



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR  
THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT NEEDS ADULT LEARNING AND EDUCATION

EAEA Statement

September 2021

Recent events - floods and forest fires in large parts of Europe - show us that there is a very strong need for action and that every second is a second lost that we – the entire population of Europe as well as representatives of politics, social partners, and civil society – are not actively working on knowledge and understanding of climate change and its consequences.

EAEA, therefore, welcomes the European Commission's public consultation on "[Education for environmental sustainability](#)"<sup>1</sup> and points out that adult learning and education (ALE<sup>2</sup>) must play a central role in European policies and funding programmes so to meaningfully promote and foster the development of sustainability-oriented attitudes and skills.

Acknowledging its potential and positive impact, EAEA welcomes the Council conclusions on "[A comprehensive approach to accelerate the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for sustainable development – Building back better for the COVID-19 crisis](#)", published on 22 June 2021, and highlights that the Council conclusions recognise "the importance of focusing on transformative education at all levels as key for empowering citizens to contribute to these objectives."

Civil society-led ALE has developed methodologies and tools to promote sustainable environmental development, for instance in the European DEAR-funded project "[Know Your Lifestyle – Introducing Sustainable Consumption in 2nd Chance Education](#)". From the practical work at the grass roots level, we know that **information on the environment and climate change** plays a central role, but also **guidance on how citizens themselves can change their behaviour, and take part in actions aiming to change politics and the society as a whole**.

However, individual activities and actions for more environmental sustainability must be accessible and socially fair in order not to be a privilege of those with a higher income. ALE plays a central role in **engaging people in their own communities**, e.g., through public spaces' gardening as a volunteer, which not only promotes environmental skills but simultaneously social skills, language skills, health skills etc.

Learning about the environment and sustainability can be intergenerational and transcultural, thereby also reaching out to those who are furthest away from learning. However, in order to reach large parts of the European population, they need to be scaled up at the European level. This requires targeted funding. **Structural funding for ALE providers is essential** to be able to provide high-quality learning provision: this includes allowing adult educators to further develop their skills and knowledge for education for sustainability, but also enabling ALE providers to reach out to their communities and other stakeholders to establish joint learning activities.

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1 Environmental sustainability – education and training – [Public Consultation](#) 18 June 2021 - 24 September 2021 (midnight Brussels time)

2 EAEA is a member of the global alliance for adult learning and education – named "We are ALE" – which aims to raise awareness of the role of non-formal adult learning and education in promoting the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.



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In addition to the individual and community level, we believe that there is a need to raise awareness and promote skills among companies to create “green cycles” within production that take emissions, waste water management and waste material disposal into account already in the planning phase of production.

We, therefore, welcome the communication of the European Commission from 14 July 2021 on Delivering the Green Deal, in which it states that the process towards a **green transformation of the European economy** requires awareness raising and new knowledge and skills. We regret, however, that the communication focuses very much on re- and upskilling in industrial ecosystems instead of using this unique chance to promote a more holistic vision of ALE in Europe.

Sustainability is not one-dimensionally only environmental - **sustainability is based on three pillars that are closely interwoven and interrelated: economic, ecological, and social sustainability**<sup>3</sup>. Skills and knowledge must, therefore, always consider the coexistence of these three pillars in order to be “future-proof”. We believe that a green transformation requires holistic learning for all, young and old, in work and outside of the labour market, learning in companies as well as in the private sphere.

Non-formal ALE promotes these future-proof “life skills”, especially problem-solving, creative and critical thinking skills, but also socio-emotional skills. Learning for the environment and sustainability also needs skills to connect different issues and topics related to sustainability, considering multiple perspectives, and acknowledging uncertainty. In this sense, sustainability - in addition to targeted learning opportunities - should be integrated into all areas of learning and all subjects.

**Policy coherence – at European as well as national and regional level** – is at the forefront of promoting sustainability effectively. At the European level, instruments such as NextGenerationEU, Erasmus+, Horizon2020, European Social Fund+, DEAR and the Education for Climate Coalition need to be well coordinated.

Above all, however, they need to use a **holistic approach to education that includes all types of learning and education** – from school education, higher education, VET to non-formal ALE, from learning for the very young to the very old. This requires effective coordination at all levels of policymaking, bringing together sectors that are not traditionally at the same table. The education sector – including non-formal ALE – must have a permanent seat at this table, because the challenges of climate change can only be met together.

#### **EAEA calls on the European Commission to**

- Promote policy coherence and ensure an effective co-ordination of instruments available for the promotion of education for sustainability, especially NextGenerationEU, Erasmus+, Horizon2020, European Social Fund+, DEAR and the Education for Climate Coalition
- Promote skills linked to all three pillars of sustainability, namely environmental, economic, and social sustainability,

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<sup>3</sup> The 3-pillar model of the UN is sometimes supplemented by one or two other pillars, e.g., cultural sustainability and security sustainability.



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- Take into account the wider skills needed for a green transformation, especially “life skills” such as problem-solving skills, creative and critical thinking skills, but also socio-emotional skills.

#### **EAEA calls on the EU Member States to**

- Pursue a holistic and transformative approach to learning for sustainability, focusing on “life skills” - including sustainability/green skills, through targeted learning activities as well as the integration of sustainability in all areas of learning throughout all subjects,
- Ensure adequate structural funding for non-formal ALE to raise awareness of sustainability and promote the skills needed at the individual level, but also for communities and a sustainable shift in production.

*EAEA has been advocating for adult learning and education for development for many years, including through being represented in a multi-stakeholder group on sustainable development co-organised by DG DEVCO of the European Commission and civil society in the development sector. In 2020, following our activity in this field and the request of our members, we joined forces with other associations in the adult education sector and launched an initiative to promote a green competences framework for all education sectors<sup>4</sup>.*

***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 120 member organisations in 40 countries and represents more than 60 million learners Europe-wide.***

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<sup>4</sup> <https://green-comp.eu/about/>