



## EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

The response of the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA)

To

The Communication from the Commission: “An Agenda for New Skills and Jobs: A European contribution towards full employment”<sup>1</sup>

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

The EAEA is an NGO with 128 members in 43 countries, representing non-formal adult education and learning on European level. EAEA itself its members represent the whole spectrum of Lifelong Learning and Adult Education activities, including formal, non formal and informal learning, education and skill training.

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1 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:0682:FIN:EN:PDF>

EAEA welcomes the initiative of the European Commission for this communication, especially the attention given to Adult Education and Lifelong learning. We would like to add our views on the following priorities:-

## **1 Flexicurity and comprehensive lifelong learning**

1.1 We support the aim to improve access to lifelong learning, through more flexible pathways; the validation of non-formal and informal learning; and the integration of learning and career guidance systems. We also welcome adopting targeted approaches for more vulnerable adults who experience exclusion from mainstream learning opportunities. We recognise that if these aims are to succeed, flexible, tailor made and learner centred approaches are required which go beyond narrow vocational training programmes. Engaging hard to reach learners requires an holistic view and learning opportunities that respect the individual, social and economic situations of the potential learners. The renewed action plan for adult learning should not be restricted to measures designed to meet labour market needs, but should recognise the role of lifelong learning in contributing to individual and collective well being, active citizenship, social cohesion and intercultural dialogue.

1.2 The communication includes an interesting call for “social dialogue on the implementation of lifelong learning”. We propose that this be extended to a “social and civil dialogue”. AE institutions on the national, regional and European level might be initiators and moderators of this process, using their competence to facilitate discussion in difference frameworks and their huge experience and continuity of the work in this area. We strongly ask for the participation of civil society organisations in the planned Tripartite Social Forum in order to bring ALL involved stakeholders together.

1.3 The communication also recommends a stronger role for Public Employment Services in providing information, advice and guidance and in developing partnerships with education and training providers and NGOs etc. We support this proposal but would suggest that in order to successfully undertake such a role, PES staff will require considerable staff development in order to understand the learning needs and barriers that are experienced by those furthest away from the labour market. The partnership in the key actions described should be tasked to explore PES staff development initiatives in relation to lifelong learning and the development of effective local and regional partnerships.

## **2 Equipping People with the right skills for employment**

2.1 The communication draws attention to the problems faced by adults with low educational attainments, who are seven times less likely to be involved in continuing education and training than those with high attainment levels. However no key actions are proposed to address this specific problem. We suggest that this issue is of great importance for the future of Europe and that a special high level task group, which includes representatives of Civil Society, be established to make concrete proposals for action.

## 2.2 Providing the right mix of skills.

The communication outlines the need to develop a range of competences which are necessary to meet the requirements for future jobs. We would also suggest that consideration is given to 'soft' skills, including team building, participation, problem solving and social skills which can be acquired in a range of non formal and formal learning environments. In this case general 'liberal' education is as significant as vocational training. Consideration of these skills should be included in the EU Skills Panorama.

## 2.3 Enhancing geographical mobility and reaping the potential of migration.

We welcome the four measures proposed in the key actions to facilitate integration; improve the enforcement of rights of EU migrants workers; to set up a European Skills Passport; and set up a policy network to improve the education of migrants. In the latter case we suggest that the remit be enlarged to include adults in addition to school students.

However while mobility and migration may assist in meeting labour market needs, it can also result in 'brain waste' and contribute to lower levels of social cohesion. It is therefore important that lifelong learning strategies are adopted to meet the needs of both migrants from inside and outside the EU and to enable intercultural dialogue with the host communities. Key actions addressing these issues should be explored.

## 3 General Points

3.1. EAEA supports the Commission's efforts to develop a transparent validation system for learning outcomes. In this context, the EQF is an encouraging model, which has the potential to include skills and knowledge received in different ways, including informal and non-formal learning. However, we should ensure that this model would include all subjects of learning, including those not primarily targeted on the labour market. Additionally, the outcome oriented scheme of the EQF should not be used by decision makers to cut off funds in education, especially adult education.

Validation does not mean that all non-formal and informal learning will be recognized and thus formalized – free and liberal education without measuring the outcome should be preserved and financed.

3.2 EAEA welcomes the call of the commission to use ESF and other European funds for lifelong learning and adult education. However, we would like to underline that a narrow understanding of learning as a tool to supply the labour market is contrary to our understanding of learning and teaching as a holistic, integrative effort of human beings, including their economic, social and individual needs and abilities. We do believe that education – fulfilling other functions outside of the labour market – can help to accomplish this in better, more satisfying and more sustainable ways than a narrow understanding of vocational training as a tool for the economy.

3.3 EAEA looks forward to the Communication on the implementation of lifelong learning strategies and competence development, the European policy handbook, and especially the renewed Action Plan for adult learning. EAEA has developed 10 key messages for this renewed action plan, which can be found at [http://www.eaea.org/doc/eaea/EAEA\\_ActionPlan\\_followup\\_2011\\_summary.pdf](http://www.eaea.org/doc/eaea/EAEA_ActionPlan_followup_2011_summary.pdf)

The EAEA and its members support the intention of the communication to “offer more resources in bad times and fewer in good times” (p. 6). For us, education can be seen as an investment, and not an expenditure and bad times need clever investments. We would encourage the Commission and the member states to use the potentials of Adult Education to promote a coherent and integrative development of our continent, including the development of skills for decent work, the necessary competences to manage the transformation of our societies in the direction of sustainable development, and the knowledge to ensure European political systems, based on democracy and active citizenship.

Signed by  
Sue Waddington, President and  
Gina Ebner, Secretary General  
on behalf of the EAEA Executive Board