



EAEA response to the EU2020 strategy consultation

European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA aisbl)

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For EAEA, Europe2020 means an important paradigm shift: the strategy has recognised education as a key priority, which EAEA has always appreciated. EAEA has always supported the idea of sustainability, inclusion and 'smartness' associated with growth.

However, EAEA questions the dominance of "growth" in the European debate. We believe that Europe should be built on rights, justice and democracy rather than a purely economic model. EAEA believes that Europe needs to look for alternatives to growth. Also, throughout the crisis, austerity measures and economic measures have become more important than the reduction of poverty, more inclusive societies, more adult education and a more sustainable planet. EAEA calls on the European institutions to (re-)focus their attention to the well-being of people and planet, including a strong push towards a 'learning Europe' that will reinforce active citizenship, personal development and employability through adult education.

Targets and flagship initiatives

EAEA would like to draw attention to the fact that the OECD in its PIAAC results demonstrated a lack of basic skills across Europe. Additionally, the BeLL (Benefits of Lifelong Learning) study¹ showed that non-formal, liberal adult education has a number of highly important benefits. It also revealed that people with low educational attainment profit most from adult learning. EAEA therefore believes that it is absolutely necessary for Europe to push for progress in adult learning and that this can be achieved by either presenting an appropriate target (broken down into national targets due to the large diversity in this area in Europe) or a flagship initiative that will contribute to progress.

This target or initiative should focus on under-represented groups in lifelong learning and under-represented countries, because there is enormous diversity in Europe concerning who participates in learning and who does not. There is geographic diversity that demonstrates high participation rates in

¹ www.bell-project.eu



Northern Europe and far less in Southern or Central and Eastern Europe. Additionally, those who already have high education levels are most likely to participate in adult learning. A target or initiative that focuses on under-represented groups therefore has enough flexibility to really have an effect. EAEA believes that we need a 'Learning Europe' with an emphasis on under-represented groups. The lack of learning in Europe has a negative impact on participation in society, on social exclusion, but also on Europe's competitiveness.

Stakeholder involvement

Stakeholder involvement, and in particular civil society involvement, has to be improved and strengthened. Whereas we welcome the consultation on "Stakeholder's consultation guidelines", current news show that for a topic such as TTIP, only some stakeholders were consulted, and civil society in particular has been left behind closed doors. Such guidelines are only adequate if they are respected especially in the event of such important negotiations as the TTIP.

In order to improve stakeholder involvement in the field of education, EAEA asks for a structured dialogue in education, which we believe is the best way to integrate stakeholders in the strategies in this area.

EAEA also demands regular support for civil society organisations, both at the national and at the European level. This is crucial to ensure that civil society can support the implementation of EU strategies.

Tools to achieve smart, sustainable growth

The current EU2020 strategy contains some laudable goals, however in reality it does not tackle the underlying structural weaknesses of the EU economy because in practice it is subordinate to the pursuit of GDP growth. A truly balanced strategy should give far greater priority to achieving longer term objectives of increased wellbeing, social inclusion and environmental sustainability. As sustainable development contains three interrelated dimensions: environmental, economic and social that are present in the Europe 2020 strategy, the focus of the review should be to promote greater wellbeing.

Therefore we support greater public investment in appropriate research, lifelong learning, environmental and social improvements and other areas that contribute to a long-term development towards a more sustainable Europe.

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