

Transforming Lives, Communities, and Society

Stories and Strategies for Change



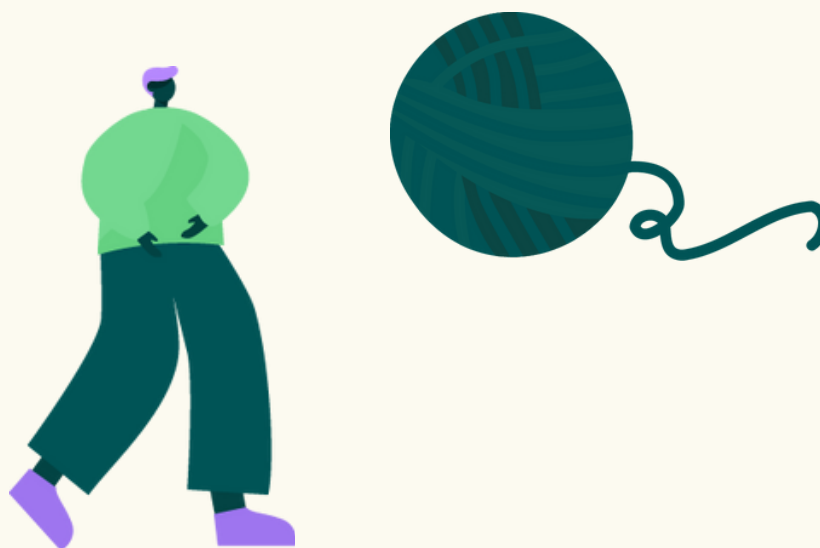
Reflections on
EAEA's annual
theme 2024



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Contents

Introduction: The Power and Joy of Adult Learning and Education	1
Key outcomes and insights from the thematic year	3
Transforming lives	3
Empowering communities	6
Shaping society	8
Special moments of the year	11
Highlights from the Annual Conference	11
Key insights from the Beyond Learning podcast	14
Launch of the new Manifesto: purpose and reception ...	16
Recommendations for the future	19
For everyone	19
For policy-makers	19
For ALE institutions and educators	20
For civil society and communities	21
For learners	22
Resources and further reading	23

Introduction: The Power and Joy of Adult Learning and Education

ALE is a cornerstone of personal, community, and societal development. It empowers individuals to navigate life's complexities, fosters resilient and cohesive communities, and lays the foundation for a more inclusive and sustainable society.

ALE is a process in which meaning is created about our individual and collective experiences, and this meaning, in turn, changes how we approach and interact with others and shape our individual and collective actions and experiences. At its core, ALE transforms not only what we know and the skills that we have, but also how we live, connect to each other, and contribute to the communities and societies we live in – and build them together with others.

The annual theme of 2024 on 'Transforming Lives, Communities, and Society' highlights the immense potential of ALE to drive positive change. In a world facing rapid technological progress, environmental and economic crises as well as social inequality, ALE offers crucial pathways to adaptability, a just twin transition and innovation. This year, EAEA explored this theme through a large number of discussions with members, stakeholders and key partners, events and other initiatives that put ALE at the centre of transformative action.

Our theme for the year once again emphasises that ALE is not just a tool for professional development, but a human right and a fundamental public good. It also stresses that ALE enriches everyone's lives by fostering personal development, critical thinking, self-understanding, and the search for knowledge and skills – even if they do not deliver any immediate 'outputs'. ALE equips individuals with the skills, knowledge and self-confidence they need to take control of their lives, stand up for their rights and meaningfully engage with society, thereby leading to greater well-being and participation of all. Ultimately, the conclusion from this leads us back to our key premise: that ALE is neither a privilege nor a private responsibility, but a shared responsibility.

This transformative potential is reflected in countless stories told by learners and educators across Europe – for instance, when Serbian filmmaker and educator Marija Stojnic tells the listeners of EAEA’s podcast ‘Beyond Learning’ why radio is still an accessible means of learning, when learners in a non-formal course at the University of Antwerp discuss how becoming a mother is a process of learning at an individual, community, and society level, or when Teréz Pataki and Reza Sayed Mustafa from the community centre Mira Haz in Budapest share their thoughts on why an integration course is not a factory. From digital literacy to climate action, from cultural understanding to active citizenship, we addressed a broad range of issues during this thematic year; sometimes challenging ourselves, but always contributing to a better understanding of ALE, empowering the people who work in and for it, and, most importantly, the learners and everyone interested in becoming a lifelong learner.

