

# The Power and Joy of Learning



**Manifesto for  
Adult Learning**  
*in the 21st Century*



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR  
THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

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THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

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**MINISTRY OF  
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# The Power and Joy of Learning

## The European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) proposes, with this manifesto, to create a Learning Europe:

a Europe that can shape its future positively and with all necessary skills, knowledge and competences. EAEA and its 120 members, in 43 European countries, propose a Europe-wide effort to develop a society that can deal with the challenges of our time through adult learning and education.

With this manifesto, we want to demonstrate how adult learning and education (ALE) can help solve many challenges in Europe. We are providing arguments, research evidence, good practices and learners' stories. They will all show that adult learning and education help change lives and transform societies.

We also want to underline the joy of learning. Adult learning and education have many benefits - learners have more confidence, more social contacts, better health and many more advantages. Understanding and experiencing the joy of learning should and can be part of everyone's life.

So let us create a Learning Europe where we all benefit from the power and joy of learning!



# What do we mean by adult learning and education?

**Adult learning and education include three key domains of learning and skills. First, literacy and basic skills; second, continuing education and vocational skills; and third, liberal, popular and community education and citizenship skills.**

The ultimate goal of ALE is to ensure that adults, throughout their lives, can participate fully in societies, including the world of work. ALE enables people to develop the necessary capabilities to exercise and realise their rights and take control of their destinies. It promotes personal and professional development, thereby supporting more active engagement by adults with their societies, communities, and environments. It fosters environmental and inclusive economic well-being and decent work.

ALE is, therefore, “a crucial tool in alleviating poverty, improving health and well-being and contributing to sustainable learning societies.”<sup>1</sup>

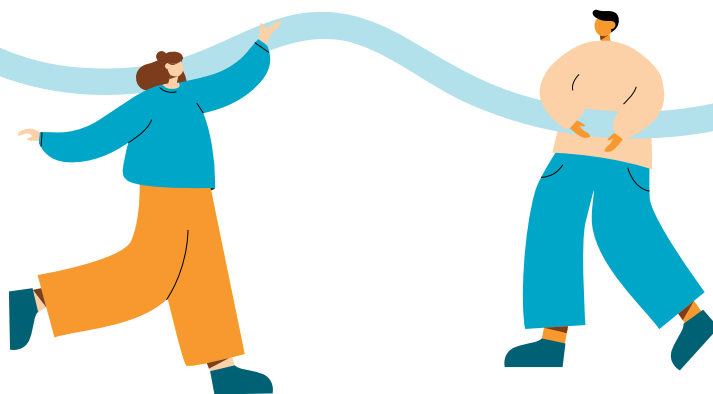
ALE has a long tradition in many countries in Europe. In different languages, we talk about folkbildning or Volksbildung or educación popular. We bring together all forms of learning but focus on non-formal and general adult learning and education.

The European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA), together with its 120 members in 43 countries, has identified the following key principles of adult learning and education:

- Adult learning and education is a human right and a common good.
- Everyone has the right to access and participate in high-quality ALE and should have the opportunity to do so.
- ALE can transform lives, families, neighbourhoods and communities. It can change countries and Europe for the better.
- Everyone can learn. This includes people of all ages, backgrounds, communities, and neurodivergent individuals.
- ALE is an integral part of democratic societies and structures.
- ALE must be underpinned by the values of advancing social inclusion, equality, and valuing diversity.
- The learner must be at the centre of the development, methodology, process, and outcomes of all ALE.
- ALE can empower learners to participate in society.

<sup>1</sup> UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, “UNESCO Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education (RALE),” accessed [15.04.2024], <https://www.uil.unesco.org/en/adult-education/unesco-recommendation>.

- Folk High Schools, Community Education, and Popular Education models provide transformative ALE experiences for social and common good.
- ALE must be flexible and provide inclusive and wrap-around support systems to include people from communities that have been disadvantaged or marginalised and/or people with low basic skills.
- ALE needs to work on reaching disadvantaged learners to combat the 'Matthew effect' (people who are already better educated tend to have more learning opportunities), e.g. through their workplace, to avoid the exclusion of individuals with limited formal qualifications.
- Using empowering, socially inclusive, and creative methods and practices provides meaningful, transformative and inspiring learning experiences. This is particularly important for people who have lost trust in formal education due to previous negative learning experiences.
- ALE improves well-being, mental health, and personal and community development.
- Professional and qualified adult educators (also often referred to as tutors, trainers, or teachers) and staff are key to the success of quality and impactful ALE programmes.
- Capacity-building and reflexive practice in ALE are essential for adapting and anticipating changes in learning and teaching.
- Cooperation (institutional, local, regional, European, and global) is crucial for the visibility of ALE and for peer learning and the sharing of best practices.
- In the 'recommendations' section of the manifesto you will find our proposals on how to make these principles a reality.



# Peace and democracy

## The challenges:

- Increasing hate speech, radicalisation, populism, xenophobia, antisemitism, and denial of scientific evidence, often reinforced by social media and fake news
- Increasing authoritarian attitudes, a tense geopolitical situation, and worrying election results and changes in voting behaviour
- Armed conflicts and emergencies in Europe and beyond



## What adult learning and education can do:

ALE is a key tool for the development of critical thinking and a lively and inspired civil society. At the same time, ALE provides safe spaces to develop active citizenship. It has a long tradition of building bridges and connecting people across borders as well as promoting reconciliation. Civic skills and learning can foster trust and counterbalance hate narratives. This needs to be enforced not only within Europe but globally. ALE can promote the understanding and sense of responsibility among Europeans for the colonial heritage and its mechanisms, many of which are still in place.

ALE is also at the heart of understanding the digital world, playing a key role in fostering a high level of media literacy. ALE brings people together and nurtures increased understanding between learners and

between different groups of people. ALE therefore becomes a space for exchange, collaboration and respect. ALE strengthens and regenerates civil society by building responsibilities and a feeling of belonging to Europe and the wider world. Democracy is only made possible through broad participation and meaningful contributions to decision-making, as well as critical evaluation of political and societal issues by all citizens and stakeholders.

EAEA and its members stand for a strong commitment to Europe and European values. We believe that peace, democracy, intercultural dialogue, social justice and cooperation are key for a Europe of respect, participation and cohesion.

Democracy and European adult learning and education have common roots and a common history. Many ALE organisations were established as the result of emancipatory movements (workers, women, religious organisations, etc.) and have therefore been a key part in the development of democratic structures, the welfare states and prosperous European development.

## Research evidence

Preston (2004) analysed the impact of ALE on participants' civic lives and the formation of values, particularly tolerance. Individual engagement in education is a predictor of engagement in public life because 'the more students are engaged in their education, the more willing they are, on average, to play a positive role in public life.'<sup>2</sup> Moreover, ALE leads to an increase in racial tolerance and a greater likelihood of voting. Preston found that learning has an impact on informal and formal civic participation. It helps individuals to build, maintain, dismantle, reconstruct and enrich their social networks.

