



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR
THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

Adult Education and Covid-19: A pledge for more Adult Learning and Education in and after the Coronavirus Pandemic

EAEA Statement
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Adult Education and Learning (ALE) is a powerful tool to help combat the aftermath of the pandemic, especially in the areas of health, digitalisation, supporting (older) learners to adjust to new circumstances, including building resilience. EAEA, therefore, welcomes policies and initiatives that take adult learning and education into consideration, such as the European Education Area, the Skills Agenda as well as discussions on a successor programme of the European Agenda for Adult Learning. EAEA also highlights the relevance of ALE for further cohesion and solidarity within Europe. Adult education has the power to promote equality in European society supporting personal development, self-confidence and enables social inclusion. ([EAEA 2020](#))

Over the last year, we have seen the severe effects the COVID-19 pandemic had on all aspects of society. The life of millions of people has changed drastically as many have faced social and health issues, had to refrain from social activities, faced educational disruption and/or lost their jobs, leading to a negative impact on their wellbeing. Within this context adult education in Europe has experienced different challenges with providers being forced to either move their activities online or close them down. This has resulted in the loss of opportunities for people to learn, build relationships and socialise. It is of utmost importance to address the negative consequences adult learning experienced in 2020 and provide the political and financial support needed going forward.

Unfortunately, those who could benefit from ALE the most, are the least likely to have access to learning opportunities¹. This has included the most vulnerable group of learners, namely people with low education levels and those who lost their jobs because of the pandemic. EAEA calls for immediate action to assist in the recovery of the ALE sector as it faces the negative effects of the COVID-19 crisis.

EAEA is urging the European Commission and the European Parliament to acknowledge the challenges faced by ALE sector through a strategic funding model that enables them to adequately support rebuilding and [accessibility initiatives](#). EAEA further recommends including civil society organisations (CSOs) in strategic efforts made by the Commission going forward. This will provide a partnership approach with civil society, learners, and the wider public ensuring a more meaningful and democratic approach in overcoming the pandemic.

¹ 2019, UNESCO, 4th Global Report on Adult Learning and Education <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/4th-global-report-adult-learning-and-education-leave-no-one-behind-participation-equity>



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Furthermore, there is an opportunity to recognise and learn from best practice at the local and regional level with providers and adult education professionals from across Europe. The EAEA recommends that the European Commission and the Parliament take action on capturing examples from initiatives taking place at the grassroots level and promoting these as case study examples with key learnings made. One example EAEA would like to promote is a toolkit for digitalisation strategies that was developed as part of an Erasmus+ programme². Furthermore, EAEA appeals to the Commission to ensure additional flexible funding is provided for further development in this sector.

Providing easy to access Adult Education and Learning

COVID-19 has not only demonstrated the current digital gap in society, it has also widened the educational attainment of those who have had access to digital technology during the pandemic and those who have not. In order to provide support to rebuild the lost ALE structures, empower marginalized groups and tackle the digital gap, the provision of different forms of learning to meet different learning needs must be part of all programmes and initiatives. In this, **EAEA strongly emphasises the importance of methodological diversity in all forms of learning in order to prevent labelling formal education as more valuable than other forms of learning as non-formal and informal learning is more accessible for some of the marginalised and vulnerable groups.**

Recommendations

EAEA call for the development of emergency funds for non-profit ALE providers and self-employed teachers, trainers and other ALE staff to soften the financial shock for ALE institutions caused by the drop of participants and the loss of funding. Additionally, **EAEA suggests full compensation of courses that have been initiated by public authorities to support society** (e.g. labour market measures, the promotion of integration etc.). Moving forward **EAEA is further stressing the importance to support the promotion of ALE on an EU level** (e.g. through tailored learning programmes and the equalisation of all forms of learning) **to further reduce income losses in the ALE sector.** ([EAEA2020](#))

The severe consequences of financial cutbacks have been shown e.g. in a recent survey³ of 370 private and public adult education centres (Volkshochschulen) in Germany. The survey reveals that roughly 40% of the centres have requested financial support from the government, as they are expecting a 76% reduction in their revenue through participant fees. Even roughly 53% of the centres expressed fear of insolvency. Trying to minimise the loss, some centres moved their office online, however, on average only 13% of the normal learning programme could be moved online and 17% of the centres were not able to offer any of their courses online. Coming from a country in which adult education centres are well established and a strong pillar of ALE, these figures underline how crucial compensative funding is for adult education institutions.

EAEA, however, underlines not only the value of ad-hoc compensatory support but also the continuation and strengthening of future adult education strategies at the EU level. During the pandemic, we have learned valuable lessons about the need for health education, supporting

² <https://eaea.org/project/future-lab/>

³ 2021, VHS Deutscher Volkshochschulverband, Survey „Aktuelle Situation und Finanzlage der Volkshochschulen“



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wellbeing, social engagement for communities, and the importance of civic education. **It is a vital tool for supporting economic stability and enabling a thriving and inclusive European community.**

A European learning-for-all strategy, inspired by e.g. the well-established learning model *Bildung* could use its integrative approach to adult education to provide the path to achieving the above objectives. This, however, would require a swift but substantial intervention on the EU level. Providing the necessary funding as well as facilitating transnational cooperation and exchange of best practice will then allow for other member states to adjust such model and integrate it according to their national resources and needs. In this, programmes like the ESF and Erasmus+ play a crucial role and should, therefore, be included in the further development of programmes and initiatives to reduce the negative effects of the COVID-19 crisis.

[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.