EAEA’s annual conference, publications and the EAEA Grundtvig Award 2024 provided platforms to celebrate small and big successes, helped us address the main challenges and pave the way forward. This background paper aims to capture the insights, special moments and lessons learned in 2024 and will serve as an inspiration for further advocacy and awareness-raising. As the second year in our three-year strategy on ‘Transformative Adult Learning and Education’, it also informs the third year, themed ‘Flexible Learning Pathways’.


We would like to take this opportunity to thank our members, the EAEA Board, and of course, the many adult educators, learners and other stakeholders who have contributed to our thematic year with many practical examples, scientific insights and policy perspectives. This year has taken us on a journey through Europe – both figuratively and literally – to trace the transformations that ALE has helped to bring about. The inspiration we have gathered will accompany our work in the future – and transform it.



Key outcomes and insights from the thematic year

Transforming lives

Adult learning and education tends to be associated in our narratives with second chances, but in order to see the true transformative nature of education, we have to understand that it is also about firsts – first opportunities to recognise one's potential, to overcome barriers, and to pursue a more meaningful or joyful path in life. It's about empowerment, yes, but more importantly, it is about transformation – **turning perceived limitations into strengths and unrealised dreams into tangible realities.**



I found true community education and explored my passions, my passion specifically for childcare. But I am still in training programs, and it's all about being heard, being listened to. There is unlimited potential to use my voice."

Paula Garry, an adult learner at the Childcare Programme in Longford Women's Link. Statement given during the "Learner Voice in Action" discussion of our Annual Conference in Helsinki, 12 June 2024

So, why do these transformations happen? **ALE creates space – not just physical space but emotional and intellectual space – for individuals to question, explore, and grow.** As discussed in our Safe Space Training, creating environments where learners feel safe is foundational. Safe spaces are about much more than removing overt threats or discomforts. They are about fostering trust, empathy, and the courage to confront both internal and external challenges. This kind of environment allows learners like Paula (see quote above) to step outside the confines of societal expectations and into a space of possibility.

Another layer of transformation lies in how ALE shifts mindsets. Often, adult learners come with the weight of life experiences – some empowering, many not. ALE does not erase these experiences; it builds on them in a constructive way .

"I loved school but it was full of anxiety! So I joined the workforce and I loved working with people. Then during the pandemic a lot changed for everyone so I went to my local community and I asked to do a course and when I followed it, it was absolutely mind-blowing. It just clicked. I could rewrite my past, this was my time in adult education. And I keep on going with other courses. Now I would love to support the education there. Maybe youth groups or sport."



Lucy Dempsey, adult learner at the Irish Organisation of the Unemployed. Statement given during the "Learner Voice in Action" discussion of our Annual Conference in Helsinki, 12 June 2024

The way and reasons behind people's choices, actions and barriers show that **everyone's story matters and it is the foundation of our learning**. Following this realisation, through our discussions during our training on "ABC of ALE" we explored how learners are not passive recipients of information but co-creators of knowledge and creating environments and processes that foster ownership of learning, turning classrooms and community centres into spaces of shared exploration and mutual respect.



"Knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention, the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry people pursue with the world and with others."

Paolo Freire, The Pedagogy of the Oppressed

Critically, ALE's transformative power is not just in what it teaches but how it teaches. As highlighted in discussions during our Safe Space Training and our discussion, adult educators must constantly navigate power dynamics, privilege, and oppression. Acknowledging these realities means creating educational spaces that not only teach but heal. As bell hooks emphasised, "Safe space does not necessarily refer to an environment without discomfort, struggle, or pain. Being safe is not the same as being comfortable." **Learning spaces must challenge, inspire, and stretch learners while ensuring they feel supported enough to take risks.**

As we discussed in the workshop “Creative Tools for Advocacy and Social Change in the Context of Migration”, with Pinar Aksu, during our Annual conference, learner space transcends the closed physical space of the classroom and is affected heavily by e.g. how migrants and migrant adult learners are represented in media and within their communities. Participants engaged deeply with themes like radical pedagogies, campaigning for the right to work, and access to education, highlighting the systemic barriers faced by migrant communities. Through this discussions the point that was made across was heard loud and clear, we need to understand the power of creative tools to not only raise awareness but also inspire actionable change, turning abstract discussions into tangible strategies for empowerment and equity, for a transformed society.