Additionally, the formation of values is influenced by learning. For example, changes in tolerance, understanding and respect were reported by respondents. Contemporary research by Smith and Duchworth (2023) 'critiques reductive skills' policies in further education and illuminates the impact colleges and lifelong learning have on social justice outcomes for individuals, their families and communities.'<sup>3</sup> Civic and social engagement (CSE) as a learning outcome has also been analysed by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD).<sup>4</sup>

## GOOD PRACTICE

06

### Citizen Diplomacy

Global challenges do not stop at national borders and can only be solved through joint, transnational cooperation – both at the political and societal levels. The concept of "Citizen Diplomacy" informed the Urban X-Change Network<sup>5</sup>, which offers nine German Adult Education Centres (Volkshochschule) and their counterparts in Great Britain, Ukraine and the USA the opportunity to carry out cross-border cultural and educational activities in close cooperation with their respective city administration and local civil society.

The 2030 Agenda set the thematic framework and ranges from waste management, peace education and the creation of a welcoming culture for migrants to the experiences of LGBTQIA+ communities. Thus, the project does not only enable peer learning and exchange but also contributes as well to a better understanding of the partner country.

<sup>2</sup> John Preston and Leon Feinstein, *Adult Education and Attitude Change: Wider Benefits of Learning Research Report No. 11*, (<https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10015019/>, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Rob Smith, and Vicky Duckworth. *Transformative Teaching and Learning in Further Education: Pedagogies of Hope and Social Justice* (DOI: 10.1332/policy-press/9781447362326.001.0001, 2023).

<sup>4</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), accessed [15.04.2024], <https://www.oecd.org/education/cei/understandingthesocialoutcomesoflearning.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> Urban X-Change Network, accessed [15.04.2024], <https://www.urbanxchange-network.org/>.

## The role of learning in crisis

ALE providers in war-torn Ukraine have had to get used to their lives changing overnight since Russian troops began a full-scale invasion in February 2022. But for ALE educators the main role has remained unchanged - developing skills and supporting communities, increasing the resilience of each person through education and training, be it mental or physical health, survival in conditions of crises, or learning to adapt to a new region of Ukraine or abroad.

The ALE Center in Nikopol in south Ukraine, just a few kilometres from the nuclear station captured during the first phase of the war had sewing machines and they enrolled 40 to 45 women for short courses for a few days and started to sew clothes for the army and the local defence groups, as well as first aid and medicine kits.

ALE providers continue their activities, developing new short-term professional courses for Internally Displaced Persons, war veterans and those who lost their jobs. They try to provide psychological support through individual sessions and special group sessions using art therapy. Many trainings take place in bomb shelters. The understanding of the important role of ALE in society is growing very quickly, the demand for non-formal ALE programmes is great, and there is a positive experience of continued financing of non-formal ALE from local community budgets.

## Learner story



*Eirini, Germany*

“ Hello, my name is Eirini and I have been now for over a year at VHS Bochum. I originally come from Greece and have lived in Germany since 2015. In the past, I never had good experiences with schools and that is why I dropped out of school. But since I am at the VHS, my viewpoint has changed.

*From the beginning, I felt challenged and taught well. Even my experiences with the other participants were almost exclusively positive. I got to know the VHS Bochum through my contact with the Agentur für Arbeit (employment agency).*

*At first, I was scared to go back to school, also because my German was not perfect. But my teachers at the VHS supported me well and now my German language skills are much better. The VHS helped me to realise what I can do with my life and how I want to develop.*

*I am really happy that I started to come to VHS and would recommend it to anyone who has problems in his life and who wants to catch up on a degree. Through the project, which we worked on together for half of a school year, I realised that it makes no difference where people come from or who they are. We all have one world together and our common goal is to preserve it.* ”



# Environmental sustainability and green transition

## The challenges:

- Climate change and its consequences
- Environmental problems such as biodiversity loss, food waste, air pollution, plastic pollution, soil degradation
- Achieving and implementing the Sustainable Development Goals



## What adult learning and education can do:

ALE contributes to sustainability on all levels not only through the provision of skills, knowledge and competences. ALE provides information, debating spaces and creativity to develop new lifestyles, new projects, and new approaches necessary for the green transition and sustainable development. This includes practical solutions for very specific problems (e.g. recycling and upcycling of materials, urban gardening and urban beekeeping), but also entering into dialogue with each other and engaging in broader societal debates to better understand the role of all stakeholders and get to the roots of the problems. As the good practice examples demonstrate, ALE can foster innovative ways of living, learning and working.

Addressing the climate crisis can seem insurmountable in its scope, both at the individual and at the community level. Yet the richness and diversity of examples that adult learners, educators and

community organisers have shared with EAEA demonstrate that a lot of grassroots efforts are already taking place. While the local contexts or personal motivations for action might diverge, the values of agency, empathy and dialogue are visible across the board. Looking at the global Agenda 2030, ALE contributes to the achievement of all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by building the foundations of change in the social, political, economic, ecological and cultural spheres. In each of the 17 goals, at least one target involves learning, training, education or at the very least, awareness-raising for education. At the same time, ALE and lifelong learning are not only a transversal goal and method to achieving the SDGs, but also a specific goal. According to SDG4 inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities need to be ensured for all.

## Research evidence

The transition to a green economy<sup>6</sup> requires change across all sectors and occupations, and here vocational education and training (VET) and ALE must play a fundamental role. The importance of that role needs to be recognised by policymakers as they look to channel funding into economic recovery. Whether this means new skills for new jobs, such as renewable energy, or upskilling or reskilling in existing jobs, such as a move to organic farming and waste management, ALE and skills development are fundamental to the future of our industries, our workers, and our economies.

### GOOD PRACTICE

## Citizen's Passport project

The 'Citizen's Passport 2030'<sup>7</sup>, a project of the Popular University of Jura, Switzerland, gives its owners - participants in ALE - points in four categories of learning activities: environmental sustainability skills, listening and introspection skills, community-building and social inclusion skills, and physical and mental wellbeing skills. The four categories are, therefore, considering the wider skills needed for sustainability and a green transition. By taking part in ALE classes, people can collect these points and get 'stamps' on their passports. People can also collect points by reading selected books from the Bibliobus, a library bus that goes to villages and remote areas with limited access to public libraries. Once a year, the "best" learners who got the most stamps are awarded a prize.

### GOOD PRACTICE

## Solar cooking in Georgia

In the framework of the DVV International's grant program 'Innovation in Adult Education' the interactive museum 'Shuqura' implemented a project: 'Solar Kitchen or paraboloidal Sunlight Cooker'.<sup>8</sup> The project introduced the use of solar light energy as the one of most efficient natural resources and supported the popularisation of eco-friendly solar-cooking methods in Georgia. With this aim, the Shuqura Museum created five solar cookers and distributed them to five ALE Centers in Georgia. The project increases awareness of using natural resources efficiently and offers the local community an alternative way of energy use. The ALE centres are using the solar cooker for the benefit of the community, culinary classes and public outdoor events. In addition, all the involved centres created ecological counselling services and are working with local communities to disseminate information on ecological issues including sustainable buildings and materials as well as social and environmental development.

