



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR
THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

For Information

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EDUCATION OF ADULTS
(EAEA)

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Erasmus+ for everyone: Europe needs a broad vision of Adult Learning and Education

EAEA's Statement
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The European institutions are negotiating the next Multiannual Financial Framework and the future of the Erasmus+ programme. The European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) is concerned about proposals to limit the definition of adult learning and education (ALE) to 'adult education' only, with potential negative consequences for future Erasmus+ funding for ALE.

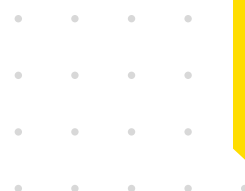
Key recommendations

- Holistic approaches to learning
- Keep learning in the definition of ALE to represent non-vet learning, important for civic engagement and personal growth
- Not conflating VET with Adult Learning and Education
- Meeting needs of diverse learners, from NEETs, through learners with disabilities and special learning needs, older learners, isolated learners and others
- Keeping mobility programmes active for learning and personal development
- Integrating sustainability in learning



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The new, shorter definition of ALE appears to have been deliberately kept vague so as not to entail any financial commitments. However, the Erasmus + programme is far more than a mobility programme solely for university students. Erasmus+ offers funding opportunities not only for higher education students, but also for learners and teachers/educators from schools, vocational education and ALE. This is a fundamental strength of the programme, particularly in times of crises that are shaking the very foundations of the European Union.

If the term 'learning' is omitted from the definition of ALE, there is a risk that future funding will be limited to employment-related programmes, whilst the essential contribution of ALE to social, civic and personal development will be overlooked. There is even a second, potentially far greater risk: namely, that it could be argued that, since ALE is already limited to labour market measures, it does not need to be funded by Erasmus+ at all, but is already sufficiently covered by other funding instruments, and in particular ESF+. **EAEA and its members are strongly committed to ensuring that ALE is recognised as a tool for developing the skills needed for both social and economic prosperity, based on the principles of the Delors report and SDG4.**

Therefore, **we call for a strong, holistic and inclusive understanding of ALE to be at the heart of the next Erasmus+ programme.** Erasmus+ is a key financing instrument for ALE in Europe and complements other European funding programmes such as ESF+ by taking a different approach. Unlike ESF+, which focuses primarily on social inclusion and labour market measures, Erasmus+ promotes transnational exchange, European peer learning and strategic cooperation, innovation in educational approaches, and the development of a European identity and shared values

ALE: an essential component of lifelong learning

EAEA's vision and definition of ALE:

Adult learning and education (ALE) is a lifelong, rights-based and learner-centred education sector. As the 'third pillar' alongside formal education, that is school education and higher education, it constitutes an essential component of lifelong learning.

ALE encompasses all organised and self-directed learning activities undertaken by adults in formal, non-formal and informal contexts, to develop knowledge, skills, competences, values and critical awareness for personal fulfilment, social inclusion, active citizenship and participation in society, employability, and a just twin transition.



ALE is inclusive and should be accessible to all adults, particularly those who are underrepresented or disadvantaged. It is based on participatory, flexible and context-specific approaches that recognise and build on diverse life experiences, learning pathways and learning needs.

ALE serves as a transformative force that empowers individuals and communities, promotes democracy and social cohesion, supports intercultural dialogue and solidarity, and enables people to play an active role in shaping just, resilient and sustainable societies.

A comprehensive understanding of ALE is not merely a matter of educational theory, but a political necessity. Democratic resilience and conscious actions depend on citizens who think critically, engage in dialogue and are able to navigate complex information landscapes. Social cohesion requires inclusive learning opportunities that bring together people from different backgrounds and generations. The twin transition requires not only technical skills, but also changes in values, behaviours and lifestyles. Public health and well-being are strengthened by learning that fosters connectedness, meaning and autonomy.