Ultimately, **transformation in ALE is deeply personal but also inherently connected to the broader world. ALE does not just change individuals—it sets off ripples of change that touch everything and everyone around them.**



Participants at the workshop ‘Creative tools for advocacy and social change in the context of migration’ at the EAEA Annual Conference 2024



Pinar Aksu, PhD researcher at the University of Glasgow

Empowering communities

Talking about empowerment in ALE, we can be tempted to focus solely on individuals. But **the real magic happens when these individuals come together, pooling their talents, experiences, and newfound skills to create something larger than themselves.**

Let us take the SmartFood project in Poland as an example. On the surface, it is a programme about sustainable food practices - promoting self-production and reducing food transportation to minimise environmental impact. But dig deeper, and it becomes clear that SmartFood is about much more than food. It's about building bonds between neighbours, fostering a sense of shared responsibility, and creating a framework where people care for each other as much as they care for the environment. The project did not just help residents share produce; it strengthened social ties and improved quality of life. Small actions like these have a powerful snowball effect, transforming communities from the inside out.



Participants at the workshop 'Communities as Catalysts for Social Transformation and Green Transition' at the EAEA annual events 2024



This idea of transformation is something we also explored in the workshop on “Communities as Catalysts for Social Transformation and Green Transition” during our annual events. Participants explored the potential of community-driven initiatives to address the global challenges of sustainability and equity. What stood out was the acknowledgement that the roots of transformation often lie in the seemingly mundane - supportive relationships, shared values, and collective courage.



“Small changes have been recognised as highly significant. They can initiate a snowball effect, allowing the community to initiate change”

Statement given during the “Communities as Catalysts for Social Transformation and Green Transition” discussion of our Annual Conference in Helsinki, 12 June 2024

ALE, when practised holistically and consciously, provides the tools and frameworks communities need to navigate systemic challenges. Whether it is combating social exclusion, addressing environmental concerns, or pushing back against inequitable policies, ALE fosters the kind of critical thinking and problem-solving skills that make collective action possible. It’s not about telling communities what they need but about equipping them to find and implement their own solutions.

Civil society and communities create and shape the fabric of new forms of transformative learning, realising the vision of “educational webs which heighten the opportunity for each one to transform each moment of his [sic!] living into one of learning, sharing, and caring,” which was described by Ivan Illich in his seminal work ‘Deschooling Society’. Published in 1970, this vision is still very relevant 54 years later.

This is a point echoed during the discussion workshop “Under pressure: (new) roles of adult educators” during our General Assembly, where we delved into how education can be a socio-political process that enables communities to reclaim public spaces and shape them according to their values and needs.



Participants at the workshop ‘Under pressure: (new) roles of adult educators’ at the EAEA annual events 2024

When going through the applications for the Annual Grundtvig Award, we saw exactly this promise in the ADELE project that provides us with another lens through which to view community empowerment. While its primary goal was to enhance digital competencies, its broader impact was on community resilience. By enabling libraries to assess and improve their digital readiness, ADELE created hubs of learning and connection within communities. Libraries became more than just places to borrow books—they became spaces where people of all ages and backgrounds could come together to learn, share, and grow. This kind of community-centred approach to education is vital in a world where digital divides often exacerbate existing inequalities.

Shaping society

When we think about the societal impact of ALE, it's easy to focus on tangible outcomes—better policies, higher employment rates, or increased digital literacy. But the real power of ALE lies in its ability to fundamentally reshape the fabric of society. It challenges systemic inequalities, nurtures critical thinking, and fosters a collective commitment to equity, inclusion, and justice.

ALE often operates in spaces where traditional systems fall short. It steps in to fill the gaps, providing access to knowledge and skills for those left behind. But it doesn't stop there. As we discussed in our Safe Space Training, ALE creates what bell hooks described as “radical spaces of possibility”—environments where people not only learn but reimagine what society could look like. These spaces allow learners to challenge oppressive systems and envision alternatives that prioritise equity over exploitation.