<sup>7</sup> Le projet "Passeport Citoyen 2030" a été réalisé de 2020 à 2022 avec l'UP Jurassienne, accessed [15.04.2024], <https://www.passeportcitoyen2030.ch/>

<sup>8</sup> DVV International Revealed the Winners of the Grant Programme "Innovation in Adult Education" accessed [15.04.2024], <https://www.dvv-international.ge/georgia/news/article/dvv-international-revealed-the-winners-of-the-grant-programme-innovation-in-adult-education>

## GOOD PRACTICE

## We Change It group

ASTO<sup>9</sup> (Patras, Greece) creates small groups of 15-20 people, who participate in the planning and implementation of various actions. There is no strict division between learners and educators and all groups are based on peer learning. The groups have specific themes and similar goals, debate certain subjects and act accordingly. The group “We Change It” was set up after some of the members of the community volunteered to clean up the local beach. It began as a small initiative and progressively, more people joined in to reclaim ownership of nature. Today, the group is made up of around 50 members who meet regularly, and 200 who participate in the most popular activities. Among the most recent initiatives, the group started building a seed library and revamped a public square to make it more green and inclusive.

## GOOD PRACTICE

## Providing green skills in community centres

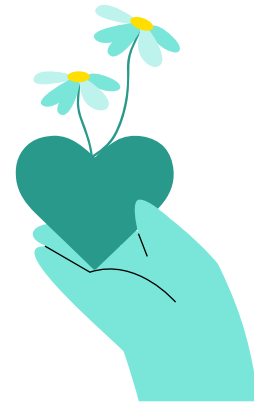
Kirikhan Community Center was opened and operated by YUVA (Youths Union for Voluntary Action) between 2013 and 2020 to serve Syrian refugees and host communities of all age groups as a multi-service provider (livelihoods, education and protection). Currently closed, the centre had meat-free Mondays and ecological training programmes, composting activities and a zero waste policy. Picnics and cooking workshops were used for awareness raising on sustainability.

In Brussels, the Elzenhof community centre brings together residents around several activities, many of which are underpinned by the principle of sustainability. Activities include a repair cafe, classes on cooking from scraps, and an exhibition on climate justice.



Photo: Elsenhof community centre

# Well-being and resilience



## The challenges:

- High risk of burnout and other stress-related mental and physical health issues, social isolation, feelings of hopelessness in the face of many challenges
- Lack of self-confidence, self-efficacy and sense of purpose
- Lack of support and tools for resilience

## What adult learning and education can do:

Evidence shows that ALE, and especially transformative learning, makes people more confident and self-effective. It makes them aware of their capabilities and skills, which translates to a greater ability to manage their own lives and become active and integrated members of their communities. Participation in learning activities offers adults the opportunity to acquire important well-being and resilience skills to take control of their own lives and bring about personal and social transformation. This leads to higher satisfaction with their lives as a whole, but also a stronger sense of purpose in life. Well-being and resilience skills include, among others, critical thinking, open-mindedness, emotional regulation, conscientiousness, extraversion, and collaboration.

Well-being is also directly related to the concept of resilience or, in other words, the process of successfully adapting to disorienting life experiences such as health-related problems, life transitions, and age-

related changes. It also entails behavioural adjustment to demands associated with social, economic, and environmental changes and, as well as external crises in general.

Moreover, ALE courses bring people together around a common interest and help develop a sense of community (in-person or digitally), contributing to better social inclusion and, in turn, a greater sense of well-being and resilience. In addition, ALE promotes health and well-being through a wide range of exercise and sports programmes for all interests and age groups, as well as courses on nutrition and healthy cooking.

It is important to note that these skills contribute not only to the personal development and fulfilment of adult learners but also have a very positive impact on their social life and their professional development. Actively promoting worker well-being in and out of the workplace helps to prevent long-term inactivity due to burnout and other stress-related health problems. It also helps to retain workers and promote job satisfaction.

## Research evidence

ALE influences people's income and employability, as well as the attitudes and behaviours that affect people's mental well-being.... "More accurately, it offers people resources that they can use to make changes in their own lives. These changes may be particularly important for those who have benefited least from initial education.

What we do not yet know fully is what kinds of resources help people to make what kinds of changes. What we do know is that very practical capabilities – sometimes spoken of disparagingly as ‘basic skills’ or even ‘merely instrumental’ – can have dramatic consequences for people’s lives. Beyond that, the evidence simply tells us that adult learning provides resources that can help fuel important changes but cannot be seen as a ‘pedagogic aspirin’ that works instantly for everyone. But we can be reasonably confident that at its best, adult learning encompasses the instrumental and practical, but also transcends it to offer what Raymond Williams (1983) called ‘resources for a journey of hope.’<sup>10</sup>

## GOOD PRACTICE

### Positive People project

“Positive People”<sup>11</sup> is a partnership project led by social enterprise Pluss, which operates across Cornwall, Devon and Somerset offering a learning lifeline to the most socially excluded and vulnerable people in society. The project includes many different learning opportunities, tailored to individual needs. Just a few examples of activities delivered through Positive People include the Feel Good Shop in Plymouth which brought the community together to learn how to live a healthy life through the project’s health and well-being partners, learn about managing finances from the Citizens Advice Bureau, learn how to get the most out of digital devices, and much more. Positive People also teaches people to live sustainably and inclusively by running activities around a sustainable, ethical life, learning how to connect with others and giving something back to the community.

## Learner story



— Deborah, 43, Ireland

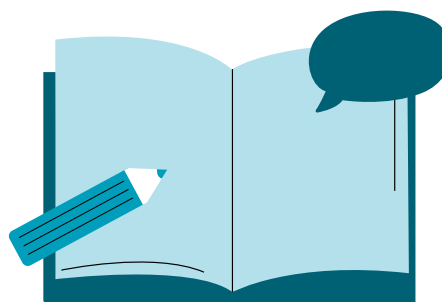
“ I believe my journey to recovery started in a coffee group at the Cork Migrant Centre because apart from just going and sharing as a migrant woman, they also offer short courses and training. That was where I did the Train the Trainer course that later allowed me to facilitate parenting workshops to help other migrant women who were struggling with the new law and the cultural difference. We also got information on workshops happening in the community. They let me know about the intercultural dialogue training, and I attended that and now facilitate it. Truly in that space, we all got empowered.

