



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR
THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

For Information

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New PIAAC results show declining literacy and increasing inequality in many European countries – Better adult learning is necessary

Joint Statement by the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) and the European Basic Skills Network (EBSN) on the OECD PIAAC 2023 Survey Results **December 2024**

The European Association for the Education of Adults and the European Basic Skills Network are very concerned about the latest results of the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) by the OECD.

The OECD presented the results on 10th December 2024 and summarises the results as follows:

Over the past decade, average literacy proficiency improved only in Denmark and Finland, remaining stable or declining in all other participating countries and economies. Numeracy outcomes are more positive, with eight countries improving their scores, led by Finland and Singapore. Most of the countries and economies that experienced skill declines saw literacy and numeracy proficiency decrease across different age groups. Widespread educational expansion did not compensate for these trends, as proficiency among tertiary-educated graduates decreased or stagnated in most countries. These findings underscore the urgent need for policymakers to focus on lifelong and life-wide learning, ensuring that education and training systems are more adaptive to evolving demands.

Declines in literacy and numeracy proficiency were particularly evident among the least educated segments of the population. This led to a widening gap in skills proficiency between highly and low-educated adults in the majority of the participating countries and economies.



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EAEA and EBSN very much support the OECD's statement that life-wide and lifelong learning are crucial and see it as the basis for more equality, better social inclusion, democracy and competitiveness in Europe.

While the European Union's **Upskilling Pathways initiative** offers a robust framework to address these challenges through skills assessment, tailored learning offers, and validation processes, its uneven implementation across member states remains a major obstacle to progress. Moreover, innovative strategies are needed to ensure these initiatives reach the most vulnerable and underrepresented groups in society.

EAEA and EBSN therefore recommend the following actions to the national and regional authorities:

Strengthen the governance of adult education and basic skills in the framework of lifelong learning

- Adopt a **comprehensive and cohesive lifelong learning strategy** that integrates adult education and basic skills development into broader national strategies on education, employment, digitalisation, health, and social inclusion.
- **Reinforce cooperation between ministries, sectors and institutions of different backgrounds.** A good strategy needs good cooperation between different sectors and institutions.
- **Prioritize and invest in adult learning and basic skills.** Increasing public investment in adult education and learning and basic skills is crucial for outreach, making the system work and enabling the participation of those who need it most.
- **Link adult education and basic skills to existing strategies.** In many countries social inclusion strategies for disadvantaged groups do not take adult education into account. By integrating adult education and basic skills initiatives into broader strategies for social inclusion, workforce development, and green and digital transformation, these will be improved, and learning will become mainstream.
- **Cooperate with civil society and providers.** In order to implement the strategy effectively, providers and civil society organisations are key stakeholders.

Non-formal and community learning and outreach

- **Encourage learning opportunities in community settings,** recognising their effectiveness in engaging hard-to-reach learners. Intermediaries play a vital role in this process by connecting individuals with learning opportunities through trusted settings. Use spaces such as health centres, social services, libraries, job centres, and community organizations as access points for raising awareness about basic skills programs.

- Enable organizations to undertake **awareness-raising and outreach efforts**, ensuring potential learners are informed and encouraged to participate. Pay particular attention to **older learners and vulnerable groups**
- **Analyse and remove barriers.** Barriers that hinder people from participating need to be examined in depth in each context. EAEA and EBSN urges Member States to analyse their legal and financial frameworks in terms of promoting or hindering the participation of disadvantaged groups.
- **Motivate learners through effective incentives.** Design and implement incentives to motivate participation among vulnerable groups. Beyond overcoming barriers, initiatives must address psychological, social, and financial factors influencing learner engagement. They should also ensure the tangible benefits of learning, such as improving quality of life, enhancing career prospects, and enabling individuals to better support their families.

Infrastructure and capacity building

- **Provide infrastructural support to overcome barriers.** This might concern child care, transport or other practical issues.
- **Strengthen non-formal structures.** Better infrastructure for non-formal adult education through legislation, institutional development and continuous financing is needed.
- **Build capacity among stakeholders and institutions.** Invest in the capacity building of stakeholders and institutions engaged in the governance and implementation of lifelong learning and basic skills policies. EBSN's Capacity Building Series provides practical tools and resources to support these efforts.
- Provide **guidance and counselling services.**
- **Enhance the professional development of educators and counsellors.** Prioritize the professionalization of teachers, educators, and guidance counsellors. Their skills are critical to delivering high-quality learning experiences and effective guidance to adult learners with the most complex needs.
- **Promote innovation in learning delivery and technology use.** Foster innovation in the design and delivery of adult basic skills programs, including the use of digital technologies to expand access and engagement, particularly in underserved areas.

Both EAEA and EBSN believe that urgent action is necessary and will continue to urge policy-makers and other actors (such as employers) to provide better and more learning opportunities.

About us

The European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) is the voice of non-formal adult education in Europe. EAEA is a European NGO with 120 member organisations in 44 countries and represents more than 60 million learners Europe-wide.



The European Basic Skills Network, EBSN, is a non-profit association gathering policy makers and policy providers engaged in basic skills training for adults.

It aims at promoting excellence in policy design and policy implementation, at European, national and regional level, in a field that has considerable impact on education, employment, social inclusion, the fight against poverty, and sustainable economic growth.

