge in final reporting as critical to programme success.

Research questions

1. How do existing conditions/resources in the pre-programme environments influence the relationships among programme operations and outcomes?

As outlined in Chapter 1, programme developers, whether at the national, regional or local level, face **three broad challenges** in providing educational and/or career guidance services to adults with low levels of education:

i. increasing the number of people reached; in particular, the challenge of helping this target group to recognise that guidance tailored to their situation can be beneficial to them.
ii. increasing the number of organisations involved in delivering guidance services.
iii. making guidance services for adults with low education or low skills effective at each stage of the journey from advice to action to impact.

The second of these challenges has had the greatest impact on the development of the GOAL guidance programmes to date. To establish networks and partnerships that function effectively, good communication and information exchange is critical. In the pre-programme phase it was critical to invest sufficient time and resources into establishing and/or extending partnerships and networks. Lack of coordination among organisations serving the target groups was a factor common to all the countries pre-GOAL and indeed provided a fundamental rationale for the pilot project. Generally, where the services took longer to launch and get up to operating speed, this was because developing the networks and partnerships to facilitate GOAL was complex and resource intensive, even where cooperative arrangements had been in place in the pre-programme environment. This challenge has

exposed the **vulnerability or contingent nature of this type of guidance programme**. In particular, services that **depend on other organisations for referrals** must work hard to establish and maintain relationships with these organisations. Referral processes can be undermined where the guidance service is not recognised officially or seen as part of the official system, which is likely to be the case with pilot interventions. Programmes need to work hard to be seen as an essential part of the structural support system for target groups.

Key strategies for developing the necessary partnerships and networks are information sharing and working towards common goals. Benefits for partner organisations must be clear, and tact is needed where potential areas of conflict and competition may arise. There is likely to be a need for sensitivity in this process, as there may be some **overlap between services**: where this is the case counselling may run the risk of being institution-centred rather than client-centred. The time taken to do this work should not be underestimated, and more than one national report emphasises the importance of **cross-organisational trust** in the process. Even with a great deal of effort, however, some partner countries experienced particular problems in bringing employers on board. This highlights the importance of awareness-raising activities where the pre-programme environment (e.g. in workplaces) is one in which educational or career guidance for low-educated adults is not established.

Other contextual factors leading to delays in programme development included attracting the target group to the service. In countries or regions (or amongst target groups) where adult guidance is rare or unknown, it may be even more difficult to “sell” the service to the target client group(s) than to potential partner organisations. In countries where adult guidance services are completely new, it takes time to get people on board, and there is likely to be low awareness in countries with no developed culture of adult guidance. The final evaluation report will assess the effectiveness of the strategies that countries employed in order to address challenges in developing partnerships and reaching out to the target groups.

That report will also investigate the impact on service user outcomes of structural factors such as the marginalisation and underfunding of adult education. Where adult education is an underdeveloped and/or under-supported field, there is, for example, little impetus to develop professional standards for guidance staff. Likewise, where adult education courses are unsubsidised or unavailable, guidance clients are less able to take the post-guidance steps required to achieve their educational and/or employment goals. While guidance may improve individual agency, it is unlikely to enable individuals to overcome large-scale structural barriers to advancement.

Ultimately, GOAL is about reaching people who are in need, and helping them take positive, sustainable steps in education and/or employment. An issue that emerged in Iceland, and which will be explored in greater depth in Wave 2, is that of readiness to take those steps, and how big those steps can be. This issue has implications for all services attempting to reach vulnerable adults. It is not only existing conditions and resources in the programme environments that need to be considered, but the conditions, characteristics and resources of the clients. For example, service

users in Iceland's target group typically lacked 'readiness' – their very low levels of confidence, motivation and perseverance made it difficult for them to take positive steps, or even show up for counselling sessions. The GOAL project in Iceland has demonstrated that if a person is in a place in their lives that hinders them from committing to counselling and looking into learning, then they are unlikely to come to sessions or benefit from the programme, no matter how many phone calls or text messages they receive. This also has implications for outcomes. It is possible, for instance, that guidance services for particularly hard to reach groups should limit their focus to pre-educational and pre-employment elements such as punctuality, motivation and self-esteem.

2. What programme processes are developed across the various intervention sites and how do these differ? Why do they differ?

In Wave 2, local evaluators will more extensively document and assess the effectiveness of the programme processes that have been developed in each country. Research methods will include a stronger focus on gathering **rich qualitative data** – for example, to enhance understanding of the guidance counsellors' experiences of GOAL in general and the guidance process in particular. This will include charting the tasks of typical working days or weeks, and providing illustrative case studies of guidance sessions. It will also involve the gathering of more in-depth qualitative data on the steps involved in setting up and running a high quality guidance service: what programme processes have been developed by the countries in catering for this target group, and what lessons have been learned through the experimentation. Thus the evaluation will focus more on **what happens inside the 'black box'** of programme (and programme development) processes.

