



STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS (EAEA) ON THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S COMMUNICATION ON RETHINKING EDUCATION

The EAEA welcomes the Communication by the European Commission and agrees that Education and Training, and especially investment in Lifelong Learning, play a vital role in boosting growth and jobs. EAEA also agrees that basic skills are crucial for European economies and for people's participation in society.

We would like to raise three main points, which we believe the Communication neglects to underline:

First, the potential of non-formal adult learning:

The Communication touches on the issue of low-skilled adults and mainly concentrates on workplace learning and open learning sources. We believe that non-formal adult learning¹ provides an enormous potential to reach out to different groups of adults, to draw them into learning pathways and to upskill them in non-formal settings, whether in or outside the work place. Non-formal adult learning can reach out to young adults (e.g. school drop-outs) and to migrants, to name just two groups. Non-formal adult learning can boost resilience and self-confidence of individuals in times of crisis, which will enable them to deal with the challenges of the economic crisis.²

We therefore propose a recommendation that foresees continued investment in non-formal adult education, thereby using its potential to support adult learners inside and outside the workplace.

Second, a comprehensive understanding of lifelong learning:

EAEA understands that the current situation in Europe necessitates a strong focus on jobs and growth. Nevertheless, we would like to underline that lifelong learning needs to be understood from a more comprehensive perspective: formal, non-formal and informal learning³ are equally important, and a too narrow focus on purely economic results of learning could actually have a detrimental effect on European societies, e.g. by privileging those who are already in the learning

¹ Non-formal learning is any organised, structured educational activity, carried out outside the framework of the formal system and in some ways connected with providers (institutions, organisations and teachers).

² As opposed to: Formal learning can be understood in the context of traditional educational institutions, which occurs in a defined, organized and structured environment in terms of space, time and material. The transmission of knowledge, skills and attitudes (with the stress on knowledge) is done deliberately and systematic. Formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view and typically leads to validation and certification.

³ Informal learning applies to self-directed or self-organised learning, in flexible, open forms and ways, outside the traditional education institutions or organisations, sometimes even without any clear idea that the process is about learning.



process and better qualified, thereby increasing educational inequalities across Europe. Additionally, the current crisis overshadows other developments that need attention, and ignoring them can lead to crises in the mid- and long-term future. We know that demographic change has already started to have impacts on European societies, and will only increase in severity. Furthermore European societies see growing number of persons with low literacy skill as well as increasing numbers of school drop outs, who need support and adult (basic) education services. The communication does refer to low-skilled adults, but mainly in the context of workplace learning. While this is an important aspect, it is necessary to promote outreach and basic skills strategies by adult education institutions.

Another key issue is the growing loss of trust in European institutions and an increasing loss of European cohesion.

All these issues need to be tackled in order to prevent future challenges, and lifelong learning, especially non-formal adult learning, are excellent tools to help deal with them.

We therefore propose to add three recommendations: to invest in older learners and intergenerational learning, to invest in basic skills and to launch a trans-European discussion of European values and cohesion with the help of non-formal adult education.

Third, the recognition on civil society as a main partner:

EAEA especially welcomes the annex on 'Partnerships and flexible pathways for life long skills development', which clearly states the importance of non-governmental organisations and civil society organisations. Nevertheless, we would like to underline that civil society, and especially European associations and national umbrella organisations, have a very specific role that needs to be recognized and supported. They serve as links between the European and national levels of policy making on the one hand and the grass-roots level of lifelong learning on the other. We believe that both sides need these links: the grass-roots level needs the information and the possibility to give feedback to policy developments, and the European and national policy levels need this feedback in order to develop policies that actually work and can improve systems. We therefore recommend continued support for European and national associations.