



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR
THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

For a holistic understanding of skills in the EU Year of Skills 2023

EAEA's response to the public consultation of the European Commission December 2022

In her State of the Union address in September, President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen proclaimed 2023 as the [European Year of Skills](#). Welcoming this initiative, we underline that skills need to be understood in a holistic way, for the development of individuals, communities, and society.

Representing the European non-formal adult learning and education sector with its thousands of organisations and providers and millions of learners, the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) is ready to contribute to its success.

We call for a holistic understanding of the EU Year of Skills 2023: Work and life skills are closely entwined, so professional development, including basic, digital and green skills, but also personal skills that all citizens need in their daily lives, including life and transversal skills, and critical skills to strengthen sustainability, democracy, social inclusion and community development, belong to the European Year of Skills.

However, the [Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and the Council on a European Year of Skills 2023](#) presents a very one-sided understanding of 'skills': in the context of the proposal, there is a strong reference to labour market relevant skills and to filling staff vacancies and "matching companies' needs". We find it particularly unfortunate that the role of the New European Agenda for Adult Learning (NEAAL) is also presented in this light, and that participation in adult learning and education (ALE) is reduced to upskilling and reskilling opportunities and learning for the green and digital transitions.

While these are important aspects of ALE, we emphasise that **ALE is much more and broader than learning for the labour market and acquiring skills that are in high demand by employers**. Participation in ALE promotes basic, transversal and life skills that are important for all aspects of life. ALE itself is a very important factor for community building and cohesion by providing spaces of dialogue and inclusion. We emphasise that these roles of ALE are equally important and, therefore, need attention and support, especially when it comes to increasing participation in ALE.

When we talk about digital and green skills, we need to include those who are furthest from learning – not only because individuals can use these skills to improve their job opportunities, but also because they are part of the life and basic skills that everyone needs to be able to get information, participate in democratic elections, manage their finances, integrate sustainability into daily life, etc. This is central not only for the labour markets in Europe, but for the development of the European project itself.

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As the Commission President pointed out during her speech, Europe is facing big challenges: the war in Ukraine and the energy crisis, inflation, the green and digital transitions, the changing labour market, and a changing political atmosphere in many parts of Europe.

To meet these challenges, skills for personal, professional and community development will play a central role. Lifelong and life-wide learning – learning across all ages and all walks of life, including non-formal ALE – connects generations and communities and is more important than ever to learn from and with each other, especially in more challenging times.

The EU Year of Skills will be an excellent opportunity for the European ALE community to showcase its many great achievements and good practices in transforming people's lives and communities. It will be of particular concern to us in the coming year to point out that 'skills' should not leave anyone behind, including learners from marginalised groups.

We hope that the EU Year of Skills will contribute to increased awareness among decision-makers that **the ALE sector, in order to play its due role and to reach even more learners, requires a substantial increase in funding and stronger governance structures at all levels.**

We urge the European institutions and policymakers to

- **Promote and support a holistic understanding of skills during the EU Year of Skills 2023;**
- **Put a spotlight on life and transversal skills promoted through non-formal adult learning and education, including green and digital skills, and skills for transformation, such as skills to understand, create and act, as well as emotional and values learning;**
- **Use this special occasion to promote better financial and structural support for ALE across Europe, and to contribute to resilient ALE systems that increase participation in ALE;**
- **Ensure that (adult) learners are given a voice in all activities in and around the EU Year of Skills 2023;**
- **Ensure that the voice of civil society is included in all activities of the EU Year of Skills 2023.**

[For 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 120 member organisations in 43 countries and represents more than 60 million learners Europe-wide.

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