When you start a course, you get into a routine. You wake up every morning and have something to look forward to. You meet people with like minds to connect with. Then you start reading, your mind starts getting bigger, and your imagination gets bigger. You start learning different things. You become a part of a group of powerful and interesting people who bring stories. You start feeling you belong to something. You get an education. You get empowered. It just shifts everything!

Education has helped my mental health and has positively impacted my life and my family. Now, I am back in college studying a post-graduate in Advanced Family Law at University College Cork. ”

<sup>10</sup> Field, John. “Adult Learning, Health and Well-being – Changing Lives.” ADULT LEARNER 2011, The Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education, no. ISSN No. 0790-8040 (2011). (<https://www.aontas.com/assets/resources/Adult-Learner-Journal/AONTAS%20Adult%20Learner%20Journal%202011.pdf>).

<sup>11</sup> Positive People Programme, accessed [15.04.2024] [https://regalnetwork.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/45.-REGALE\\_Good-Practice-Positive-People\\_UK.docx.pdf](https://regalnetwork.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/45.-REGALE_Good-Practice-Positive-People_UK.docx.pdf).



## The challenges:

- A significant proportion of adults in Europe are left behind in basic and essential skills, but also in skills to manage their lives successfully

## What adult learning and education can do:

Everyone should have the essential skills and capabilities that they need for life and work in the 21st century. ALE provides the necessary life skills but also anticipates and shapes future developments. This includes basic, or essential skills such as literacy and numeracy but also digital skills, language skills and a wide range of key competences everyone needs in daily life, such as financial literacy, health literacy and media literacy. ALE provides skills and learning experiences that have many benefits and purposes and offer many ways that support individuals throughout their careers and lives.

EAEA, together with members and partners, has developed a 'European framework for life skills' which emphasises the need for lifelong and life-wide learning for all. In an era characterised by constant economic, technological and social developments, all people in Europe need to continuously develop, enhance and update their life skills. Informal and non-formal ALE can help with this: evidence shows that ALE activities of all kinds, regardless of the specific learning content, promote life skills. ALE providers need to emphasise these transversal educational goals even more in the future to demonstrate the wealth of

competences that learners acquire. Research evidence and ALE practice show that basic skills such as numeracy, literacy and digital skills are foundations for lifelong learning and also for the development of capabilities for life and work. Life skills cannot be learned in an abstract and theoretical way – the individual must collect, probe and discuss their experience where it happens in real life. It is important not to forget the contextuality of life skills as this leads to the success of life skills learning: this means that life skills need to be adapted to the specific contexts of each country, group and individual. Life skills are in constant evolution in terms of individual, economic, social and cultural contexts.

Estera Možina, head of the thematic field at the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education has written a blog post<sup>12</sup> on EPAL on life skills.

## Research evidence

“Our societies are undergoing rapid changes, with technological developments largely driving at such a fast pace. Automation is already transforming the labour market, with routine and low-skill tasks increasingly being performed by machines. Technologies are therefore playing an increasingly important role in several areas of life, leading to skills quickly becoming obsolete, producing new work models, and stressing the need for people to update their skills

throughout their lives. In the economic sphere, we are seeing swift changes in the forms of employment, whereby temporary positions are more common; not only this, employers are increasingly seeking workers with competences such as flexibility, and a disposition towards continued learning.

Demographic changes – due to the ageing population pyramid in the EU – highlight the need for renewed efforts to nurture personal well-being and ensure longer but also more fulfilling lives. To cope with complex life situations, European citizens need to continuously develop competences which allow them to successfully manage the challenges posed by the many transitions taking place in their work, in their spheres, and society. Individuals need to deal with uncertainty, nurture their resilience, develop on a personal level, build successful interpersonal relations, and learn how to learn. Formal, non-formal, and informal education can contribute to the acquisition of these competences.”

Education in its different forms (formal, informal, and non-formal) is the prime vehicle to both help learners develop this competence, and help them in their unfolding as learners to contribute towards societies becoming further attuned to nature, public health, and other sources of intrinsic value. All learners, including those facing disadvantages or special needs, should be given adequate support in inclusive settings to fulfil their potential.

## Citizen’s Curriculum in Wales

Volunteers and teaching staff have been working with the University of South Wales to design a teacher training course at Oasis that meets the needs of people seeking sanctuary in Wales. The content of the lessons is based on the real-life needs of the learners.

Refugees and asylum seekers face unique challenges and barriers upon arriving in a new country. They may struggle to carry out even basic tasks like seeing a doctor due to language barriers, and some have literacy needs due to disrupted schooling.

Free ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes take place at Oasis five days a week, where the new teacher training course is being delivered. For many refugees and asylum seekers, these classes are their primary social space, providing a sense of structure to their lives and offering both linguistic and psychological support.

One of the refugees involved in the pilot said: “When I came last year I had depression and anxiety. I didn’t know about the English language. But I feel relaxed when I come to Oasis and I learn a lot of things here. They give me ESOL class but most importantly confidence. I will never forget this.”<sup>14</sup>

