



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR
THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

EAEA statement

ESF+: A chance for adult education?

August 2018

The European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) welcomes the [Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Social Fund Plus \(ESF+\)](#). EAEA particularly appreciates that it is conceived as “the EU’s main instrument to invest in people and to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights”, and that it promises more coherence and synergies with other funds and instruments such as the Erasmus programme.

In the current funding period, the European Social Fund (ESF) has been a central funding tool for non-formal adult education in Europe. Adult education contributes to supporting the objectives of the ESF, and in turn, the ESF supports adult education in a number of ways. The ESF enables innovation in adult learning and education, it promotes policy reform, gives the possibility to create tailored programmes for specific target groups, fosters cross-sectoral cooperation, and promotes the professional development of adult education staff.

In a statement from November 2017, EAEA made several recommendations for improving the ESF, most prominently among them the recommendation to simplify the administration and management of ESF projects in order to improve access to the programme. The proposal for the new ESF+ programme, commencing in 2021, is ground for cautious optimism as it recognises the call to reduce the administrative burden, particularly in regard of collection of data. Very positively noted is also the participation of social partners and civil society in the implementation of the ESF+ under shared management.

Equal access to adult education and learning is highlighted several times in the proposal. It names young people, alongside particularly deprived groups such as Roma and migrants, as main target groups of the programme, referring to their specific needs in terms of education and social inclusion. EAEA is concerned that defining target groups too narrowly does not only lead to the potential stigmatisation of target groups, but also reinforces unintended consequences such as social exclusion. In this context, EAEA would also like to highlight that data protection of sensitive personal data needs to remain key. While collecting basic information about the participants of courses and trainings may be necessary for statistical purposes, this data should be collected anonymously. Furthermore, the provision of data should be voluntary and, in case of non-provision by the participants, should not lead to any disadvantage for the participant or the learning provider.

A narrower focus of prioritised groups would also be a potential barrier when seeking to create programmes that allow people from various target groups to work on and address shared challenges jointly. Such an approach would create a stronger sense of community and contribute to active citizenship and strengthening of European values. The proposal states that synergies with the Erasmus programme should “facilitate the participation of disadvantaged learners in learning mobility”. As the current and future Erasmus programme does not foresee any specific action for learning mobility of adult learners, ESF+ could be a chance for the implementation of such an action.

European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA)

Mundo-J, Rue de l’Industrie 10, B-1000 Brussels / Tel: +32 2 893 25 22 / eaea-office@eaea.org



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR
THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

The proposal emphasises the aspect of social inclusion in the future programme. At the same time, educational measures promoted by the ESF+ focus strongly on the aspects of upskilling and reskilling for employment. To make sure that educational measures are not one-sided and really support the objective of social inclusion, they need to be open to a broader group of potential learners. Non-formal adult education shows very good results in reaching out to groups at risk of social exclusion (see for instance the [results of the OED network and its follow-up ImplOED](#)). In addition to promoting upskilling and reskilling for employment, adult learning is particularly powerful in bringing together people from different walks and stages of life, in developing mutual understanding and respect, and in contributing to active citizenship, personal development and well-being. This is benefitting society, democracy and social peace.

EAEA would like to underscore that adult education can also contribute to other policy objectives, in particular to the health strand as well as measures focusing on a greener, low carbon Europe. All actions supported through the ESF+ should include a strong education component. Health literacy is crucial for health promotion and disease prevention, helps to reduce health inequalities and contributes to making health systems more effective, accessible and resilient. It should therefore be a main part of the health strand. When it comes to promoting a greener, low carbon Europe, non-formal adult education can play an important role as well, for instance through awareness raising of the population about a more sustainable lifestyle and introducing non-formal global learning activities in curricula.

EAEA's recommendations

- Reduce the administrative burden
- Make the ESF+ programme truly inclusive: avoid a too narrow definition of the target groups, and open up educational offers to a broad group of potential learners – this would help to identify and address common challenges faced by the participants, and at the same time create a stronger sense of community and contribute to active citizenship and strengthening of European values
- Ensure the protection of sensitive private data and make the provision of data by the participants of courses as well as the learning providers, i.e. the beneficiaries, voluntary
- Promote learning mobility of adult learners within ESF+ and strengthen synergies with the Erasmus programme
- Include health literacy in the health strand
- Support non-formal learning for promoting a greener, low carbon Europe

More information

Contact: **Gina Ebner**, EAEA Secretary-General, +32 2 893 25 24, gina.ebner@eaea.org.

The European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) is the voice of non-formal adult education in Europe. EAEA is a European NGO with 142 member organisations in 44 countries and represents more than 60 million learners Europe-wide.