



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR  
THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

## EUROPEAN EDUCATION AREA: Adult Education and Learning for all must become a top European priority

EAEA Statement

June 2024

The European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) welcomes the European Commission's [open public consultation on the mid-term review of the European Education Area](#) and calls for adult education and learning for all to become a top European priority for the newly elected European Parliament and the new European Commission.

Recalling [our statement of September 2023](#), EAEA welcomes the decision of the European Council to extend the timeframe for the implementation of the European Education Area (EEA) from five to ten years until 2030. This extension will be beneficial for the achievement of the priorities and benchmarks set. The creation of the New European Agenda for Adult Learning (NEAAL), a key demand of EAEA, is particularly welcomed. With appropriate support, this agenda has the potential to significantly increase participation in adult learning to 60% by 2030. However, **EAEA insists that all adults, including those who are not/ no longer in employment, older people, and people with disabilities, people with parenting and caregiving responsibilities, are included in the European strategies**, emphasising the importance of lifelong learning for social inclusion and active and healthy ageing.

EAEA stresses the **essential role of adult learning and education (ALE) in reaching new learners and providing flexible learning pathways for all** through guidance and validation of prior learning. Non-formal ALE must be recognised as a key education sector that empowers learners by making learning accessible and enjoyable. To achieve this, EAEA calls for an **increase in financial and structural resources and emphasises the need for stable public funding**, especially for smaller ALE providers. To reach a higher participation in ALE by 2030, it must be recognised that it is not enough to strengthen the demand for ALE, for instance through Individual Learning Accounts: the supply side must also be strengthened to ensure excellent quality and infrastructures adapted to the higher demand. This cannot be achieved through the current project-based model of ALE and requires fundamental reforms of the legal framework, public funding and taxation systems and governance structures.

EAEA welcomes the focus on the digital and green transition but emphasises that **adult educators must have the opportunity to develop the necessary skills** to integrate this into educational content and teaching methods. There are still significant differences in digital access and skills across Europe, and to address these, substantial resources are also needed for the training of adult educators. EAEA points to the precarious working conditions of many adult educators and calls for better initial and continuous training opportunities for adult educators as well as better working conditions by promoting structural support to the sector, recognising that stronger ALE structures are essential for the provision of inclusive, high-quality learning opportunities for all adults.

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EAEA emphasises the **importance of developing basic and transversal skills of adults** in order to reduce functional illiteracy, innumeracy and digital exclusion across Europe and to help young adults in particular to develop learning-to-learn capacities for better and more effective improvement of competences necessary for work and life. **Life skills and competences play a central role for social inclusion and empowerment, but also creativity, innovation and problem-solving in Europe to achieve a just green and digital transition and to meet future challenges.**

EAEA also calls for a **stronger focus on science, citizenship and democracy education and a strengthening of intersectional approaches to combat misinformation, xenophobia, racism, anti-Semitism and gender-based discrimination as well as all other kinds of discrimination** and to promote active citizenship and democratic engagement. Especially in view of the political polarization trends and increasingly difficult framework conditions for civic participation in many European countries, citizenship and democracy education must be recognised as central components of ALE and promoted accordingly in order to foster a more open and cohesive society. Global developments must also be brought back into focus as part of global citizenship education - also and above all for adults, in order to raise awareness of global interdependencies and the consequences of everyday and political behaviour.

Another central focus must be placed on wellbeing: the professional, social and familial demands on adults are becoming ever greater. According to several studies<sup>1</sup>, the risk and the cases of burnout and other stress-related diseases are rising across Europe. At the same time, the economy is demanding a higher level of professional involvement from the so-called “inactive” and long-term unemployed, many of whom suffer from mental and physical health problems. **Promoting wellbeing at work and in personal life must therefore become a political priority** in order to enable people to lead healthy, happy and self-determined lives. Non-formal ALE offers a wide range of programmes for this purpose, for example in the areas of health, nature-based learning and gardening, arts and cultural education, and at the same time, ALE always promotes social inclusion, which in turn has a positive impact on wellbeing.

Finally, EAEA advocates for a **more visible, but also more integrated European Education Area that is coherent with other policy agendas**, including the Sustainable Development Goals and the European Consensus for Development, and recognises ALE as a transversal agenda that is crucial to all other policy areas. This requires stronger governance structures at the regional, national, and European levels. **Civil society must be involved in all areas of governance to ensure that policies and structures put the needs and interests of adult learners at the centre.**

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<sup>1</sup> e.g. as cited in <https://www.euronews.com/next/2024/01/03/the-mental-health-of-workers-in-europe-is-on-the-decline-people-in-this-country-suffer-the>



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## EAEA's recommendations to European policy-makers:

1. **Recognition of non-formal ALE:** Recognise and support non-formal ALE as a key education sector that empowers learners and makes learning accessible and enjoyable. Preserve and strengthen ALE systems in countries with a long ALE tradition through continued investment and structural support, and support especially countries who are building new ALE systems.
2. **Financial and Structural Support:** Increase financial and structural resources for ALE, with stable public funding, especially for smaller providers, to meet the 60% adult learning participation benchmark by 2030. Recognise that a higher demand for ALE also requires a strengthening of the supply-side of ALE to ensure fair working conditions of adult educators and high-quality learning provision.
3. **Promotion of Legal Frameworks for ALE, stronger Governance Structures and Civil Society Involvement:** Establish stronger governance structures at the regional, national, and European levels, including through the promotion of legal frameworks for ALE at the national and regional levels, involving civil society at each step to ensure policies address the needs and interests of adult learners.
4. **Promote European Initiatives in ALE:** Encourage countries with less-established ALE traditions to leverage European initiatives, like the EEA and New European Agenda for Adult Learning, to strengthen their national and regional ALE landscapes. Make European funding opportunities more visible and accessible to these countries.
5. **Inclusive Policy Strategies:** Ensure all adults, including the unemployed, older people, people with disabilities, people with caregiving and parenting responsibilities, are included in strategies of the European Education Area, emphasising the importance of lifelong learning for social inclusion and active and healthy ageing.
6. **Promotion of initial and continuous training for adult educators:** Create opportunities for adult educators to improve their skills in developing content and teaching methods to adequately support all learners.
7. **Promote Basic, Transversal and Life skills for Adults:** Support initiatives to strengthen basic, transversal and life skills for adults to reduce functional illiteracy, innumeracy and digital exclusion, and boost social inclusion, empowerment, creativity, innovation and problem solving.
8. **Focus on Science, Citizenship, and Democracy Education:** Strengthen science, citizenship, and democracy education and strengthen intersectional approaches to combat misinformation, xenophobia, racism, anti-Semitism and gender-based discrimination as well as all other kinds of discrimination, and promote active global citizenship and democratic engagement.
9. **Focus on Wellbeing:** Prioritise wellbeing in education policies, stressing the crucial role of non-formal ALE to promote health, social inclusion, and overall wellbeing.



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10. **Integrated and Coherent Policy Agendas:** Promote a more coherent and integrated EEA that aligns with other policy agendas, including the Sustainable Development Goals and the European Consensus for Development, recognising ALE as crucial to all policy areas.

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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 123 member organisations in 43 countries and represents more than 60 million learners Europe-wide.*