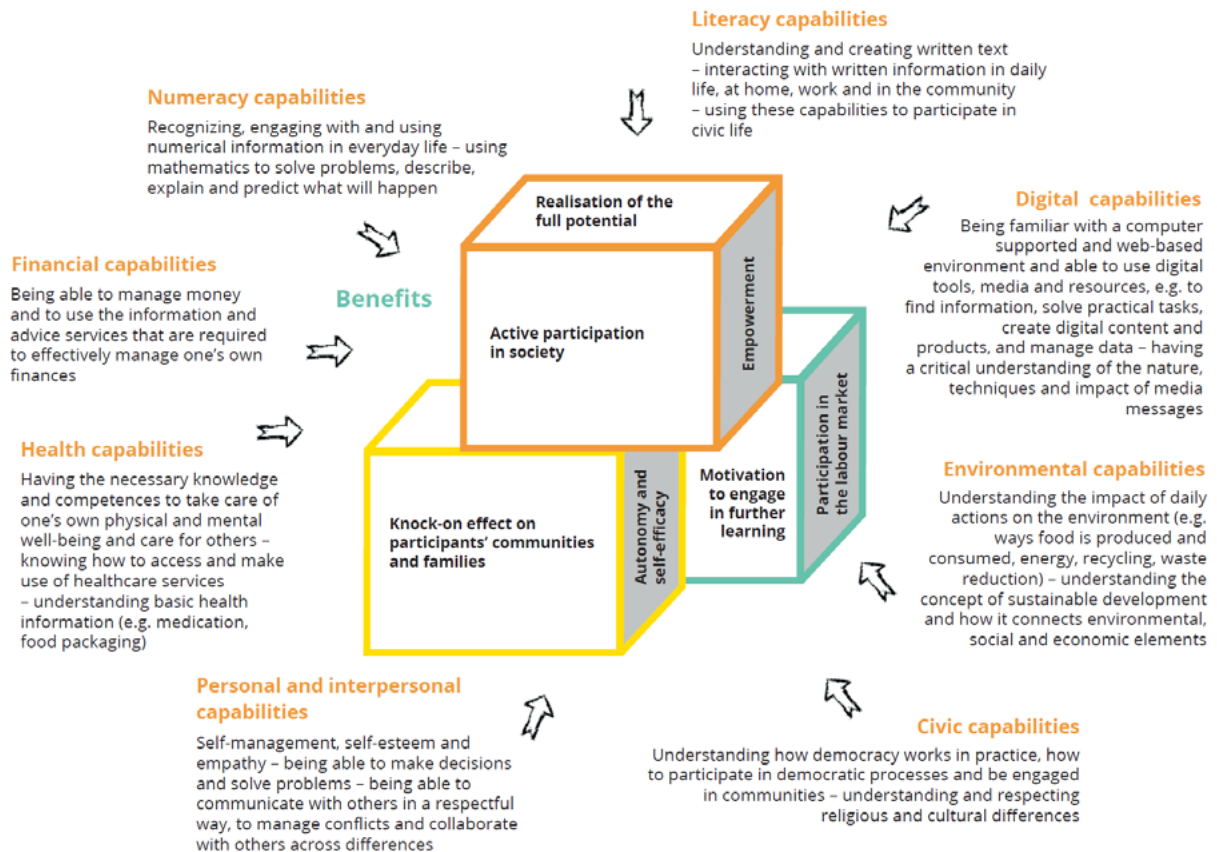
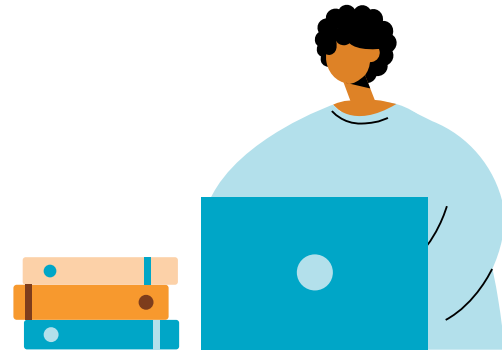
<sup>13</sup> Sala, A., Punie, Y., Garkov, V. and Cabrera Giraldez, M., LifeComp: The European Framework for Personal, Social and Learning to Learn Key Competence.” Publications of the Joint Research Centre, accessed [15.04.2024]. [<https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC120911>].

<sup>14</sup> “The Citizen’s Curriculum: Empowering adult learners in Wales.” First published: January 5, 2024. Last updated: January 5, 2024. Accessed [15.04.2024]. [<https://www.gov.wales/citizens-curriculum-empowering-adult-learners-wales>].

## GOOD PRACTICE

## Framework for Life Skills

The “Life Skills for Europe”<sup>15</sup> project developed a framework for Life Skills that is meant to be practical and to support practitioners in applying and developing their own concrete learning and teaching methods.



Picture from Life Skills for Europe -project <https://eaea.org/project/life-skills-for-europe-lse/>





# Inclusion, empowerment and social justice

## The challenges:

- Growing social inequalities, lack of inclusion, marginalisation
- Too many people experience being left behind and excluded from participating in society



## What adult learning and education can do:

Adult learning and education plays a fundamental role in fostering social justice, embracing diversity, and promoting inclusion. Research evidence shows that ALE offers individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds a chance to enhance their education, increase their job prospects and improve the quality of their life.

Critical thinking and problem-solving skills are crucial for active participation in the processes of a democratic society. Active participation promotes social justice by ensuring that diverse voices are heard and respected. Transformative learning methodologies empower adult learners, especially those who are not participating in learning activities, to participate more – in society, community, democracy, economy, arts, and culture.

ALE furthers greater social mobility by supporting both those who have not been able to take full advantage of initial education and those who have, but want to pursue further learning as an adult. From basic skills training to second chance schools and language learning – ALE provides many opportunities to improve individuals' lives by offering flexible learning options, such as online courses or evening classes. It also equalises societies on a larger scale and creates fairer societies as well as more economic growth.

ALE is particularly powerful in bringing together people from different walks and stages of life, and in developing mutual understanding and respect. Moreover, ALE has the flexibility to address issues like gender equality, racial justice, and environmental sustainability critically. Informed and critically engaged adults who understand the value of diversity, inclusion and sustainability are better equipped to actively work toward a more democratic, inclusive, and equitable society.

## Research evidence I

“The empowerment role of adult education is revealed through agency expansion, which enables individuals and social groups to gain power over their environment in their striving towards individual and societal well-being. ... Our analyses show that participation in non-formal adult education is viewed as a means for empowering individuals through increasing their self-confidence and their capacity to find a job and to control their daily life... The empowerment effect of adult education is greater among learners with low educational levels than it is among those with medium and higher educational levels. This means that to truly be sensitive towards vulnerable groups, adult education policies have to more seriously consider the varying roles adult education can play in the empowerment of people from different social backgrounds.”<sup>16</sup>



### GOOD PRACTICE

## Empowerment project of refugees for refugees

Around 10,000 refugees currently live in Stuttgart. Politics, administration, and civil society work hand in hand to open pathways to a smooth integration process. The City of Stuttgart implements a large number of tailor-made strategies for integration. Among others, it established a most innovative approach: in a programme called “Empowerment”<sup>18</sup>, educational offers are initiated and run by refugees themselves – and supported by local stakeholders with a view to general organisational aspects, rooms, and other facilities. This way, the initiative incorporates elements of education and capacity building both among refugees and civil society. Moreover, offers are tailored to the needs of the refugees and, as a consequence, a rich and diverse range of activities could be established.

## Research evidence II

“There is no doubt that through innovative provision, strategies to motivate and engage learners and alliances with government and other social actors, adult education can make a difference... Perhaps alongside its task of offering second chances that transform the lives of individual learners and groups of users, its most important current task is to share in securing the public space for the debate of alternatives to the neoliberal consensus that increases inequality and reinforces marginalisation.”<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Boyadjieva, Petya, and Penka Ilieva-Trichkova. “Adult Education as a Pathway to Empowerment: Challenges and Possibilities.” In *Lifelong Learning, Young Adults, and the Challenges of Disadvantage in Europe*, 169-191. [[https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-14109-6\\_7](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-14109-6_7)].

<sup>17</sup> Tuckett, Alan. “Adult Education, Social Transformation, and the Pursuit of Social Justice.” *European Journal of Education* 50, no. 3 (2015): 245–249. [<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26609273>].

<sup>18</sup> Project “Empowerment Project of Refugees for Refugees.” Accessed [15.04.2024]. [[https://regalenetwork.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/37-REGALE\\_Good-Practice-Empowerment-City-of-Stuttgart.pdf](https://regalenetwork.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/37-REGALE_Good-Practice-Empowerment-City-of-Stuttgart.pdf)].

## Learner story



— Jason, 48, United Kingdom

“ Jason was recovering from severe brain damage and years of homelessness when he found training opportunities and a new sense of direction through Newground Together. Jason’s success in learning led not only to an offer of work but the chance to reconnect with his family.

