



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR  
THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

## REACTION TO THE EUROPEAN SKILLS AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE COMPETITIVENESS, SOCIAL FAIRNESS AND RESILIENCE

EAEA Statement

July 2020

The European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) welcomes the [Communication of the European Commission on the revised European Skills Agenda](#) that was launched on 1 July 2020 and its appreciation of the role of non-formal adult learning and education. While the Upskilling Pathways have been very valuable for promoting basic skills and validation of non-formal and informal learning, the Skills Agenda goes one step further. It strengthens non-formal adult education and learning by saying that it will “prioritise non-formal, life-wide learning, intergenerational, intercultural and community learning” and by highlighting skills for life as a key pillar of adult learning and education. EAEA is happy to see that the Communication also addresses groups not or no longer active in the labour market, especially senior citizens, by setting ambitious benchmarks for adult learning across the life-span.

EAEA is particularly pleased with the Commission's announced intention to work with Member States to develop **new priorities for the European Agenda for Adult Learning**. However, no clear indications are given as to how new priorities will be introduced and when. EAEA will be happy to support the European Commission in identifying priority areas, including the digitalization of adult learning and education, promoting democratic values and social inclusion of disadvantaged groups of society. The European Agenda for Adult Learning has been central for improving adult learning structures and increasing participation in adult learning, but has not yet been fully implemented in all countries. A continuation of the Agenda is essential to achieving the objectives set in the Skills Agenda as well as to deliver on the implementation of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.

EAEA appreciates the broad and inclusive approach to lifelong learning that is spelled out in the Communication: “It is only by instilling a genuine culture of lifelong learning that we can ensure a competitive economy and cohesive society and bring to life the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning, as declared in Principle 1 of the European Pillar of Social Rights.” (p. 15). Stating that lifelong learning for all must become a reality in Europe, the Skills Agenda acknowledges the **crucial role of life skills** for strengthening a sustainable, socially equitable and resilient Europe. EAEA has been emphasizing the importance of life skills for individual and community development particularly with its ‘Manifesto for Adult Learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century’, but also its contribution to the development of the European LifeComp Framework through the expertise acquired in the European project “Life Skills for Europe”. EAEA is, therefore, delighted that life skills have been made a separate flagship action (Action 8) in the Skills Agenda.

Other flagship actions of the Skills Agenda that are particularly relevant for non-formal adult learning and education include Action 7 that proposes to create a strategic framework for the **recognition of transversal skills**, such as working together, critical thinking, and creative problem solving. EAEA reinforces the



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messages of the Communication that these skills are “often developed outside formal learning, at work and throughout life”. EAEA would like to point out, however, that organisations working in the validation of informal and non-formal learning have considerable expertise to offer in regard to the proposed validation pioneer organisations and other entities working in the professionalization of validation experts. Organisations independent from employers and employment services could ensure that wider skills are taken into account in validation procedures. The European approach to micro-credentials, proposed in Action 10, could also be a valuable instrument for adult learning and education as it can complement EU policies on validation of non-formal and informal learning.

EAEA would like to emphasise that European adult education and learning, however ambitious the Skills Agenda may be, **needs adequate funding**. This will require a substantial increase in public funding, both at the European and the national levels. Encouragingly, the Communication tackles the latter by stating that possible operations that can be supported with the future EU budget include “investment in community adult learning centres, where people of all ages can learn and exchange, building a resilient and cohesive society”. A concrete proposal for this investment needs to be integrated into the architecture of the future Erasmus+ and ESF+ programmes.

The Skills Agenda also suggests exploring **Individual Learning Accounts** as financing tools for adult learning; however, there are problems with Individual Learning Accounts that occur in a number of EU Member States, including that they are managed differently, that they are mainly used by the working population, and more so by the highly educated part of the population, that they are not always easy to use and that they cannot be applied to all learning activities. Moreover, structures of and funding for adult learning and education are not adequately developed in all European countries and regions to provide a sufficient and balanced range of learning activities - this is particularly true in countries and regions where adult learning structures are comparatively weak. While EAEA believes that Individual Learning Accounts can be a central financing tool for adult learning and education, it must be recognised that they have their limitations as they focus strongly on the demand side of adult learning and education. Financing instruments should support not only the demand side but also, and above all, the supply side of learning provision in order to increase participation levels in adult learning and education.

The European Association for Adult Education will be happy to support the European Commission, wherever possible, in developing the key actions proposed in the Skills Agenda, but will also hold the European Commission accountable for their implementation. EAEA urges the European Commission to present its plans for the continuation of the European Agenda for Adult Learning as soon as possible, so that the Agenda can be anchored in the European Education Area. Finally, EAEA calls on the Commission to ensure adequate funding for adult learning and education and calls on Member States to work with adult learning providers and civil society in the field of non-formal adult learning and education to develop adult learning strategies in order to fully implement the Skills Agenda.

***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.***

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