The initial findings from GOAL raise some questions about the amount of **cross-country learning** that can take place in terms of programme development. Programmes can learn important lessons from one another in a number of areas; however, it may also be the case that programme context, particularly at the level of client disadvantage, may make it difficult to transfer other lessons from one country to another. For example, the Flanders counselling model appears to be well developed and accurately tailored to the target group. It remains to be seen how many of the strategies used in Flanders would prove beneficial for more disadvantaged clients in other countries. However, there are some strong similarities across countries. All the programme processes place a heavy emphasis on individualised services, i.e. on tailoring the guidance to the client. For example, whereas guidance sessions or journeys may follow a rough general structure, individual pathways showed great variety. In all countries, the counselling model appears to be based on **acknowledging clients' starting points**, customising services to their needs, and helping them to take steps forward. However, the more vulnerable the target groups, the smaller the steps tend to be.

Wave 2 of the evaluation will explore in greater depth the relationship between programme contexts, particularly client disadvantage, and the **mechanisms, strategies and processes developed and refined by counsellors** as they seek to help clients achieve desired outcomes. An important component of this analysis will be to map the tools used at each stage of the process

3. What service user outcomes are achieved, for what groups, and to what degree?

There are insufficient data in Wave 1 to do any detailed analysis on either the type of outcomes or degree of outcomes associated with particular cohorts of service users. In Wave 2 the evaluators will look at differences across a number of groups, e.g. those between men and women, younger and older clients, and employed and unemployed clients. It will also be interesting to investigate differences between client outcomes in terms of levels of motivation and specificity of goals. The aim of GOAL is to help clients take the next step up on their educational and/or employment pathway. For many clients, that step may be obvious and easily recorded, e.g. enrolling in a course. For more disadvantaged clients, however, **the 'next step' may be something as seemingly small as making a slight gain in self-esteem or punctuality**. Such gains may be less interesting to policy funders, but may be essential stepping stones to more universally valued outcomes such as enrolment in education.

In Wave 1, clients have been overwhelmingly positive about their experiences of GOAL, rating the service very highly on satisfaction surveys. This suggests that the counsellors are doing a good job with clients, and that clients feel the guidance is beneficial. However, clients' positive experiences of GOAL do not necessarily mean they will achieve their desired outcomes; for many clients, there are **significant barriers** – attitudinal, situational, and more – to overcome. A critical issue to explore in the future will therefore be expectations and return on expectations. It was repeatedly stressed in national level reporting that it is important not to give unrealistic expectations to clients, particular where structural issues mean that clients are not able to access sufficiently subsidised courses.

4. What programme and policy characteristics appear to be associated with positive service user outcomes?

As noted above, differences between the pre-programme environments across the six countries, coupled with further differences amongst the programme models and target groups, means that it may be difficult and perhaps even misleading to compare programme outcomes. These differences in programme contexts may also affect the generalisability of messages about some programme processes, e.g. guidance tools: some guidance tools may be particularly well suited for particular target groups, but less well suited to others. These and other challenges to generalisability and programme and policy learning demand further investigation and analysis over the life of the GOAL project. However, there are programme processes which clearly are generalizable across programme contexts – in particular, counsellor competences.

Counsellors are at the centre of the programme, and a consensus emerged in Wave 1 that counsellor competences are an essential component of a high-quality guidance service. To work with low-educated adults, counsellors may require a broader skillset than is needed in other areas of guidance. In Wave 1, a theme that has emerged and which will be explored in greater detail in the remainder of the project is the link between the counsellor's job role and the quality of the service. For example, when counsellors are expected to perform in multiple roles, this expectation may negatively impact on guidance quality. Do staff provide better guidance where they are able to

dedicate more time to counselling activities, develop and maintain a coherent professional identity, and readily access training?

It would also be useful to explore counsellors' perspectives on the **challenges and rewards associated with working with more challenging clients**. Such clients may require even greater patience than normal, and may prove frustrating to work with, in part because of pressures on counsellors to achieve measurable educational or employment related outcomes.

Other programme characteristics that are likely to be relevant to outcomes and generalizable across contexts include the duration of the guidance process: for example, clients may receive greater benefits from a service model based on providing **more than one session per client**, as additional sessions may help in the provision of information about next steps, and may help clients to develop confidence and motivation, and take the many small steps that may be required in order to take a larger one.