



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR
THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

For Information

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EDUCATION OF ADULTS
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Greta Pelucco,
Senior EU Public Affairs
Coordinator
greta.pelucco@eaea.org

Raffaella Kihrer,
Secretary General,
raffaella.kihrer@eaea.org

A bolder and more ambitious EU budget for education, inclusion and social resilience

EAEA's Response - November 2025

The European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) took part in the Public Open Consultation “EU’s next long-term budget (MFF) – EU funding for cross-border education, training and solidarity, young people, media, culture, and creative sectors, values, and civil society”.

EAEA welcomes the European Commission’s proposal for the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2028–2034 and its intention to provide a strategic, long-term roadmap for Europe’s priorities. We appreciate the Commission’s ambition to enhance the EU’s capacity to respond to global challenges, strengthen its resilience, and invest in its future.

At the same time, we believe that the proposal requires **important adjustments** to ensure that the EU budget can genuinely support **social cohesion, democratic resilience**, and the **lifelong learning** transition Europe urgently needs. We call on the co-legislators to reinforce the social dimension of the MFF and to ensure that adult learning and education receive the visibility and investment they deserve.



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Simplifications must be designed with the interests of beneficiaries at the center

The proposal document builds on three main pillars: simplification, flexibility and competitiveness. While EAEA acknowledges the need for a substantial revision of the budget, we strongly believe that the simplification proposed by the Commission does not meet today's challenges, nor those that lie ahead in the next seven years.

Although simplifying administrative burdens and processes would be welcome, as it could ensure greater accessibility for all actors involved in the programs, simplification must not come at the expense of clarity and purpose. **Merging programs** may streamline procedures, yet it risks blurring the specific objectives for which these programs were originally designed. Such an approach could foster competition among civil society organizations, which should instead be working together, and dilute attention to crucial thematic priorities.

Bigger budget, but the devil lies in the details

The proposed €1.8 trillion MFF represents a substantial increase (almost 50%) compared to the current framework. However, **inflation and rising demands risk diminishing the real impact of this investment**. Europe needs an MFF that not only responds to geopolitical pressures but also **champions social investment, civic participation, and access to learning opportunities for all adults** for Europe to remain competitive.

We need bolder and more targeted investments. We insist that the protection of Europe's citizens lies not so much in an increased military capacity but in investing in everyone's future after the current multi-crises - in **education**, skills for **personal** development and **social** resilience.

The proposed 50% increase for Erasmus+ is a positive signal. However, **taking into account inflation, overall participation in lifelong learning and the need to increase it, as well as the planned merger with other programs, the increase in funding will not lead to an actual increase in the budget**. In real terms, the program would retain barely the same capacity as in the current period.

We also note that, to date, there is no information available on how funding instruments such as the **DEAR** program (Development Education and Awareness Raising) will be integrated into the next MFF. If DEAR were to be merged with Erasmus+, this would require a further increase in the budget of the Erasmus+ program.

To maintain its impact and transformative potential, Erasmus+ requires at least 40% more than the current proposal, reaching € 55–60 billion for 2028–2034.

We welcome the 14% target for social expenditure under the National and Regional Partnership Plans (**NRPPs**). Still, **clarity is needed** on what proportion will support social inclusion, lifelong learning, and participation, including through the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+). Without transparent allocations, lifelong learning risks remaining fragmented and unevenly supported across Member States.

Greater flexibility must not come at the expense of financial sustainability

Greater flexibility in spending is, in principle, welcome, as it can help the EU respond to emerging crises. However, it must not undermine the stability and predictability of funding. In a context where certain sectors tend to receive targeted increases, flexibility without safeguards can result in sudden cuts to other sectors. Especially for sectors such as education and social inclusion, which are affected by austerity measures at the national and regional levels, stable, predictable EU investment is essential.

The question remains: what guarantees are in place to ensure that all sectors will be treated fairly and consistently throughout the seven-year period of the next MFF? Excessive flexibility also risks exacerbating the already existing lack of coherence between EU instruments. Flexibility should foster coherence, rather than generate confusion, overlap and fragmentation across Member States.

A thriving Europe depends equally on social resilience and democratic engagement

Since Mario Draghi's report, competitiveness has increasingly become a dominant focus of the EU. Erasmus+, for instance, appears ever more linked to labour-market objectives and economic performance. Frequent references to the **Competitiveness Fund** and the **Union of Skills** highlight the growing alignment of education with industrial and innovation policies.

While we recognise the focus on competitiveness, we recall the role that the EU's budget has to play in the implementation of the Union of Skills, the European Pillar of Social Rights, and the European Education Area, and we emphasise that **a thriving Europe depends equally on social resilience and democratic engagement**.

Although it may be difficult to calculate a short-term impact on social policies, investing in education remains the most effective way to safeguard our democracies and lay the foundations for a cohesive and resilient society.

A genuine boost is needed for adult learning

At a time when adult participation in education and training remains stagnant - below 40% and far from the 60% target for 2030, the EU should consider a genuine boost for adult learning: one that is inclusive and tailored to learners' real needs. The PIAAC results reveal a worrying picture for education and training participation, with Europe increasingly falling behind. **We call for structural and financial support in the next MFF that is adequate to prepare adults in Europe for changes in the labour market and to provide them with the life skills and transversal competences needed in our changing communities, society, and environment.**

EAEA welcomes the creation of **AgoraEU** as a consolidated program for culture, media, civil society, and democratic values. This initiative is a positive step toward strengthening participation and resilience. However, for AgoraEU to fulfill its promise, it must ensure meaningful involvement of adult learning organizations and provide clear, stable funding for civil society organizations working on community-based learning, democratic engagement, and social cohesion.

The next MFF should strengthen the alignment between priorities and instruments

Europe's key transitions - green, digital, demographic, economic, and social - require **a coherent strategy for skills, adult learning, and social participation**. While the overall architecture of the MFF remains broadly functional, the current distribution across headings does not fully reflect the scale and cross-cutting nature of Europe's skills and social inclusion challenges. Key priorities - such as adult learning, reskilling, upskilling, community-based learning, and inclusion - are addressed through multiple instruments (Erasmus+, ESF+, RRF, the European Semester, the European Education Area, the Union of Skills, etc.) without a coherent and predictable budgetary anchor. **This fragmentation creates inefficiencies, overlaps, and gaps in both implementation and access.**

The next MFF should strengthen the alignment between priorities and instruments by establishing clearer, skills-oriented allocations across Headings 2 (Competitiveness, Prosperity and Security) and 3 (Global Europe). It should also integrate an overarching budgetary priority for adult learning and social inclusion, ensuring that skills essential for the green, digital, and demographic transitions are consistently funded across programs rather than left dependent on changing national agendas.

Finally, **better coordination between MFF programs and the European Semester** would make EU funding easier to use and more consistent with countries' real needs. This would reduce administrative work and help EU investments in skills have a stronger and more visible impact.

Key Recommendations

- An **adequate recalculation** of the MFF allocation reflecting real inflation rates to safeguard its impact on the social dimension.
- A transparent and structured estimation of the budget allocated to the **ESF+** as was clearly specified in the previous MFF proposal.
- An effective **40% increase of the Erasmus+** beyond the current proposal to offset the inflation and better align to Draghi's and the European Parliament's recommendations.
- A stronger focus on improving the **coherence of the existing instruments**, rather than pursuing innovation before NGOs can fully implement existing tools.

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.



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