



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR
THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

ET2020: WHAT WILL COME AFTER 2020?

EAEA Statement

September 2019

Ten years have gone by since the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET2020) was adopted by the Member States of the European Union. The European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) has closely followed up its implementation. While ET2020 has brought some improvements for the field of education and training, progress in adult learning has been slow. The successor of ET2020 should be ambitious, but also ensure that its objectives can be reached by promoting national strategies for their implementation.

More ambitious benchmarks for adult learning

Within the ET2020 framework, the EU Member States agreed on a benchmark for adult participation in lifelong learning, stating that by 2020, an average of at least 15% of adults should participate in lifelong learning, using the Labour Force Survey of the European Union (LFS). Recent figures show that current participation rates in adult learning are at 11.1%, going up from 9.3% in 2010. While it is likely that the ET2020 benchmark of 15% will not be reached by 2020, it is of great importance that the future framework is even more ambitious to encourage Member States to take action. While the Labour Force Survey is an important instrument for measuring participation in adult learning, EAEA believes that the Adult Education Survey (AES) can give a better picture of participation in adult learning as it uses a longer reference period (one year in the AES as opposed to four weeks each quarter in the LFS). Adult learning is generally characterised by a shorter duration of courses as well as a lower frequency of participation in trainings and learning activities, compared to formal education. **To take this into consideration, the target for adult learning should be expanded and include a second benchmark of 60% of the population participating in adult education, using the AES.**

Currently, the LFS measures participation in adult learning among 15-64 year olds, while the AES is limited to the age group of 25-64 years. However, the European population is ageing and retirement age is rising in almost all European countries. This should be reflected in the benchmarks and the instruments to monitor their implementation. Moreover, EAEA believes that adult education is not only relevant for the working population, but particularly also for elder persons who are at risk of social isolation. For this reason, **EAEA proposes to extend the age groups considered in the LFS and AES to the age of 80 years.** The higher age limit for measuring participation in adult education and learning coincides with the average life expectancy of the EU's population. It also takes the changing labour market into account that increasingly includes people beyond the (official) working age who are still working or volunteering. At the same time, the higher age limit can capture the participation of elderly in adult education and learning.

The growing importance of adult learning for personal and professional development of the European population needs to be reflected in its financing. EAEA therefore suggests to introduce a new benchmark that aims to improve the financing of the sector. **The share of the gross domestic product spent on adult learning should be set at 1.5%**, including all forms of funding such as public financing, employer-financed,



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public employment service-financed as well as privately financed.

More visibility for adult education

Adult education and learning is part of the lifelong learning continuum that brings together different education sectors in informal, non-formal and formal learning. A close collaboration between these sectors is crucial to create learning offers that put the learner at the centre and to enable smooth transitions from one learning form to the other as well as interlinking them.

Non-formal adult education and learning complement continuous vocational education and training, and, more and more, these sectors become intertwined along a spectrum of informal, non-formal and formal learning activities for the adult population. Adult education and learning plays a central role for personal and professional development as well as the development of communities and society. Its focus on active citizenship, democracy, well-being and an equitable change of society, alongside others, makes it relevant also for older learners beyond the working age. **Adult education caters to a number of different target groups and learning needs, enabling life-wide¹ and life-deep² learning. For this reason, EAEA opposes a re-definition of the term “adult education” to “continuous learning”.**

Make lifelong learning a human right

The first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights on the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning should become a human right. Lifelong learning needs to be inclusive, giving access to the highly educated as well as those with low formal qualifications and those with specific learning needs or coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. Guidance and validation of non-formal and informal learning are central to this. Adults should get access to learning throughout their entire life, also beyond working age. **This requires a recognition of non-formal adult education as a central education sector as well as adequate financial instruments to support it.**

Promote life skills for a better European future

In the past years, “life skills” have emerged as a new paradigm in lifelong learning, indicating a shift from a sector-related approach to a more skills and competencies-related approach. Life skills are extremely important in order to learn how to deal with the increasingly rapid pace of change in society, work and private life. Particularly when looking at the proliferation of “fake news”, life skills such as media literacy and critical thinking are pivotal.

Adult education can play a central role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and combating climate change. Waiting for a future generation, i.e. a focus on formal education, would mean not

¹ The notion that learning “occurs in multiple contexts, such as work, at home and in our social lives” (OECD 2007: Understanding the Social Outcomes of Learning. France: OECD Publications. p. 10)

² “Life-deep learning scaffolds all our ways of approaching challenges and undergoing change. Religious, moral, ethical, and social learning bring life-deep learning that enables us to guide our actions, judge ourselves and others, and express to ourselves and others how we feel and what we believe.” (Banks et al 2007: Learning in and out of school in diverse environments. Life-Long, Life-Wide, Life-Deep. The LIFE Center (The Learning in Informal and Formal Environments Center) and the Center for Multicultural Education. p. 13)



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acknowledging the problem adequately. Adult education can reach out to adult citizens and engage them in sustainability and environmental learning. **EAEA proposes an inclusive and comprehensive strategy that includes all sectors of education within the lifelong learning continuum for tackling the Sustainable Development Goals and combating climate change.**

A close cooperation between adult education providers and their environment, including civil society, public libraries, employers, public employment services, social partners, health and social services, leads to more effective learning provision and a higher accessibility of adult learning offers. Moreover, it is a “win-win” for all sides involved. Health education – provided through a breadth of learning offers such as cooking classes, sports classes, health literacy courses etc. – is a good example: it leads to more well-being and fewer sick leave of employees, less costs for the public health system etc. However, **in order to enable more and closer cooperation between these sectors, political and financial support is crucial.**

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 130 member organisations in 43 countries and represents more than 60 million learners Europe-wide.