



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR
THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

Call for urgent action to mitigate the impact of the energy crisis and inflation on ALE provision and to ensure access to learning opportunities

EAEA's statement November 2022

European adult learning and education organisations are ringing the alarm bell: the energy crisis and inflation in Europe are spreading far and wide and are starting to show their negative impact on the adult learning and education (ALE) sector. The current crisis not only leads to skyrocketing energy costs of educational institutions, but also has a strong negative impact on the purchasing power of learners and the retention of ALE staff by educational institutions. This, in turn, has a negative impact on access to learning. At the same time, ALE offers citizens the most direct access to learning opportunities on sustainability: these opportunities are at risk of being curtailed in the coming months and possibly years.

We call for IMMEDIATE ACTION AT ALL POLITICAL LEVELS to provide structural and financial support to ALE organisations and providers.

The current crisis is highly jeopardising the potential of ALE as learning opportunities are limited due to high energy prices and inflation. This creates structural exclusion from adult learning and education, increasing the risk that adults will be socially excluded, have fewer opportunities for further education, and have less access to learning about sustainability – a dimension that should not be underestimated when it comes to green change and moving towards more sustainable energy production and consumption.

We recall that the European Pillar of Social Rights enshrines the right of everyone to lifelong learning. This right must be protected and promoted, also and especially in times of crisis.

ALE organisations and providers need immediate support

- To be able to cover their increased energy and heating costs;
- To be able to retain educators and other staff, and adapt salaries to the rising costs of living;
- To be able to retain learners, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, people with illnesses and elderly people, and to provide safe and warm spaces for learning and social inclusion;
- To be able to apply for additional funding to implement more learning activities that contribute to a just green transition and climate action.



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The rising costs for energy and the inflation put ALE organisations at a serious risk of financial capacity loss and loss of staff

EAEA's members, from the westernmost to the easternmost point of Europe, have approached EAEA in recent weeks because of their difficulties. Few ALE providers can afford to maintain buildings (as owners, renters or joint users of public buildings) that meet the highest energy standards or are able to produce energy themselves; consequently, costs for heating have risen exponentially.

Furthermore, ALE centres that provide a technology-rich learning environment, for instance for ICT courses or programmes that link non-formal ALE with continuous vocational education and training, such as carpentry and baking courses, feel the very high electricity and gas prices.

Reports from countries including France, Portugal, Estonia, Austria, and others, indicate that **ALE organisations increasingly have to decide whether they can continue to pay their energy bills and other operating costs or their staff**. Funding levels are not adjusted to the higher prices, or not enough to fully compensate for the increase of costs, especially where ALE organisations receive operating and project funding. In a recent survey of EAEA members, some ALE organisations also reported that they experience increased difficulties in applying for public funding as governments move their attention to other sectors and areas, as a consequence of the multiple crises.

Adult educators and other ALE staff are at risk of unemployment as ALE organisations have to make difficult decisions. At the same time, ALE staff are feeling the increasing costs of living themselves and are, in some countries, moving to other (and better paid) sectors outside ALE, continuing a trend that began during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The crisis could lead to limited access to learning – perpetuating the crisis

These developments create a vicious circle for the provision of ALE and learners' access to it. Learners, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are the main losers in this situation. Citizens on the lower and middle ends of the income scale are at risk of becoming structurally excluded from ALE, firstly because of limited learning opportunities due to the difficult situation of providers, and secondly because they have to prioritise other expenses over paying learning fees for courses that are not offered free of charge. Access to ALE also becomes more difficult for people in rural areas when small educational institutions have to cut back their learning offers or close down altogether.

ALE providers fear that migrants and people with low formal qualifications in particular are most at risk of exclusion. This can also have concrete legal implications, namely where, for example, language skills have to be proven at a certain level in order to be allowed to stay in the country. People in a low income bracket, on the other hand, would tend to look for yet another additional income to be able to pay their energy and other bills and would, therefore, no longer have time to participate in further education and learning. Older people, people with illnesses and those who live in poorly insulated buildings might also be forced out of ALE if the course rooms can no longer be (sufficiently) heated and are no longer safe and warm spaces of learning and social interaction.



Exclusion from participation in ALE will have a **negative impact on learners' wellbeing, health, social inclusion, and community development**. Especially in times of crisis, however, these are central to building resilience and trust that a change for the better is possible. We would also like to stress that ALE promotes knowledge and competences that are necessary to avoid future crises, to provide possibilities for re- and upskilling, to give people the confidence to find better (and better paid) jobs, and to reduce unemployment. Taking away these possibilities from (potential) learners might perpetuate the current crisis and potentially also aggravate future crises.

Adult learning and education provides skills and tools needed for more sustainability and a just green transition

ALE plays a particularly important role in raising awareness of the climate crisis, as it presents information on the causes and effects of climate change, which is often perceived as complex, in a clear and understandable way. In short and longer courses and programmes at adult learning centres, learners can find out more about climate action and are empowered to become 'agents of change'. Education for sustainable development is embedded and mainstreamed across non-formal ALE activities, ranging from learning about energy-efficient building and renovation to renewable energy production to sustainable food and clothing production and to a more sustainable lifestyle. The [Marrakech Framework for Action of the UNESCO](#), adopted in June 2022, recognises the pivotal role of ALE for sustainability, by empowering adults to "adapt their consumption patterns and lifestyles, and engage actively in democratic debates and initiatives to protect and preserve the environment."

ALE addresses many aspects of sustainability and the green transition so that learners can discover their own areas of interest and what is feasible for them to implement in their own lives and communities. Especially in the context of the current crisis, the link between financial literacy and energy saving plays an important role, with information being shared in adult learning centres on how to make savings through small renovations and other measures. ALE promotes financial skills required to cope with the impact of the energy crisis and inflation on one's household budget and to plan the available budget in a more targeted way.

ALE empowers people to work towards social sustainable development for all

However, given the seriousness of this crisis, EAEA would like to emphasise that **the green transition must be socially just**. ALE does not want to participate in rhetoric that, in a belittling way, informs people how to plan their household budget in times of inflation and high energy prices or to renovate houses and flats in an energy-efficient way. This would financially not be possible for many learners in ALE, and especially for people in the lower and middle income brackets. Data on the distribution of emissions clearly demonstrate that the groups with low and lower middle incomes consume the least energy and thus contribute the least to rising carbon emissions (see, for instance, the [Emissions Inequality Dashboard](#) of the Stockholm Environment Institute). Yet, they are the ones on whom the brunt of the crisis lies.



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We believe, however, that more environmental sustainability can be beneficial for everyone – individuals, communities and society – but only if everyone has the financial and structural opportunity to help shape it. ALE can also play an important role in this: it **empowers people to demand social sustainable development and actively advocate for a just green transition**. This can have a positive impact on all areas, personal as well as professional. Participation in ALE leads to active citizenship, community development, and social inclusion. It can also contribute to finding creative solutions to the climate crisis, to make work processes more sustainable and to think more systemically.

The access to ALE must be protected and promoted, also and especially in times of crisis

We recall that the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) enshrines the right of everyone to lifelong learning. This right must be protected and promoted, also and especially in times of crisis. ALE can play a significant role for sustainable development and the empowerment of adults in engaging for a just green transition. The current crisis puts this potential of ALE at great risk by limiting learning opportunities due to high energy prices and inflation. We, therefore, call for immediate action at all political levels to support ALE financially and structurally.

For more information

Contact: Raffaella Kihrer, EAEA Head of Policy, raffaella.kihrer@eaea.org and Gina Ebner, EAEA Secretary General, 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 120 member organisations in 43 countries and represents more than 60 million learners Europe-wide.