



EUROPEAN EDUCATION AREA MUST NOT LEAVE ADULTS BEHIND

Reaction to the Second Package of the European Education Area

EAEA Statement

June 2018

[The European Association for the Education of Adults \(EAEA\)](#) welcomes the appreciation of lifelong learning in the European Commission's [Communication on Building a stronger Europe: the role of youth, education and culture policies](#). The communication reiterates the commitment of the European Union to the implementation of the first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights, i.e. the right to quality education, training and lifelong learning, as well as the need for an “inclusive, life-long-learning-based and innovation-driven approach to education and training” in several places. EAEA very much welcomes this commitment.

However, the measures proposed in the package are not embedded in a holistic lifelong learning approach. The package focuses strongly on young people. The communication refers to the New Skills Agenda for Europe, and more specifically to Upskilling Pathways, as an action that “will help give young people [...] more promising prospects”. This initiative, however, was designed to provide new opportunities to adults. While investments in the young generation are, without any doubt, very important, adults cannot be left behind.

Family learning - a missed opportunity

The Proposal for a [Council Recommendation on High Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems](#), launched as part of the second package of the European Education Area, states that “it is in the early years that children create the foundation and capacity to learn throughout life”. It fails to recognize, however, the crucial role of family learning that is providing adults with the skills and knowledge to support their children’s education.

Evidence suggests that family learning significantly contributes not only to the health and intellectual, social and emotional development of children, but also to their parents’ self-confidence, options to retain and find work, involvement in pre-school and school activities as well as involvement in the local community, to name just a few benefits. Including this aspect of early childhood education and care is a missed chance.

Adult education crucial in language learning

With the Proposal for a [Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages](#), the European Union sets out to create a multilingual Europe, with the objective to enable citizens to study, learn and work in other countries as well as to improve social inclusion in non-native-speaking environments. Despite this ambition, the proposal focuses on language learning at school and in higher education, omitting the role of adult education for language learning. Many people learn their second (or third, fourth, ...) language only when they are adults, some of them after a difficult experience with language learning at school.



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR
THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

Apart from the positive effects of being able to communicate in another language, language learning in non-formal adult education can also be a stepping stone into further education and learning. Again, family learning can play an important role – many parents start learning (or refreshing) languages when their children start.

There is also a need to provide affordable language learning for adults that uses suitable teaching and learning methodologies. Organisations like the Volkshochschulen in the German-speaking countries provide adult-appropriate courses for both retired (during the day) and working (evening) classes. EAEA proposes a recommendation in the Proposal that foresees access to affordable and high quality language learning in all Member States.

Attention to literacy skills in native language needed

What the proposal still does not take into account is that as much as one fifth of the adult population has poor literacy skills, and more than a third has intermediate skills – in their native language, according to the PIAAC study. On average, older adults have lower literacy skills than 25-34-year-olds, which means that the age group above 34 would require particular attention in terms of language learning offers. The first objective of language learning policy should always be a good understanding and use of people's native languages. The possibility for the acquisition of a second language will then depend on relevance, self-confidence and appropriate learning offers.

In this context, the potential of combining language with digital learning cannot be underestimated. Digital tools and media can improve flexibility of learning as well as increase the joy in language learning, for instance through game-based learning. This could increase the interest of younger adults in language learning and increase the digital competences of older learners.

EAEA recommends integrating a lifelong learning approach that considers all ages and all stages of learning. This means recognising the role of adult learning in all measures proposed by the European Union in order to improve their impact.

EAEA's recommendations

- To ensure a holistic approach to lifelong learning, invest in not only the education of young generation but also of adults
- Recognise the role of family learning in providing adults with the skills and knowledge to support their children's education and emotional development
- Recognise the role of adult education in language learning as a means of communication and a stepping stone into further education
- Ensure access to affordable and high quality language learning in all Member States
- Provide special attention to the language learning offers for adults over 34 to ensure the improvement of literacy skills in the native language
- Improve flexibility of language learning through digital tools and media.



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR
THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

More information

Contact: Gina Ebner, EAEA Secretary-General, +32 2 893 25 24, gina.ebner@eaea.org.

The European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) is the voice of non-formal adult education in Europe. EAEA is a European NGO with 142 member organisations in 44 countries and represents more than 60 million learners Europe-wide.