One of the clearest examples of this transformative potential is how ALE influences policy. At the EAEA annual events, former Swedish Education Minister Anna Ekström remarked, “ALE is a solution to most problems: skill shortages, high thresholds in the labour market, lack of equality between men and women, fake news and outright lies in debates, alienation, and unfulfilled dreams,” underscoring how ALE addresses not just immediate educational needs but also the deeper societal challenges of our time.

Katarina Popović, Secretary General of the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE), pointed out, “We need an intersectional approach in research and activism. Empowerment is important, as well as critical thinking, but how do we measure it?”, inviting us to consider how ALE can not only transform individual lives but also contribute to broader societal shifts toward justice and equality.

This discussion on how we measure the impact of our actions on topics of justice and equality deeply resonates with the work we did on gender equality in 2024. Gender equality remains one of the most pressing challenges in shaping a fairer society, and ALE has a pivotal role to play in this struggle. Yet, even within the ALE sector - a field often associated with inclusivity and empowerment - deep-rooted inequalities persist.



The panel at EAEA's annual conference, composed of Tuulikki Laes, Anna Ekström, Katarina Popović, and Alex Stevenson

During the discussions at the EAEA Annual Conference, we unpacked the complexity of gender inequity in ALE. The wage gap was a recurring theme, exposing how even within progressive spaces, women's labour is often undervalued. But the problem is not just economic—it's structural. Gender intersects with race, class, and other identities, creating compounded layers of disadvantage for many. For non-binary and queer educators and learners, the challenges go beyond representation to questions of safety and belonging. How can adult education advocate for inclusion when it struggles to embody it fully within its own ranks?

This paradox points to a broader issue: **the systems that perpetuate inequality are mirrored in the very spaces where we expect to dismantle them.** Legislative reform, while critical, is only part of the solution. ALE must also take a hard look inward, addressing its own biases and barriers. It's not just about creating opportunities for women to advance—it is about transforming the structures that hold them back. This includes everything from addressing childcare needs to fostering equitable hiring practices and ensuring representation at every level.

In this quest for reflection **we must recognise that empowering communities through ALE is not just about what happens within those communities; it's also about how they interact with the broader world.** Margreeth Broens from EAEA's Dutch member Learn for Life describes this dual function as "learning in and through groups", but also "learning for the group", emphasising the social character of learning (Broens 2024).

As highlighted during the "Global Perspectives on ALE" workshop, ALE fosters a global outlook while remaining rooted in local action. By addressing issues like sustainability, social justice, and inequality, ALE connects local communities to global movements, creating a more cohesive and equitable world. This dual focus is what makes ALE such a powerful tool for societal change.

The societal impacts of ALE are profound and far-reaching. From influencing policies to bridging digital divides, fostering democratic values, and building resilience, ALE reshapes societies in ways that go beyond the classroom. **It challenges us to rethink what education can achieve and inspires us to build a future grounded in equity, inclusion, and collective action.**



Participants at the workshop 'Global perspectives on ALE' at the EAEA annual events 2024



Jose Roberto Guevara, President of ICAE, and Board Member of the GCE representing Asia-Pacific.

Special moments of the year

Highlights from the Annual Conference

The 2024 EAEA Annual Conference was a way for us to gather voices, ideas, and shared commitments to the transformative potential of ALE. Held in Helsinki under the theme 'Transforming Lives, Communities, and Society', the conference brought together 150 participants from 34 countries. Over two days, attendees engaged in rich discussions, interactive workshops, and critical reflections, with each session underscoring the urgent need for ALE to be both adaptive and inclusive in an ever-changing world.

Isabel Kempf, Director of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, opened the conference with a keynote speech titled 'Empowering Agility: Adult Education's Role in Navigating Global Change'. She emphasised the **importance of creating "active spaces where people can meet, socialise, and learn together,"** reminding participants that ALE must go beyond skill acquisition to promote equity, inclusion, and resilience. Kempf also highlighted the persistent digital divide, urging stakeholders to ensure that learning spaces remain accessible and supportive for all, particularly in an increasingly digitalised world.