“I have two adult sons, but for a long time after my brain injury, I couldn’t remember them. As my brain started to rewire itself, I wanted to reconnect with them – but I was ashamed. I started a facilities management course that included work experience at THG properties in Halifax. That taught me caretaking, cleaning and basic estate management. Since being offered an employment contract, I’ve also learned how to report damage, manage repairs and liaise with contractors.

Being a caretaker is an important job. There’s a lot of responsibility and it’s a great feeling to know that the little things I do are improving somebody else’s life. This is why I want to keep learning. I feel responsible for my tenants and the environment they live in, and it feels like a chance to repay the help I’ve been given by helping my immediate community.

My brain is working much better now, although the damage is always going to be there. I believe learning has helped the recovery process, encouraging my mind to keep making new connections and get stronger. Learning has also made me feel like a man again, and because of this my sons have got their dad back.”

## Learner story



— Oleksandra, 42, Ukraine

“My way to adult learning started unusually. My younger son didn’t want to study. A psychologist recommended that I become a role model for the child by starting to learn something new myself. By chance, I got to the webinar “Home pastry chef” and decided to learn how to cook modern desserts. I could not find confectionery courses in our city, but I was able to jump on the last train to a series of confectionery workshops of the “Persnyi” ALEC (in the temporarily occupied city of Melitopol) in Ukraine.

“I realised that I like confectionery and I’m pretty good at it. So I took self-development courses at “Persnyi” ALEC and understood how to plan my further life.” Over some time, Oleksandra became a part of the ALEC team and a trainer of confectionery courses. She understood that she needed to return to her first teacher’s education and start working as a vocational trainer.

“I entered the university, where I currently study food industry technology. After the first learning experience, I don’t understand how I lived without it before. Now I constantly attend new courses and programs in both professional and self-development directions. Thanks to learning at “Persnyi” and the cooperation with ALEC as a trainer and a team member, in the most difficult times of 2022, I managed not only to survive but also to gain new experience that still helps me today.”

# Employment and work



## The challenges:

- Shortage of labour skilled for certain jobs and areas, and elimination of many jobs that require only low qualifications and a low formal skill level
- The need to upskill and reskill to meet the needs of the twin transitions and other high-demand sectors
- Digitalisation, green transition, internationalisation, service orientation, flexibilisation of work processes, and innovation need to raise and change the requirements for the competencies of workers

## What adult learning and education can do:

The positive link between learning and work is obvious: Learning workers are more creative, innovative, stress-resilient, and productive – this makes companies more competitive and successful. Digitalisation, green transition, internationalisation, service orientation, flexibilisation: all these mega-trends on the labour market have one thing in common: they raise and change the requirements for competencies of workers. This is not a new development. What is new is that the demands are changing and increasing faster than ever.

Professional competencies need to be updated regularly and meta-competencies such as social and communications competencies become essential. The recognition and validation of skills and competences that people have acquired through in - and non-formal ALE form an important basis for reskilling and upskilling.

Almost every study on labour market developments and the future of work comes to the same conclusion: to master the ongoing transformation, continuous training and workplace learning are simply indispensable – not only for workers with lower formal education but for all workers. Equally, for those out of work, ALE increases resilience and reduces the effects of loss of confidence associated with unemployment or inactivity in the labour market. ALE promotes new skills and competences to be able to develop professionally and move into higher-quality jobs. ALE facilitates and creates a bridge between unemployment/ inactivity and work, education and work, and education and further learning (e.g. from ALE to higher education) and it helps people to make smooth transitions on their learning pathways.

## GOOD PRACTICE

### Learning basic skills at workplace

In Switzerland, a state programme to promote workplace basic skills learning was launched in 2018. The programme supports businesses that invest in basic skills training of their workers so that they can better cope with the transformation in the labour market. The program is based on the positive experiences made with the GO project in Switzerland. The project demonstrated that workplace basic skills learning is highly beneficial for both the workers and the employers. (<https://www.sbf.admin.ch/sbf/de/home.html>)

## GOOD PRACTICE

### National quality guidelines for basic skills

The Austrian Initiative for Adult Education is a cooperation of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education and the nine Austrian provinces. Its objective is to enable adults who lack basic skills or never graduated from a lower secondary school to continue and finish their education. The innovative approach of this project is due to two characteristics. First, the implementation of consistent national quality guidelines for courses of this program and, second, the fact that all courses are free of charge for the participants.

## Learner story



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— Rebecca, 39, United Kingdom

“ Rebecca enrolled on the Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship while working as a prison officer at HMP Dovegate. For her apprenticeship project, she successfully pitched to invite a local assistance dog training charity, the Restart Dog Project, into the prison – a scheme which proved to have a significant benefit on prisoners’ wellbeing.

“I hadn’t known what career I wanted when studying for my A-levels and decided that university wasn’t the right path for me. I came to regret this later on.

When the Serco Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship (CMDA) was introduced at HMP Dovegate in 2017, I jumped at the chance to gain the degree I thought I had missed out on. I had just returned from maternity leave after having twins and wanted to set them the example that it is never too late to learn.

I was determined to reduce incidents of self-harm and suicide in our prison. I researched the positive effects of animals in rehabilitation and, for my apprenticeship project, put together a business case for bringing in an assistance dog training programme. My idea turned out to be incredibly successful: at the start of the programme, prisoners rated their mental health as a 4 out of 10. Their latest ratings show that this is now 8 out of 10.

”

## Learner story



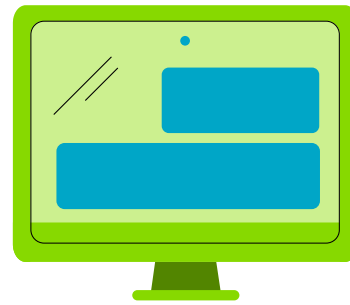
— Korina, 40, Greece

“Greece has a lot to offer concerning the adult’s education. Apart from the Universities, there are also Institutions and Academies where adults can participate in professional training programs for upskilling and reskilling. Compared to the previous years, education has become more organised, it is open to everybody, and the tutors are well educated. But still, with much more effort, things will get better.

From my experience at Odyssea Academy, I had the opportunity to take part in the Social Media Marketing program. Although it was a new section of education for me, there was such an interaction between the participants and the tutors that all the courses of the program were pleasant and easy to learn. The tutors also were very well organised, and they had a great knowledge of the market as a business. I would be glad to participate in the next program.

The CMDA qualification was also pivotal in my promotion to senior project manager at HMP Dovegate. A picture of myself at my graduation ceremony with my children by my side now hangs on my office wall and brings a smile to my face every time I look at it.”





