



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR
THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

REACTION THE COUNCIL'S CONCLUSION ON IMPROVING THE WELL-BEING OF OLDER PERSONS IN THE ERA OF DIGITALISATION

EAEA Statement
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EAEA welcomes the Council's conclusions on improving the well-being of older persons in the era of digitalisation during the covid-19 pandemic and highlighting the opportunities and potential risks for older persons in a digitalised world, considering that only roughly 49% over 50 year olds¹ use the Internet compared 94 % 16 to 29 year olds². EAEA believes that it is essential to support the elderly during these challenging times as well as moving forward in the aftermath of the pandemic; and agrees that the aspect of ageing will need to be considered in all policy fields and older persons will need to be involved in decision-making processes in order to develop an inclusive exit strategy from the COVID-19 pandemic.

With the demographic structure of the EU population steadily changing and the number of elderly consistently surpassing the number of children in the EU-27 since 2004, EAEA appreciates the conclusions of the European Council. COVID-19 has had dramatic effects on the elderly as well as the ALE sector, forcing numerous ALE providers to stop their offers. Different from formal providers, the majority of adult learning programmes were not able to move their offers online due to a lack of preceding support of the sector and missing infrastructure. With this, COVID-19 amplified the marginalisation of elderly and deprived them, not only of learning opportunity but also of platforms to connect and socialise with others.

Strengthening social inclusion and mutual solidarity between generations

Understanding this, **EAEA supports the Council's endeavour to encourage societies and economies to react to the demographic change, while addressing the needs and interests of the elderly** by strengthen social inclusion and mutual solidarity between the generations; as well as raising awareness among younger generations for the valuable contributions of older persons towards society. EAEA agrees that only by including all generations in future efforts to mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic, intergenerational bonds can be strengthened and ageism reduced. In its conclusions the Council specifically underlines the importance of a rights-based approach, to assure the same rights and access to services for all groups of the population, including those who cannot

¹ König et al. (2018): Internet use among older Europeans: an analysis based on SHARE data (<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10209-018-0609-5>)

² [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Being_young_in_Europe_today_-_digital_world#:~:text=In%202019%2C%20some%2094%20%25%20of,\(77%20%25%20in%202019\).](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Being_young_in_Europe_today_-_digital_world#:~:text=In%202019%2C%20some%2094%20%25%20of,(77%20%25%20in%202019).)



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fully use digital technologies, respectively services provided exclusively online. EAEA wants to underline the importance of that approach especially through the means of learning offerings.

Promoting the learning of elderly

The Council's conclusions rightfully urge the support and strengthening of education and training, including life-long learning opportunities. **EAEA agrees with the importance of the development of skills, especially technological and digital skills, in order to assure the equal and unrestricted access of elderly to public and private services.** With more information and services being moved online, health, social and long term care must remain easily accessible and barrier-free. **EAEA recommends to extend the endeavours to provide better learning opportunities for the elderly during and after the time of the pandemic.** To assure and further the active participation of all generations, we have to not only enable older persons to adjust to the changes caused by pandemic specifically, but to develop the skills that prepare for future technical, social and societal changes. Therewith skills for life and a holistic approach to learning are being promote, as described in the new Skills Agenda, and that goes beyond a consumer/utility perspective of digitalisation. Noticing that non-formal education has not been mentioned within the Council's conclusions, **EAEA advocates to recognise more explicitly the role of non-formal adult education in providing learning opportunities for the elderly.** EAEA believes that by doing so, non-formal adult education can serve as a key contributor to overcome learning barriers brought up by the Covid-19 crisis. As the Council's conclusions do not specify the means of their recommendations, **EAEA urges future endeavours to consider non-formal education as possible entrance points to formal and accredited education and therefore explicitly include this approach.** For this, EAEA recommends to further the exchange between the European Council and civil society all over Europe. Additionally EAEA encourages the cooperation between different services, e.g. social services, care homes and ALE providers to assure an active inclusion and participation of elderly.

Looking forward to the new European Agenda for ALE, EAEA is trusting that older learners will be included as a specific target group in order to support the idea that non-formal education can serve all age groups by proving a flexible and diverse doorway to education, considering that the learning of elderly is mentioned within the Skills Agenda as well as within Action on Life Skills.

More information

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

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