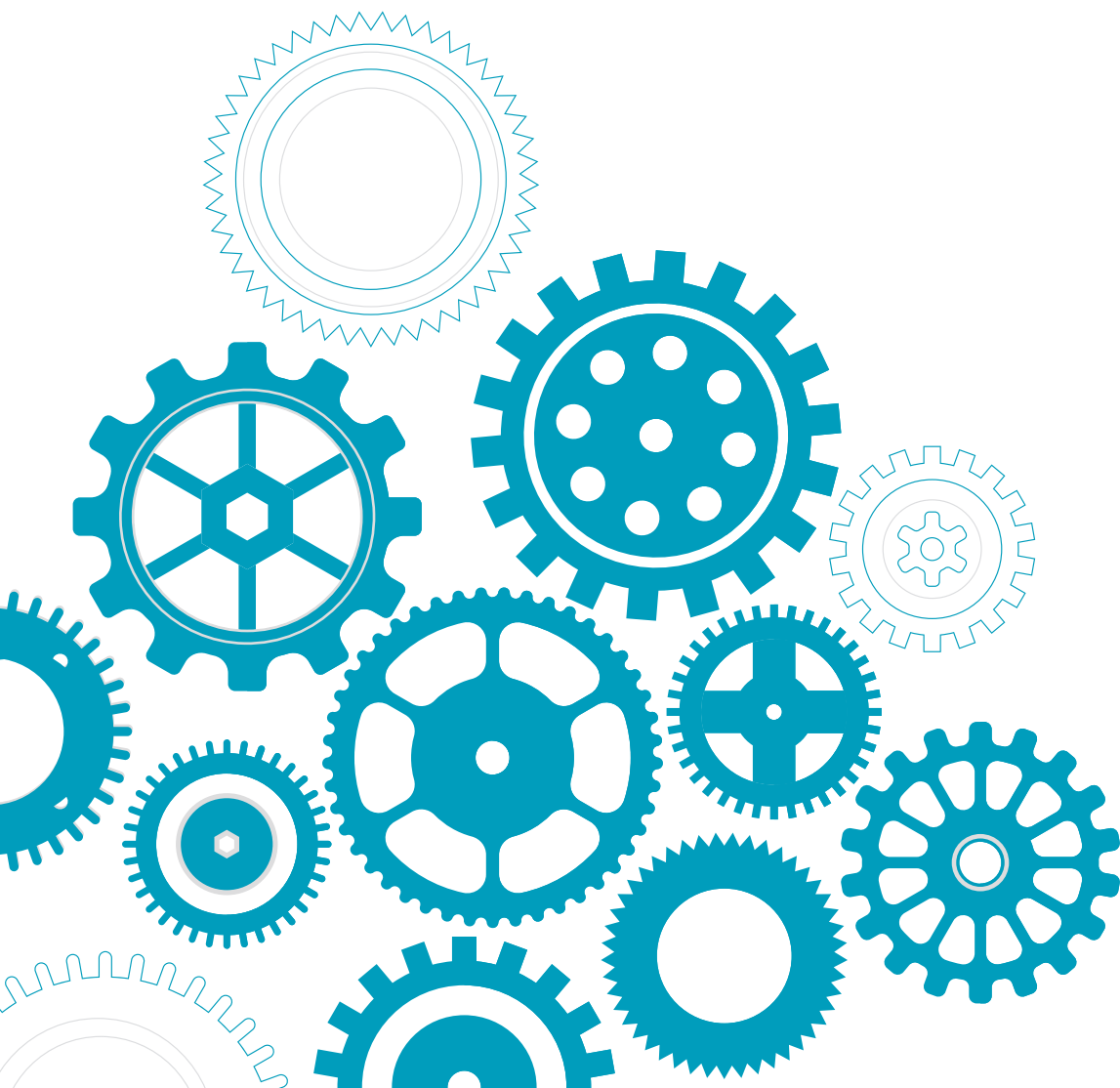




EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR
THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

EAEA POLICY PAPER
**LEARNING AND SKILLS
FOR ADULTS IN EUROPE**



Learning has many benefits for adults. There are a number of studies that underline the personal, social and economic returns of learning¹. Nevertheless, the progress towards the benchmark of 15 % participation of adults in lifelong learning is not happening as fast as needed. Additionally, the diversity in the rates across Europe is enormous, and in some cases even within a country, participation patterns vary widely.

EAEA therefore would like to highlight the importance of adult learning to decision-makers and provide recommendations on some of the key areas. Additionally, we would like to highlight the different strategies and objectives currently being proposed by European and international bodies (European Commission, OECD, UNESCO). EAEA believes that by introducing appropriate adult learning initiatives, a country or region can fulfil the objectives of all of these strategies at once. They will thereby contribute to the competitiveness, but also social cohesion and inclusion as well as active citizenship and democracy for their citizens and residents, in addition to many other benefits such as health and well-being, personal development and many others.

Introduction

781 million adults across the world and in average 20 % of the EU adult population have low literacy and numeracy skills². Many more cannot use digital tools confidently in everyday life. Without these skills individuals are at greater risk of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion.

