

# Promoting literacy, mathematics and digital competences for adults

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

STRATEGY/ACTION PLAN

 NETHERLANDS

## Timeline



ID number 28455

## Background

This action is a follow-up of 2016 -2019 Count on language (*Tel mee met Taal*) action plan.

## Objectives

The main objectives of the 2020-2024 Count on language (*Tel mee met Taal*) action plan are:

- (a) increasing the reach out to illiterate people who have Dutch as their native language;
- (b) promoting adults' digital skills;
- (c) promoting basic skills, including numeracy, via in-company training;
- (d) supporting children and young people with a language deficiency;
- (e) increasing efficiency through research and monitoring;
- (f) promoting decentralisation of the action;
- (g) introducing independent points of expertise.

The objectives of this action plan have been agreed between the government and all Dutch municipalities. A national monitoring system will be set up.

## Description

The Count on Skills (*Tel mee met Taal*) action plans for 2016–2019 and 2020–2024 both aimed to combat low literacy in the Netherlands. However, the 2020–2024 plan introduced several key enhancements, such as increased funding, broadened target groups, enhanced local collaboration and focus on quality and monitoring.

Part of the new approach is to reach out to illiterate people who have Dutch as their native language. The new joint action plan to tackle illiteracy also includes more emphasis on digital skills for adults.

The government announced on 18 March 2019 the allocation of EUR 425 million for the period 2020-24 to tackle illiteracy. This is a EUR 35 million increase compared to the

budget for 2015-19. Municipalities will receive more money to increase the scope and quality of their (language) courses. Each region will draft a future plan. The extra budget for municipalities will amount to EUR 7.3 million per year in 2024. Annually, EUR 3 million will be made available to employers to offer language, numeracy and digital skills courses to employees.

A point of expertise on basic skills will also be established, which will serve as a source of information for legislation and regulations in the field of adult education, training schemes and subsidies. For the further design and implementation of this new approach, the Dutch government will collaborate with municipalities, employers and employees, libraries and several social organisations.

Finally, the plan aims to improve the quality of educational offerings and included systematic monitoring to assess the effectiveness of interventions.

## 2019 Approved/Agreed

### 2020 Implementation

The action plan is being carried out. For example, municipalities are supported in enrolling learners to the courses and employers can apply for subsidies to offer training courses to low-literacy employees. In addition, the Centre of expertise on basic skills was set up.

### 2021 Implementation

In 2021, an additional subsidy of EUR 6 million has been made available to offer training to digitally illiterate employees.

The goal of the follow-up approach on low literacy is that municipalities provide efficient facilities to fight low literacy. At the end of 2024 this must be arranged in all municipalities. The monitoring of the follow-up programme shows that most municipalities are taking a more demand-oriented approach instead of supply-oriented and focus on adults with low literacy who have Dutch as a native language.

The government pays special attention to SME employers in reaching out to employees with low literacy. In 2021, there has been a one-time increase in the budget for language courses that employers can offer to their employees. The increase was funded via the pandemic support and recovery package.

### 2022 Implementation

The measure is operational and runs as a regular practice. Currently, the subsidy scheme is being evaluated. In 2024 the measure will end, and the task will be transferred to municipalities.

In the run-up to this decentralization, the state commissioned the development of a Municipal family approach to literacy (*Gemeentelijke Gezinsaanpak Geletterdheid*). Pilots are carried out in a dozen municipalities in 2022 and an additional 25 in 2023. By the end of 2024, a step-by-step plan and a toolkit must be ready - at which point municipalities will be given the "independent director's role" in combating literacy.

### 2023 Implementation

A mid-term review of the Count on Language (*Tel mee met Taal*) programme showed that stakeholders are relatively satisfied with the results achieved thus far. Partners highlighted improved regional collaboration between key stakeholders as a significant outcome of the programme. Additionally, stakeholders expressed satisfaction with the insights gained into the quality of training programmes designed to enhance basic skills. However, reaching the target group of low-literate adults remains a challenge and requires further attention.

Moreover, an additional funding has been made available for municipalities to offer

training in basic skills. With an additional EUR 17 million municipalities now have an education budget of EUR 80 million yearly.

Furthermore, the project LLL-Collective for low-skilled and low literate adults, aiming to improve the regional educational infrastructure that provides training opportunities for low literate adults, has launched two pilot programmes in two employment regions. This initiative is supported by an annual allocation of EUR 7.6 million from the National Growth Fund.

## 2024 Implementation

The Minister has introduced an exploration of follow-up policies to strengthen adults' basic skills after the *Count on Language* programme concludes next year. Recommendations from this exploration will inform decisions on the continuation or adaptation of the programme. For the time being, funding has been secured until 2028.

Several aspects of the programme will remain in place until 2026, including budget provisions for regional coordination, support for municipalities through the Reading and writing foundation (*Stichting Lezen en Schrijven*), and the reading promotion initiative Art of reading (*Kunst van Lezen*). These measures aim to maintain momentum in improving basic skills among adults while shaping the next phase of policy.