Narrow and reductionist views may result in falling participation, falling of key competences and basic skills having been reflected by PIAAC reports of OECD. In order to avoid and eliminate such negative trends and failures, we must grant adult learning and education are better recognised. Such recognition will result in better participation and performance in adult learning through non-formal and informal learning.

In this regards, European policy initiatives and strategies need to take all groups of adult learners into account:

- **NEETs, people with low basic skills and groups from disadvantaged backgrounds:** Everyone should have the opportunity to acquire basic skills, regardless of whether they are young or old, in the labour market or at home, or whether they are native-born or have migrated. Improved basic skills benefit democracy and the economy, people's well-being and social cohesion. So-called 'low-threshold' learning opportunities, in which bridges are built between non-formal learning and further education – including pathways to vocational training and higher education – through the validation of skills and guidance programmes, play a central role in empowering learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. These approaches are especially effective for those who may have had negative prior educational experiences, as they help rebuild confidence, overcome fear of failure, and restore motivation to learn.



- **Adults with disabilities and special learning needs:** Many people are unable to (fully) access the formal education system or receive the specific adjustments to their (learning) needs that they would require. ALE addresses this by offering flexible and inclusive learning pathways that promote social participation, autonomy, and quality of life.
- **Older learners and people living in isolated areas:** Europe's population is ageing, and it is in everyone's interest that older people remain healthy, socially included and active for as long as possible. There is ample evidence that ALE – including so-called 'leisure courses' – contributes precisely to this. People living in very isolated (rural) areas often face similar challenges. Community-based and non-formal learning opportunities, e.g. in local study circles, play a key role in overcoming isolation and strengthening local cohesion.
- **Everyone who needs better life skills:** To navigate complex life situations, the entire population needs a range of life skills; this is even more important for learners in precarious situations, (longer) unemployment, and those facing structural barriers. This can include managing a household budget, digital banking and dealing with public authorities, parenting skills, using social media, sustainability in everyday life, and much more. Life skills also tend to change: as a result of digitalisation, the skills required are constantly evolving and demand continuous personal development.
- **Adults who want to discover the added value of the European Union:** Mobility programmes for adult learners, particularly for those who did not have the chance to do so in their previous educational careers, offer an essential opportunity to discover new horizons and develop skills. During a public discussion, one woman explained: "When I was young, girls from my background simply weren't expected to go abroad to study." Those who have this opportunity turn into enthusiastic advocates for the EU and European cohesion. The diversity of European education offers the exploration of new educational and intellectual approaches through cross-cultural exchange, leading to greater European cohesion.
- **Adults who wish to incorporate greater sustainability into their lives and want to gain more knowledge about the twin transition, consumer issues, etc.:** Lifelong Learning is also recognised in the Sustainable Development Goals – which were co-signed by the European Union and declared a central commitment – as a key driver of both personal and societal development. Therefore, access to ALE must be guaranteed for all on an equal footing, in the interests of global justice and fair competition.



We acknowledge that inclusive and outreach-oriented approaches are resource-intensive. They cannot be sustained by market mechanisms alone. Reaching groups furthest removed from learning often requires targeted counselling, community engagement, tailored educational approaches and long-term support, which, whilst not yielding immediate financial returns, bring significant social, democratic and economic benefits for society as a whole.

For this reason, **strong and sustainable public financial support - including, and especially, at the European level, in times of austerity measures at the national level! - is essential.** Investment in ALE is an investment in social inclusion, democratic resilience, public health and economic cohesion. Without adequate funding, those who would benefit most from educational opportunities risk being left behind, which exacerbates inequalities and weakens social cohesion. Public support ensures that ALE remains a public good and a shared social responsibility, accessible to all and able to fulfil its transformative potential.

EAEA calls on the European institutions to reject a narrow definition of adult education. Instead, **the next Erasmus+ programme must be built on a broad, holistic and inclusive understanding of adult learning and education**, one that reflects the full reality of people's lives and the needs of European societies. This means taking all adults and all forms of adult learning and education into account. It will benefit democracy, the economy, the twin transitions, and the promotion of European values.

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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