



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR
THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

For Information

EUROPEAN
ASSOCIATION FOR THE
EDUCATION OF ADULTS
(EAEA)

Transparency register
no. 3334854676-12

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The role of adult education in promoting active ageing and building inclusive societies

EAEA's Statement - March 2026

EAEA participated in the **European Commission's open public consultation on the upcoming strategy on Intergenerational Fairness**. EAEA welcomes the strategy and emphasises the pivotal role of adult learning and education in supporting responses to the age structure change that are occurring in our continent.

Key Recommendations

- **Mainstream ageing and intergenerational fairness** across EU policies, ensuring that ageing is addressed as a cross-cutting societal challenge.
- **Combat ageism and age discrimination** through education and awareness-raising, supporting learning initiatives that foster intergenerational dialogue.
- **Ensure that the implementation of tools such as the Union of Skills does not solely focus on adults of working age**, including adults over 65.
- **Recognise adult learning as essential infrastructure for intergenerational fairness**, ensuring that lifelong learning policies accessible, relevant and high-quality provision.
- **Invest in capacity-building for caregivers and professionals working with older adults**, supporting them in acquiring new competences.
- **Include older persons in the design of educational policies and learning initiatives** to better understand their learning needs, motivations, and barriers.



Co-funded by
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As demographic change transforms European societies, with older people projected to make up **129.8 million of the EU population by 2050** (a significant increase when compared to the 90.5 million at the start of 2019)[1], ensuring fairness and solidarity across generations is crucial. An ageing population is rapidly transforming European societies, placing increasing pressure on welfare systems, healthcare and long-term care services, labour markets, and public finances, while challenging intergenerational solidarity and the sustainability of current policy models in all Member States.

Active ageing: the (hidden) societal value

Investing in adults and their needs is a strategic investment in societal resilience and economic sustainability, enabling societies to navigate demographic change and remain cohesive beyond narrow employability objectives. Such investment must be considered holistically, including basic skills: literacy, numeracy, problem-solving, digital and citizenship skills in all phases of their life. The PIAAC results confirm that **one in five adults show low proficiency in reading and writing**. To achieve intergenerational fairness, as the upcoming strategy aims, we need to guarantee learning opportunities for adults of all ages. These times of rapid change make it all the more urgent.

Active ageing is not only connected to the availability of good health and care services. Rather, it relies on the extent of independence, belonging and active citizenship, as also outlined in the 2012 Decision on the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations[2]. **All adults**, including older people, should be supported and encouraged to participate in adult learning. Adult learning gives people spaces for dialogue, cohesion and mutual learning - a fundamental aspect to motivate people to remain active and contribute to society, beyond labour market needs, combating loneliness.

Learning opportunities need to be learner-centred, as the example of **WISELIFE** (Turkey, Greece, Poland, Italy) which created a digital memory platform to support older adults preserving and sharing their memories or **Ageing Well** which created an eLearning platform for adults 65+ to develop their digital skills, but also to develop creativity, resilience and social and interpersonal competences.

[1] Ageing Europe - statistics on population developments | Statistics Explained | Eurostat (2020), <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/SEPDF/cache/80393.pdf>

[2] 2012 Decision on the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32011D0940>

The positive outcomes of investing in intergenerational learning

Learning breaks barriers. It is not only the individual who benefits from the process: the positive outcomes are also reflected in the communities. Older people's experiences are a crucial contributor to resilient and adaptable communities. Thus, to ensure our communities continue to adapt in times of rapid change, measures should also reach older adults. When seniors are supported and encouraged to actively participate and share their knowledge with younger generations, **we are building bridges that will connect and enrich communities.**

Activities such as learning, volunteering, advocacy, mentoring younger adults and participating in physical activities contribute to **better mental health, while also strengthening adaptability, social resilience and trust in institutions through active participation and mutual learning.** Particularly in the current geopolitical context, adult learning across the life course plays a critical role in supporting individuals and communities to deal **with change and navigate uncertainty.** Moreover, investment in adult learning is a structural investment that reduces long-term pressure on healthcare systems, mitigates social isolation, and supports sustainable welfare models in ageing societies.

The **Duo for a Job programme** (Belgium, France and the Netherlands) exemplifies a successful mentorship model, pairing people over 50 with those under 34, revealing renewed purpose for older mentors alongside career support for young professionals. This initiative demonstrates that intergenerational dialogue addresses shared concerns, including age discrimination, which affects both young and older adults. Actively participating in society through activism is another way the older generations contribute to intergenerational fairness.

The **European Grandparents for Climate** represents national and regional organisations of grandparents and seniors who fight against climate change. Learning in a community setting can also be powered by arts and culture and by physical activity. In 2023, **EuropeActive's** annual campaign #BEACTIVE highlighted intergenerational inclusion, focusing on how intergenerational physical activities can engage people of all ages to be active together, fostering mutual understanding and respect between generations and strengthening a sense of community.

The case of EAEA's Grundtvig Award

Many other best practices of intergenerational dialogue and active ageing can be found in **EAEA's Grundtvig Award** publications, an award which celebrates innovation and excellence in non-formal adult education. These examples further illustrate the transformative potential of intergenerational approaches:

- Successful Aging and Green Transition (Portugal) empowers older adults as environmental stewards, fostering social relationships whilst advancing sustainable development goals through intergenerational environmental education.
- Silver Books (France, Portugal, Italy, Belgium) empowers seniors through digital storytelling, bridging generations whilst enhancing digital skills and reducing social isolation, demonstrating how technology can facilitate intergenerational connection.
- Mitigating the Impacts of Climate Change with Children-MECCC and Intergenerational Transfer (Turkey) uses intergenerational knowledge transfer to strengthen solidarity in environmental education, with older eco-guides training children who in turn engage parents and wider communities.

All the above practices demonstrate that promoting active ageing and intergenerational approaches supports societal inclusion, workplace integration, and community engagement. **Non-formal adult education plays a key role in ensuring access and outreach to older adults and learners furthest from education**, by offering flexible, community-based and learner-centred learning pathways beyond traditional institutional settings. These offers can take place in diverse settings rather than in traditional educational institutions (e.g. community centres, cultural organisations, libraries...), which facilitates intergenerational encounters as well as an easier outreach to older adults and adults currently furthest from learning. **While providing older people with new opportunities to learn, they bring valuable knowledge, experience, and perspectives that enrich younger generations, forge social connections and find renewed purpose.**



Recommendations

- **Mainstream ageing and intergenerational fairness across EU policies**, including education, skills, employment, health, social inclusion and digital policies, ensuring that ageing is addressed as a cross-cutting societal challenge rather than a sector-specific issue.
- **Combat ageism and age discrimination through education and awareness-raising**, by supporting learning initiatives that foster intergenerational dialogue, challenge stereotypes, and promote positive narratives on ageing and contribution across the life course.
- **Ensure that the implementation of tools such as the Union of Skills does not solely focus on adults of working age**, but fully reflects a lifelong learning approach by guaranteeing access to learning opportunities for adults of all ages, including older adults and those furthest from learning.
- **Recognise adult learning as essential infrastructure for intergenerational fairness**, and ensure that lifelong learning policies prioritise accessible, relevant and high-quality provision that supports participation, wellbeing, active citizenship beyond employability outcomes.
- **Invest in capacity-building for caregivers and professionals working with older adults**, equipping them with the competences needed to promote active ageing, wellbeing and intergenerational solidarity in care, community and learning settings.
- **Include older persons in the design of educational policies and learning initiatives**, through consultations, advisory councils or community forums to better understand their learning needs, motivations, and barriers.

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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