Isabel Kempf,
Director of UNESCO

Throughout the conference, discussions tackled critical issues facing ALE. In “Research, Policy, and Practice: What New Spaces for Exchange?”, Marcella Milana and Gina Ebner explored the **potential of integrating research evidence into policymaking**, while in “Gender Equality in the Adult Learning Sector: Are We There Yet?”, led by Angeliki Giannakopoulou and Marina Sakač Hadžić, participants candidly **examined the sector’s persistent wage gap and the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles**, despite their higher levels of education. As one participant observed, “Representation isn’t enough; we need structural change to level the playing field.”



Marcella Milana, Professor at University of Verona, and ESREA

Participants at the workshop ‘Gender Equality in the Adult Learning Sector: Are We There Yet?’ at the EAEA annual events 2024



Marina Sakač Hadžić, EAEA Communications and Capacity Building Officer and Angeliki Giannakopoulou, EAEA Project Coordinator

In 'Under Pressure: (New) Roles of Adult Educators', Anna Skocz facilitated a **critical dialogue on the mounting pressures educators face**. With the rapid pace of digitalisation, educators are expected to innovate constantly while managing limited resources and time. At the same time, in 'Creative Tools for Advocacy and Social Change in the Context of Migration', facilitated by Pinar Aksu, participants explored the portrayal of migrants in media and communities. Methods like the Theatre of the Oppressed invited participants to examine migration laws and campaign for the right to work and access to education, with one attendee expressing how: "Theatre gave us a way to experience the injustice and imagine solutions collaboratively".

Another standout workshop, 'Communities as Catalysts for Social Transformation and Green Transition', emphasised the **importance of incremental, community-led actions in addressing sustainability and social justice**. Facilitator Laura Kaestele highlighted how courage and supportive networks often serve as the seeds for broader systemic change. The metaphor of a "snowball effect" resonated with participants, illustrating how small actions can grow into significant movements. In a parallel quest the importance of amplifying learner voices was evident throughout the conference, and specifically in the workshop 'Learner Voice in Action', where personal stories underscored the limitless potential of learner-led approaches to drive personal and societal transformation.

Finally, global perspectives were explored in a workshop organised by the ICAE, which examined diverse approaches to ALE worldwide. Facilitator Jose Roberto Guevara emphasised the adaptability of educational practices across cultural contexts and the value of international collaboration. The session reaffirmed the interconnectedness of local and global challenges, offering a comprehensive view of how ALE can respond to shared issues.



Key insights from the Beyond Learning podcast

The second season of the Beyond Learning podcast, titled “Identities”, offered an auditory journey through Central and Eastern Europe, weaving together stories of transformation, belonging, and resilience. Produced by EAEA, **this season explored how ALE fosters identity and community in rapidly changing societies, providing a platform for learners, educators, and activists to share their narratives.** Each episode invited listeners into spaces where learning intersects with lived experience, sparking reflection on the power of education to challenge norms and reimagine possibilities.

The season’s opening episode, ‘A Little Island’, took listeners to Vienna, where Margit Lindner from the magdas hotel showcased a groundbreaking model of integration and inclusion. By creating a business centred on people rather than profit, the hotel became more than just a workplace for refugees—it became a safe space where they could rebuild their lives. As Lindner reflected, “What if our space for learning could turn into a living room, a café – or an island?” This question captured the essence of the episode and set the tone for the season: **learning spaces are not just physical locations but environments that nurture belonging and transformation.** Similarly, Alisa Cela-Goldgruber from Verein Piramidops emphasized how community centres for migrant women create platforms for exchange and mutual support, both metaphorical and tangible.

As the season unfolded, ‘Naming the Nameless’ took the conversation further, delving into the power of language as a tool for both inclusion and exclusion. In Linz, Rubia Salgado, co-founder of the migrant women’s collective das kollektiv, discussed how grammar and syntax carry political weight. “Who makes—and owns—a language?” she asked, pointing to the ways in which linguistic structures can marginalize certain groups while empowering others. The episode demonstrated how poetry, conversation, and shared language create spaces of agency and visibility for migrant learners.

