



## **The response of the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA aisbl) to**

### **"EU Citizens' Rights – The way forward":**

#### **Consultation on how to strengthen the rights stemming from Union Citizenship**

#### **European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA aisbl)**

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#### Introduction

The EAEA is an NGO with 128 members in 42 countries, representing non-formal adult education and learning on European level. EAEA itself and many of its members have been very active in citizenship education and think that active citizenship is an essential part of lifelong learning and therefore an excellent tool for empowering citizens in achieving their rights.

1. What are the main obstacles European Union citizens currently face in the exercise of their rights resulting from Union citizenship? What could be done to address these obstacles (*for example, by providing citizens better and simpler access to information, advice and problemsolving assistance etc*)?

Too many EU citizens do not know their rights and have therefore no idea how to reinforce them. European civil society organizations, especially in the lifelong learning sector, can help. Active adult education organisations constitute, together with other civil society organisations, a foundation for a strong civil society. They form a structure of crucial importance for a sustainable democracy. Non-formal learning is an important tool for discussing and promoting the European idea itself as well as the rights that come with it. If civil society is to be capable of successfully generating involvement in Europe, decision-makers at EU, national and local levels must embody and pay attention to the democratic activities carried out by civil society organisations. Programmes, networks and initiatives that are designed to encourage active citizenship should aim to include adult education organizations.

3. What are the main obstacles faced by European Union citizens when moving to or residing in another EU country? What could be done to remove these obstacles and enhance this right (*for example, by improving enforcement of EU rules; simplifying administrative procedures, etc*)?

Some progress has been made through the developments of NQFs and the EQF in recognizing formal academic and vocational qualifications across the EU, but too many obstacles remain which create barriers for citizens to have the right for their national qualifications recognized in another EU country. The network of NARICs needs to be



reviewed and the services provided made more accessible. New initiatives are needed, especially when it comes to the recognition of non- and informal competences when moving from one EU country to another. Current initiatives by the EC on the recognition and validation of prior learning have to be reinforced.

5. What could be done to improve consumers' access to goods and services from other Member States (*for example by harmonising consumer legislation or otherwise motivating companies to sell cross-border*)?

The European Commission has already supported Consumer Education (especially for adults – cf the DOLCETA project), which is an important tool for informing and empowering European consumers. EAEA suggests increasing efforts in this area.

7. What could be done to increase involvement in the democratic life of Union citizens residing in another EU country (*for example, by facilitating their participation in political parties, etc*)?

8. What could be done to increase voters' participation in European Parliament elections (*for example, by carrying out electoral campaigns focusing on European issues, etc*)?

We would like to answer questions 7 and 8 at the same time by suggesting a European Adult Education Initiative, an initiative that invests in the education and learning of citizens. The initiative will promote the acquisition of the EU's key competences, such as learning to learn, social and civic competences, cultural expression, digital competence and entrepreneurship. This will promote social cohesion and more people will be able to join the labour market. It will also prepare Europe for future challenges such as demographic and environmental change. Non-formal learning is crucial for promoting learning for sustainable development. An investment in adult education now – despite and because of the crisis – will bring long-term benefits. Non-formal adult education and informal learning can reach out to people and foster a sense of community and citizenship. It is an asset and a necessity for Europe, its member states and its regions.

Brussels, 11 June 2010