



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR
THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

EAEA welcomes the « Skills Agenda » - a huge opportunity for Europe

EAEA strongly welcomes the new initiative “Skills Agenda”, and particularly the “Skills Guarantee” published by the European Commission. These ambitious initiatives have the potential to make a real difference in the lives of many citizens in Europe and to create positive changes by upskilling people that really need it; in particular the “Skills Guarantee” goes in the right direction for adult learning and for low-skilled people. As the Communication rightly says, “most members of Europe’s workforce in the next two decades are already adults today”, which is why a focus on adult education to reskill and upskill people is very much needed.

EAEA agrees with several key points in the initiatives, as the necessity to **increase participation in lifelong learning** and to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to attain at least the equivalent level to upper secondary education qualification. In this endeavor, **outreach to disadvantaged groups**, in particular migrants and refugees, is essential. We also agree with the necessity to have skills recognised, especially for people who have acquired their skills through non-traditional or informal ways. The focus on the recognition of skills across borders is crucial in times of intense mobility of workers; opening opportunities for skills recognition and validation to non-EU workers as migrants and refugees is very relevant. Ensuring continuous skills development of the workforce is absolutely necessary to allow people to develop in their careers and to ensure that they have the right skills for tomorrow’s jobs.

EAEA wants to underline the potential of **non-formal adult education** to reach out to and empower learners. Therefore the importance of its provision and of its recognition needs to be even more strengthened in the Communication. Non-formal education is only mentioned through the lens of skills recognition, not as a provider of learning opportunities and a facilitator of life skills acquisition that needs to be supported. Non-formal adult learning can reach out to people with bad experiences in formal education; it opens the world of learning for many. Nevertheless, many policy-makers underestimate the possibilities of non-formal adult learning. The [PIAAC](#) and [BeLL](#) results clearly demonstrate the need for more adult education, and especially the need to increase its possibilities to reach out to disadvantaged groups. This needs to be a key part of all lifelong learning strategies at the European and national levels. The EAEA-led Grundtvig network [Outreach – Empowerment – Diversity](#) has identified a large number of interesting outreach initiatives in non-formal adult learning that can serve as inspiration.

Structural change and support for non-formal adult education providers in order to establish or sustain the work of this sector is needed. Non-formal adult learning can be much more flexible in responding to learners’ needs and interests than other forms of education.



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EAEA misses an emphasis on skills such as **critical thinking, problem solving or learning to learn** (which are best acquired through non-formal education and learning) and proposes that these should be strengthened in the Skills Guarantee as well as in the planned adaptation of the **key competences framework**. EAEA promotes a 'life skills' approach rather than just basic skills. Adults generally need more than just reading / writing / numeracy if they lack any of these competences. These basic skills can be complemented by digital skills but also health literacy, civic learning and the key competences mentioned above. The proposal of the European Commission, which foresees a skills assessment followed by a tailored learning offer, actually provides this opportunity.

EAEA would like to strengthen even more the understanding (which is mentioned in the communication) of learners not only as workers / employees but also as citizens, parents, voters, consumers, etc. It is crucial to understand the needs of the whole person on the one hand but also society on the other. In this context, we would like to see a close link of the Skills Agenda with other Commission strategies. Recent elections have clearly shown that the level of education is closely related to the voting behaviour of individuals. EAEA therefore proposes to link the new skills agenda closely with the Paris declaration and to put a particular focus on civic, democratic and intercultural competences in the upcoming adaptation of the key competences framework.

In order to implement the Skills Guarantee, EAEA proposes to **increase civil dialogue for lifelong learning. Partnerships and mutual learning on different levels (European, national and regional) and in particular a close cooperation with civil society organisations (CSOs) are needed**. The sector needs to be able to work proactively rather than reactively to changes in policy. Participation of and dialogue with all relevant stakeholders (social partners, learning providers, NGOs, etc.) must become a regular part of decision making and policy development. **Investments** will be necessary. We call on all member states and stakeholders to take this challenge seriously as the only thing that will be more expensive is NOT to invest in the learning of Europeans.

EAEA confirms that adult education civil society and providers are ready to contribute and to participate in making the Skills Agenda and Skills Guarantee a success.

In autumn, EAEA will publish a more detailed policy analysis which will provide a more in-depth analysis that will also contain ideas, proposals and good practice examples for the implementation of the Skills Guarantee.

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