In ‘Changing Narratives’, the podcast shifted to Budapest, highlighting two organisations that are reframing how we think about integration and homelessness. At the Mira Haz community centre, educators and learners collaborated to challenge the notion that integration is a one-size-fits-all process. “It’s time to change the vocabulary,” one guest remarked, emphasizing the importance of language in shaping perceptions and policies. Meanwhile, the Shelter Foundation’s Hungarian Street Paper showed how giving marginalised individuals a platform for self-expression can foster dignity and societal change.

These stories illustrated the recurring theme of the season: the power of narratives to reshape reality and build more inclusive communities. 'There Before Me' provided a reflective dive into the intersection of history, activism, and learning. Set in a bustling library and archive in Athens, the episode explored how feminist movements from the 1980s laid the foundation for ongoing struggles for equality and inclusion. Irene, an archivist and feminist, shared her insights on how libraries serve as sites of collective memory and transformative action. "Libraries are more than repositories—they are catalysts for change," she noted, emphasising their role in documenting diverse voices and histories. This episode highlighted the profound connection between past movements and present efforts, showcasing how learning is deeply rooted in historical context.

Participants at the workshop 'European Education Area: only one year to go!' at the EAEA annual events 2024



One of the season's most poignant moments, though, came in 'Spaces of Encounters, Spaces of Freedom', which **explored how public spaces can become arenas for learning, solidarity, and resistance.** In Belgrade, Katarina Popović and Maja Maksimović discussed how cultural identity and collective practices can reclaim urban environments, turning abandoned buildings into vibrant hubs of community. Their reflections on the complexities of place-making and belonging highlighted the transformative potential of adult education to reimagine not just personal identities but entire urban landscapes.

From poetry to participatory theatre, creative practices were celebrated as tools for deepening emotional connections, fostering critical thinking, and challenging entrenched power dynamics. **The second season of Beyond Learning was not just a collection of stories—it was a call to action.** It challenged educators, policymakers, and learners to think critically about how education shapes identity and community, reminding us that learning is an ongoing dialogue between the self and society.

Launch of the new Manifesto: purpose and reception

The launch of the Manifesto for Adult Learning in the 21st Century by the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) was a significant milestone in advocating for the continued importance of lifelong learning in shaping inclusive, equitable, and sustainable societies. **Rooted in the principles of inclusion, sustainability, and empowerment, the manifesto serves as a clarion call for a "Learning Europe," where adult education is recognised as a cornerstone for personal growth, social cohesion, and systemic change.**

The manifesto's central theme, "The Power and Joy of Learning," encapsulates its purpose: to showcase how adult learning can address pressing global challenges while fostering individual and collective well-being. This purpose is **underscored by the manifesto's holistic view of ALE as a fundamental human right and public good.** It calls for the recognition of adult learning as a tool to alleviate poverty, combat inequality, and drive sustainable development. As one key excerpt of our manifesto states, "ALE can transform lives, families, neighbourhoods, and communities. It can change countries and Europe for the better".

Purpose: A Blueprint for Change

The manifesto is **not merely a theoretical framework but a practical guide for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders.** It emphasises the role of ALE in addressing critical issues such as peace and democracy, environmental sustainability, digital transformation, and demographic changes. For instance, the manifesto highlights how ALE fosters critical thinking and media literacy, essential tools for countering fake news and xenophobia. By equipping learners with these skills, ALE becomes "a space for exchange, collaboration, and respect," a critical foundation for vibrant civil societies.



**The Power
and Joy of
Learning**

Our manifesto identifies nine core areas where adult learning can drive individual and community development as well as societal progress:

PEACE AND DEMOCRACY

Adult learning and education provide safe spaces to develop active citizenship. It also has a long tradition of building bridges and connecting people across borders as well as promoting reconciliation.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND GREEN TRANSITION

Adult learning 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.

WELL-BEING AND RESILIENCE

Evidence shows that adult learning and education make people more confident and self-effective. 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.

LIFE SKILLS

Adult learning and education provide the necessary life skills but also anticipate and shape future developments. This includes basic 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.

INCLUSION, EMPOWERMENT, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Adult learning and education play 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.