## The challenges:

- The need to use and understand digital tools in life and work
- New technologies (such as artificial intelligence) are disrupting labour markets and fundamentally altering the nature and future of work education and training
- The digitalisation of everyday life - e.g. banking and payments, self-checkout tills in supermarkets, communications, and even digital ballot boxes - is leaving many people behind, especially those without access to technology, broadband internet and digital skills

## What adult learning and education can do:

Understanding the opportunities, challenges and impact of digitalisation on work and learning is important for every adult. It is key to support employability, social inclusion and active citizenship. Everyone now needs to have a sufficient level of digital competence to play an active part in society.

EAEA is deeply concerned that “44% of the European adult population does not have basic digital skills.”<sup>19</sup> Adults who do not possess a sufficient level of such skills face a high risk of social exclusion. “Over 70% of businesses have said that the lack of staff with adequate digital skills is an obstacle to investment. Europe also faces a shortage of digital experts who can develop cutting-edge technologies for the benefit of all citizens.”<sup>20</sup>

The ability to manipulate digital tools will become critically important in the next five years. The ability to seize the opportunities provided by digitalisation, however, is not evenly distributed. Adults in vulnerable and marginalised situations could face a double disadvantage in the future, due to a lack of awareness of, or the means to adapt to, these changes. EAEA recognises the importance of ensuring all adults have access to education and training for both basic, intermediate and advanced digital skills.

Digital skills also encompass more than the handling of digital tools. An understanding of issues such as algorithms, fake news, and online ‘bubbles’ is necessary to use digitalisation positively.

Technology is also altering the future of teaching and learning, providing a myriad of tools to enhance the way we educate, teach and learn. Educators must utilise these tools to improve their work, create communities of practice, and share knowledge and skills. What is needed therefore is improved access to infrastructure and training. Online learning offers many possibilities but it needs to be done well - good e-learning is not a ‘cheap option’ but needs to be developed and implemented with good methodologies. Additionally, face-to-face learning remains an important part of ALE.

<sup>19</sup> Towards 2023: the European Year of Skills. Accessed [15.04.2024]. [<https://data.europa.eu/en/publications/datastories/towards-2023-european-year-skills>, 2022].

<sup>20</sup> European Commission, “Digital skills and jobs”, 2023. Accessed [16.04.2024]. [<https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/digital-skills-and-jobs#:~:text=The%20European%20Commission%20has%20set>].



## Research evidence

“If the need for digital skills is present in most personal and professional activities at present time, studies are forecasting a continuous growth in demand for digital skills for employment and professional careers, putting digital literacy at the core of transversal skills (OECD, 2021). Even more aspects of specialised domains in ICT are pouring slowly but continuously into the pot of digital skills for citizens as the last version 2.2 of DigComp<sup>21</sup> has shown with the inclusion of references to Artificial Intelligence. As we have commented before, although progressing and making efforts to expand digitisation and qualification in digital skills, the indicators in Europe are still far from what the EU requires for a prosperous digital future. So, digital reskilling and upskilling with clear strategies for lifelong learning will be prominent trends from now on.”<sup>22</sup>

## GOOD PRACTICE

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### Digital Village project

“Digital Village” project increases the digital competences of individuals using a community-based approach. The project aims to give the residents of municipal buildings a low-threshold opportunity to ask questions in connection with digitalisation and to solve digital problems that arise in their daily lives.

Two digital Experts from the Volkshochschulen (VHS, Adult Education Centres) provide materials and equipment (Laptops, tablets, smartphones and free Wi-Fi) and offer “digital consultancy services”<sup>23</sup> (“Digi-Info-Stand”) for 2-3 hours at a time in the courtyards of large municipal residential buildings. Residents can ask questions and obtain solutions for digital problems on site. No curriculum describes what the participants should learn; instead, the residents come with questions and challenges, seeking easy-to-understand “on-the-spot” solutions. This project is treating digitalisation itself as a topic (rather than applying digitalisation to another subject, like using digital tools in language learning, for example). The project deals directly with the digital transformation of society and the fact that many people cannot keep up with these rapid processes.

<sup>21</sup> The Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DigComp). Accessed [15.04.2024]. [[https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/digcomp/digcomp-framework\\_en](https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/digcomp/digcomp-framework_en)].

<sup>22</sup> “Digital Skills: A Deep-Dive.” Created by Luis Fernandez Sanz. Posted August 29, 2023. Accessed [15.04.2024]. [<https://digital-skills-jobs.europa.eu/en/latest/briefs/digital-skills-deep-dive>].

<sup>23</sup> Digi-Infotage”. Accessed [15.04.2024]. [<https://www.vhs.at/de/digiinfotag>].



# Demographic change and migration

## The challenges:

- Demographic changes, including an ageing population in Europe, migration, and urbanisation, strain public infrastructure, housing, and social services, leading to concerns about social welfare systems, social cohesion and the perception of security, as well as environmental issues.
- Challenges posed by Europe's ageing population include the impact on pension systems, healthcare, and the labour market. At the same time, measures for active ageing are crucial to accommodate the older population's participation and continued contribution to society more proactively.
- Europe experiences changes in its workforce due to later retirement ages, requiring adjustments in employment policies and practices to enable age-appropriate working with a focus on health and well-being at work. Despite longer working lives, there are labour shortages in many sectors which are being addressed in many countries by introducing political measures to welcome skilled migrants and restricting entry for other migrants, thereby reinforcing mechanisms of brain drain from global peripheries.
- Political measures for the reception and inclusion of migrants are perceived as inadequate or failing by large parts of the population. Migrants continue to experience not only rejection from the majority society, but also insufficient and unequal access to the labour market, the



recognition of qualifications and skills, as well as learning opportunities for basic language and life skills. The promotion of mutual understanding between migrant and receiving communities, as well as the promotion of social cohesion and social inclusion amidst cultural diversity remain key policy issues.

## What adult learning and education can do:

ALE promotes active ageing and the development of a shared vision for the active participation of all Europeans. Learning in later life plays a central role in fostering and maintaining cognitive and social competencies: research shows that seniors who learn are more active, have more social contacts, are more likely to volunteer, work longer and are healthier. It can even help to combat dementia. A society that considers itself inclusive must provide quality learning opportunities for people of all ages. This calls for a necessary framework of policy, funding, structures and access - including cost-benefit considerations that build on relevant research evidence.

Learning opportunities can include intergenerational learning: it enables both older, experienced people and the young to benefit from each other's knowledge and experience. The results of such shared learning processes can also contribute to greater intergenerational solidarity.

Adult learning and education also plays an important role in overcoming the challenges associated with migration in and to Europe. ALE provides a safe space where debates and inter- and transcultural dialogues can foster exchange between the resident population and newcomers. ALE helps migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees to learn about the cultures and customs of their new host countries and allows the resident population to learn and appreciate other customs. This fosters the development of deliberative democracies.