## 2025 Completed

The 'Count on Language' programme (*Tel mee met Taal, TmmT*) was completed in 2024, and an evaluation report was published in May 2025. This evaluation report shows that concrete successes have been achieved and visible improvements have been made in assisting adults with limited basic skills. The programme created a structured framework that enabled stakeholders to collaborate more effectively, aligning various projects and initiatives, particularly through the Programme Advisory Council. This collaboration enhanced mutual understanding and strengthened the collective commitment of VET schools, ministries, and municipalities to improve the national basic skills strategy. Now that the Count on Language programme has ended, there is a risk that initiatives and projects will once again operate independently of each other and that the collaboration will be lost.

In the policy letter of July 2025 on Strengthening of basic skills of adults from 2025 onwards, the State Secretary of Education informs the parliament about the course of action for adult basic skills after 2025. The ambition is to continue working on strengthening the language, numeracy and digital skills of adults. This will be achieved, among other things, by maintaining the infrastructure and achievements of the Count on Language programme in policy, and by working on closer links with the labour market domain in order to focus attention on the group of workers and job seekers with limited basic skills.

In order to ensure continuity in the approach that has been developed, the following elements from the Count on language programme will be continued:

- (a) Municipalities will continue to receive funding under the Education and vocational training act (*WEB*), and they will also continue to receive a grant for the coordination of the regional approach that was set up in the programme;
- (b) The Reading and Writing Foundation (*Stichting Lezen en Schrijven*) will receive continued funding to help municipalities further develop their approach to improve basic skills;
- (c) The Expertise Centre for Basic Skills will be maintained;
- (d) The website 'Literacy in Sight' (*Geletterdheid in Zicht*) has been updated with new PIAAC results per municipality and will continue to be maintained and updated.
- (e) The monitor National overview of adult education (*Landelijk Beeld Volwasseneneducatie*) will be continued;
- (f) The ABC Foundation (*Stichting ABC*) will continue to receive funding; and
- (g) Libraries will continue to receive funding for the preventative programme Art of

Reading (*Kunst van Lezen*).

Furthermore, the following measures to promote basic skills are announced:

- (a) Basic skills will become an explicit theme in a new regional labour market infrastructure. By 1 January 2026, every labour market region will establish a Work Centre (*Werkcentrum*), which is a joint public-private service point, offering integrated support to jobseekers, employees, and employers. These centres will assess and address basic skills as part of career and training services.
- (b) New agreements will be formalized on the support the Foundation for Reading and Writing (*Stichting Lezen en Schrijven*) on how they will provide to the WEB-municipalities on the subject of work and a better connection to the labour market infrastructure.
- (c) The Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW) and the Ministry for Education, Culture and Sport (OCW) aim to identify and remove legal and practical barriers that currently prevent municipalities and the Public Employment Service (UWV) from addressing basic skills in their upskilling and reskilling programmes in supporting reintegration.

## Bodies responsible

- Ministry of Education, Culture and Science
- Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment
- Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport

## Target group

### Learners

Adult learners

Unemployed and jobseekers

Persons in employment, including those at risk of unemployment

Low-skilled/qualified persons

## Thematic categories

### Governance of VET and lifelong learning

Engaging VET stakeholders and strengthening partnerships in VET

### Modernising VET offer and delivery

Acquiring key competences

### Supporting lifelong learning culture and increasing participation

Providing for individuals' re- and upskilling needs

Lifelong guidance

Ensuring equal opportunities and inclusiveness in education and training

## European priorities in VET

### VET Recommendation

VET agile in adapting to labour market challenges

VET promoting equality of opportunities

## Osnabrück Declaration

Establishing a new lifelong learning culture - relevance of continuing VET and digitalisation

## Subsystem

CVET

## Further reading

[Letter to parliament on the follow-up approach for 2020-2024 for Count on language](#)

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[Policy letter - response to vocational secondary education motions and commitments, 17 December 2021](#)

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[Policy letter informing Parliament on progress on the approach tackling adult literacy](#)

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[Midterm evaluation of Count on Language programme](#)

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[Policy letter on continuation of Count on Language programme](#)

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[Groot, A.; Buiskool, B.; Elderenbosch, M. \(2025\) Final evaluation of the Follow-up Approach Low-literacy 2020-2024, Count on Language \(Eindevaluatie Vervolgaanpak Laaggeletterdheid 2020-2024\), ECBO, 's-Hertogenbosch](#)

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[Policy letter on the strengthening of basic skills of adults from 2025 onwards, Ministry of Education, 11 July 2025](#)

## Related policy developments

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**2025 Implementation**

### Basic skills of VET students

The Masterplan basic skills from 2022 focuses on enhancing education through five key pillars:

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#### Type of development

Strategy/Action plan

#### Subsystem

IVET

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**2025 Implementation**

### Measures to promote lifelong learning

Several measures have been developed by the education and labour ministries to stimulate enrolment in lifelong learning. The measures concern both the supply side and the demand

side of the adult training market.

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**Type of development**

Practical  
measure/Initiative

**Subsystem**

CVET

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**2019 Completed**

## Improving adult literacy

The Count on language action plan 2016-19 (*Tel Mee met Taal*, EUR 18 million annual budget) introduced a joint action programme of several ministries to improve social and labour market participation, primarily of adults with insufficient literacy skills.

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**Type of development**

Strategy/Action  
plan

**Subsystem**

CVET

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“ ... ” **Cite as**

Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). Promoting literacy, mathematics and digital competences for adults: Netherlands. In Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). *Timeline of VET policies in Europe* (2025 update) [Online tool].

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/timeline-vet-policies-europe/search/28455>