EMPLOYMENT AND WORK

The positive link between learning and work is obvious: Learning workers are more creative and productive. ALE promotes new skills and competences to develop professionally and move into higher-quality jobs. ALE also helps people to make smooth transitions on their learning pathways and move for example from unemployment/inactivity to work.

DIGITALISATION

Adult education helps to close the digital gap and provides individuals with digital competences, which are key to personal fulfilment, employability, social inclusion, and active citizenship. Everyone now needs to have a sufficient level of digital competence to play an active part in society. Technology is also altering the future of teaching and learning.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE AND MIGRATION

Adult learning and education promote active ageing of all Europeans. Learning in later life plays a central role in fostering and maintaining cognitive and social competencies. ALE also plays an important role in providing accessible and affordable learning opportunities for migrants and asylum-seekers.

ADULT LEARNING AND EDUCATION AND EUROPEAN & INTERNATIONAL POLICIES

Adult learning and education are necessary to implement most European and international policies. ALE contributes to main European and international strategies in the fields of growth, employment, innovation, equity, social cohesion, active citizenship, poverty reduction, climate change, internal market, migration, peace, and more.

As it goes, **the manifesto's strength lies in its comprehensive approach, connecting these diverse areas under a shared vision of lifelong learning as a public good and human right.** As EAEA President Uwe Gartenschlaeger remarked at the launch, "Adult education is not a luxury—it is a necessity for individuals, communities, and societies to thrive."

A Call to Action

While the manifesto does not claim to solve all the world's problems, **it offers a grounded yet inspiring vision for how ALE can contribute to meaningful progress.** It invites stakeholders to reflect on the role of ALE in their own contexts and to consider how investment in education can yield long-term benefits for individuals, communities, and society alike, contributing to social return on investment. By focusing on actionable recommendations and showcasing inspiring case studies, the manifesto bridges the gap between theory and practice.

At the end of the day, the Manifesto for Adult Learning in the 21st Century reminds us that education always remains one of the most powerful tools we have to foster change, promote resilience, and build a more inclusive and sustainable future. What we want to achieve is a deeper understanding of transformation, why and in which areas we need it, and how ALE can contribute to it when it has the opportunity to develop its full potential – but also the great impact that it already has despite the limits set by its structures and financing in many countries. As the manifesto aptly states, "Let us create a Learning Europe where we all benefit from the power and joy of learning."

Recommendations for the future

For everyone

Recognise the transformative potential of ALE and promote data collection:

The transformative potential of ALE for individuals, communities and society is not a utopian ideal, but a fact. However, we still need more data and information about the impact of ALE. Everyone can contribute to this: ALE providers, educators and learners on the practical side, research for the scientific collection and analysis of data, and, above all, political and financial support for broad and long-term studies.

For policy-makers

Take ALE into account in broader social issues and political decision-making processes:

As our EAEA Manifesto shows, ALE plays an important role in a large number of key social issues, such as promoting democracy, sustainability, employability and active citizenship. ALE organisations must therefore be actively sought out and consulted in political decision-making processes. ALE organisations are very close to citizens, especially disadvantaged groups, and can provide crucial input for the social impact of changes, as well as creating constructive dialogue between political decision-makers and citizens.

Create a common basis for ALE policy at the European level:

ALE policy varies greatly across the EU. In order to successfully implement EU initiatives, more work is needed on a common basis for ALE policy in order to create the basic conditions for a European Education – and Lifelong Learning - Area. This means strengthening governance structures in ALE, promoting umbrella organisations and providing the sector with adequate financial resources.

Strengthen democratic cooperation between policymakers, ALE providers, educators and learners associations, and other key stakeholders:

Active and structured dialogue between relevant stakeholders in the field of ALE is central to informing policy initiatives, adapting them to national, regional and local contexts, and empowering all those involved. The development of cooperation and partnerships with other sectors must be strengthened and promoted to ensure that every person in Europe finds their way into and place in education.

Achieving the EU's education goals by 2025 requires central EU governance AND autonomy:

Strong central governance of EU initiatives in ALE, such as for the New European Agenda for Adult Learning (NEAAL) and Upskilling Pathways, is of the utmost importance to support Member States in their implementation, for example through regular meetings of national coordinators, but also by promoting democratic decision-making processes for appointing these coordinators. On the other hand, these initiatives must also promote autonomy for the implementing countries and regions by allowing the fine-tuning of the objectives to their respective circumstances and needs.