Accessible and affordable learning opportunities for migrants, along with the recognition and validation of prior skills and learning, are vital. ALE serves as a crucial bridge between immigration, service providers, and society, facilitating skills acquisition and inclusion, especially for disadvantaged individuals and newcomers. Europe must prioritise accessible learning and offer language training for migrants to foster active participation in society, including the labour market, and prevent brain drain from other, less advantaged parts of Europe and the world. ALE also plays a key role in harnessing the skills of highly skilled migrants for the benefit of society.

At the same time, ALE must create a space where individuals and communities who feel alienated and threatened by migration are supported in acquiring competencies to understand migration and inclusion processes. This includes combating fake news and other forms of disinformation, but also promoting life skills such as empathy,

critical thinking, and active citizenship. In addition, ALE can play an important role in promoting better working conditions for all, mitigating competition between different population groups and avoiding brain drain from other countries for certain professions.

## Research evidence

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## Learner story



— Fakhra, United Kingdom

“ Fakhra spoke no English when she moved to the UK in 2010 and lacked the confidence to explore beyond her home environment. When her husband died shortly after she gave birth to her third child, adult learning paved the way for her journey to independence.

*When I first started my ESOL course at Oldham Council’s Lifelong Learning Service, I couldn’t speak English. I didn’t have the confidence to go shopping by myself and always relied on my husband. I panicked when it came to making appointments and wouldn’t pick up the phone.*

*After the death of my husband, I found myself in a low place that lasted for a long time, and I was looking after my three children alone. I started to feel better once I had seen my doctor and started taking antidepressants. I was able to go back to the Lifelong Learning Service and enrol in more courses. I wanted to develop my confidence and find a job so that I could support my children.*

*English language learning has allowed me to gain further qualifications, a job in social care, money, and new friends. I am confident speaking to my children’s teachers and can also help other people in my community understand official paperwork, reading and interpreting their letters for them. My friends have watched me develop as a person and tell me they admire my achievements. I always say to them, “If I can do it, anyone can do it, because I never thought I could do all of this. I am proud of what I have achieved, and I know that my husband would have been very proud too.”*

*Julie Miller, a tutor at Lifelong Learning Service, said: “Fakhra is a positive role model for her young family and members of her local community. She is always supportive of her peers in class and encourages them to enrol on additional courses to support their development. Fakhra is a passionate advocate for lifelong learning and will confidently share her learning experiences with others.”* ”

## Learner story



— Marija, 75, Slovenia

“ Marija joined the regular university programme as soon as she started her retirement. Before that, it just wasn’t possible. Today she is an avid reader, a regular visitor of musical concerts and all sorts of exhibitions, volunteers on every occasion with the multitude of institutions, to name only a few, and above all, learns from every person she meets. And she meets a lot. ”

# Adult learning and education and European & international policies

As this manifesto demonstrates, adult learning and education is necessary to implement most European and international policies:



## Green Transition

ALE contributes to the Green Transition by addressing the skills required for a sustainable and environmentally conscious economy. Learning offers include a focus on green skills and awareness including upcycling and recycling, consumer education, civil society cooperation, and preparing adults to actively participate in industries that prioritise environmental sustainability as well as more sustainable lifestyles.

## Digital Transition

In the context of the Digital Transition, ALE is crucial for equipping individuals with digital literacy and skills essential for a technology-driven society and workforce. Digital skills are, in many countries, essential for obtaining information, accessing (public) services, communicating, shopping, and much more. Artificial intelligence will propel the need for digital skills even further, including for navigating a highly manipulative digital environment.

## Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

ALE is necessary for the achievement of all SDGs. By promoting lifelong learning, addressing skill gaps, and fostering inclusivity, ALE contributes to the broader agenda of sustainable development set by the UN.



## The European Pillar of Social Rights

Education, training and lifelong learning are the first principles of the European pillar, which demonstrates the close link between social rights, equal opportunities and learning. Adult learning and education ensure better access to the labour market but also to participation in other areas of life, such as democratic processes and active citizenship.

## European Skills Agenda

ALE is instrumental in realising the objectives of the European Skills Agenda by providing avenues for individuals to acquire and enhance their skills. By providing outreach, life skills and learner-centred methodologies, ALE organisations are at the forefront of creating a 'Learning Europe'.

## Upskilling Pathways

ALE plays a pivotal role in implementing the Upskilling Pathways strategy. Flexible basic and life skills training, outreach and skills assessments enable to empower individuals and offer them access to better jobs and lives.

## Policies on adult learning and education

### *CONFINTEA VII Marrakesh Framework for Action - harnessing the transformational power of adult learning and education*

With the adoption of the Marrakech Framework for Action at the Seventh International Conference on Adult Education on 17 June 2022, representatives of over 140 countries committed to translating the vision of a right to lifelong learning into reality. They undertook to significantly increase adult participation in learning and recognised the need for increased financial investment in adult learning and education. Civil society in ALE across the globe (EAEA and its members for the European region) cooperates with, and supports, governments to fulfil this ambitious vision.

### *European Agenda for Adult Learning*

The European Agenda for Adult Learning emphasises the importance of ALE in fostering social inclusion, active citizenship, and continuous personal development. EAEA and its members are among the key actors implementing the Agenda. ALE carries out activities to reach out to, support and empower those furthest from learning and work and those who have benefited least from initial educational opportunities.

EAEA recommends that European and national policymakers:

- Recognise the benefits and importance of non-formal adult learning and education for individuals, communities, and society – for democracy, labour markets, health systems, and other key areas.
- Recognise that the major challenges that Europe is facing cannot be solved without adult learning and education.
- Recognise adult learning and education as a key political priority for Europe.
- Recognise that the concept of skills contains a wide range of learning for work and life.
- Use the European Semester as a key instrument to support and develop ALE.
- Turn the European Education Area into a true European Lifelong Learning Area with all sectors having equal status and priority.
- Approach the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights from a citizen-centred perspective with a strong lifelong learning aspect.
- Promote cooperation with, and support for, lifelong learning in the European Neighbourhood countries and other parts of the world.
- Increase cooperation, collaboration and learning between policy, practice and research.
- Establish and/or increase civil dialogue for adult learning and support civil society organisations.
- Develop and implement adequate governance and funding systems, which are necessary to enable outreach, quality provision and increase participation in lifelong learning.
- Invest adequate financial resources into ALE and see this as an investment and not as an expense.
- Establish coherent lifelong learning systems that enable progression, also through validation and recognition.
- Fund and support learning in communities.
- Create financial incentives for ALE institutions to develop and offer climate literacy courses for adults.
- Promote climate education programs that empower adults to take actionable steps to address climate changes in their communities.
- Support community-led initiatives that engage adults in sustainability projects, such as community gardens, energy efficiency retrofits, and waste reduction programs.
- Provide ongoing professional development for adult educators, focusing on pedagogical methods that promote transformative processes, democracy and peace.
- Support peer learning networks and mentorship programs to share best practices and innovation in ALE.

# Manifesto for Adult Learning

*in the 21st Century*



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