For ALE institutions and educators

Define expectations of adult educators:

All too often, adult educators are expected to outperform themselves with limited resources, i.e. to achieve a high percentage of successful learner completion, to implement new regulations, and to always use the latest digital technologies for teaching, communicating with learners and for administration. These expectations and rules need to be clarified between stakeholders in order to improve work pressure. Networking and solidarity between and within institutions should be promoted in order to jointly demand better conditions for institutions and educators. This also includes better access to continuing training opportunities.

Consider blended or hybrid training formats to improve accessibility and engagement in continuing training of ALE staff:

ALE staff on all sides, i.e. practitioners, policy-makers and researchers, often work irregular hours, evenings and/or weekends, which makes it difficult for them to participate in further training. Hybrid formats, blended learning, etc. can help to ensure that (larger) parts of learning programmes can be completed in a self-directed manner at times that fit into the respective work schedule.

Focus on creating training formats that are both informative and engaging for staff working in the practice, policy and research of ALE:

Training formats should always use active methods of ALE so that a connection is created between methods and content and ALE staff themselves experience how methods feel, how they promote collaboration and autonomous learning, and how they help achieve learning goals.

Implement principles of gender equity and intersectionality in the sector:

inclusive language policies, consideration of childcare and other care work, and the right to continuing training must be implemented as a matter of course in ALE, not only as topics but also as a place of work and learning. Representation and security, especially from the perspective of non-binary and queer people, must be actively promoted. ALE must also address any existing wage gaps between men and women; in this sector, too, the trend is that women are better educated, but generally do not occupy higher positions and do not have the same employability as men. Working towards transformative learning, ALE must also transform itself in this regard.

For civil society and communities

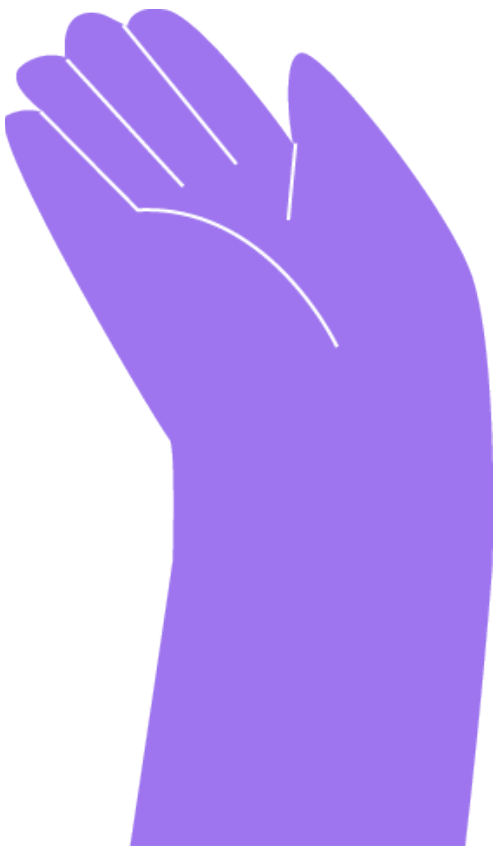
Promote collaboration between civil society and communities:

Collaboration can create physical and mental spaces in which learning, belonging, dialogue and security can flourish, allowing people to exchange views on important social issues, develop critical awareness and work on common solutions. The grassroots level provides a basis for transformative learning at the individual, community and society level, and collaboration between actors, for instance in community councils, amplifies the voice of all.

For learners

Stand up for your right to ALE and share your stories of transformation to inspire others:

The voice of adult learners can be empowered and amplified through learner collaboration, for example in associations and councils. Joint advocacy for the general right to lifelong learning, but also more specifically for paid transnational educational leave, can make a difference at the political decision-making level. If stories about how learners have experienced transformation are shared more widely, many more people can find their way into learning and, at the same time, the big impact of ALE can be seen at the political level.



Resources and further reading

Broens, Margreeth (2024): Sociaal leren en actief burgerschap. Beleid, theorie, praktijk. Amsterdam: Kring Andragologie UvA.

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