Within the context of these challenges, political as well as research debates continue to stress the growing importance of adult education and learning. Recently, international and European institutions have proposed strategies that are intended to improve competence and skills levels across Europe and around the world. EAEA believes that these ambitious initiatives have the potential to make a real difference in the lives of those citizens in Europe and across the world; creating positive changes by providing opportunities for upskilling individuals.

This paper focuses on three recent relevant documents and initiatives:

- I. **The OECD Survey of Adults Skills (PIAAC)**
- II. **New Skills Agenda for Europe and Skills Guarantee (by the European Commission)**
- III. **Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

... while formulating recommendations for policy makers supporting the objectives of all three.

I The OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC)

The OECD Survey of Adult Skills is an international survey carried out in 33 countries as part of the PIAAC – Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies and the first results were released on 8 October 2013. It measures key workplace and cognitive skills needed for individuals to participate in society and for economies. The PIAAC survey found

¹ References

² OECD (2013) "Skilled for Life? – Key findings from the Survey of Adult Skills"

that in nearly all countries, adults with low proficiency and low levels of education show the lowest probability of reporting positive social outcomes: individuals with lower literacy skills are more likely to report poor health, to believe that they have little impact on political processes, and do not want to participate in associative or volunteer activities. In most countries, they are also less likely to trust others.

Learning improves health and increases civic engagement as well as trust

EAEA agrees with the results of PIAAC that even though wider skills (social skills, health literacy, civic engagement, critical thinking, problem solving or learning to learn), are often neglected, they have essential implications for the well-being including self-esteem and increased social interaction of individuals and society. Further research by EAEA and others (such as the BELL study³) found that adults, who attend adult education courses are 13 % more likely to vote. Adult learning has a number of benefits: it can help to substantially reduce poverty; it can provide a stable and open community, a chance for reorientation, a safe place and social recognition. The literature⁴ reveals that educational attainment in one generation has positive effects in the next generation. In the UK, studies have shown that family learning can increase children's academic achievement by as much as 15 percentage points. Also four-fifths of learners reported a positive impact on areas such as confidence and life satisfaction.

These benefits clearly illustrate that the impact of skills and learning goes far beyond earnings and employment. A focus on these outcomes understates the role that adult learning can play in the lives of individuals and communities. And therefore EAEA agrees with the OECD that investment in skills and learning is urgently necessary. The results from PIAAC furthermore underline the need to move from a focus on initial education towards strategies that support lifelong learning.

A re-focussing of priorities will need to include a wide range of key stakeholders, actors and policy areas: employers and companies, national and regional governments, NGOs, adult education institutions, CSOs, individuals etc. In this respect, the PIAAC survey results offer vital insights for policy makers towards increasing and maintaining investment in skills and adult learning.

II New Skills Agenda for Europe and Skills Guarantee

In June of 2016 the European Commission adopted the comprehensive New Skills Agenda for Europe. The aim of this agenda is to improve the quality of skills and their relevance for the labour market. It supports a shared commitment and works towards a common vision about the strategic importance of skills. This Skills Agenda has the aim to strengthen and streamline (some existing) initiatives to better assist Member States in their national reforms.

The New Skills Agenda is centred around **three key work strands, including 10 actions**⁵ :

³ BeLL Project <http://bell-project.eu/research.html>

⁴ <http://www.learningandwork.org.uk/community-learning/sites/default/files/resources/Compilation%20evidence%20family%20learning%20final%20revised%2001092013.pdf>

⁵ 1. A **Skills Guarantee** to help low-skilled adults acquire a minimum level of literacy, numeracy and digital skills and progress towards an upper secondary qualification.

1. Improving the quality and relevance of skills formation

People need a broad set of skills to fulfil their potential both at work and in society. Increasingly, however, evidence shows that policies to increase attainment alone are often not sufficient.

2. Making skills and qualifications more visible and comparable

Identifying and validating skills (acquired outside formal learning institutions) is particularly important for people with lower qualifications, the unemployed or those at risk of unemployment, for people who need to change career path and for migrants. It helps people better showcase and use their experience and talent, identify further training needs and take up opportunities for re-qualification.

3. Advancing skills intelligence, documentation and informed career choices

Policymakers and education providers need sound evidence of the skills, which will be required in the future to help them make the right decisions on policies and reforms, education curricula and investment.

Example: Action 1 - The European Commission's Skills Guarantee: Strengthening the foundation

EAEA believes that in particular the "Skills Guarantee", proposed in the New Skills Agenda for Europe, is a step in the right direction for adult learning and for those with low skills. Europe has a basic skills challenge. People need a minimum level of basic skills, including numeracy, literacy and basic digital skills, to participate in society. The Skills Guarantee is to help low-skilled adults acquire a minimum level of literacy, numeracy and digital skills and/or progress towards an upper secondary qualification or equivalent (EQF level 4). It provides:

- a skills assessment, enabling low-qualified adults to identify their existing skills and their upskilling needs;
- a learning offer, responding to the specific needs of individuals and of local labour markets; opportunities to have their skills validated and recognised.

Member States should put in place pathways for upskilling via a "Skills Guarantee" established

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2. A review of **the European Qualifications Framework** for a better understanding of qualifications and to make better use of all available skills in the European labour market.
 3. The "**Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition**" bringing together Member States and education, employment and industry stakeholders to develop a large digital talent pool and ensure that individuals and the labour force in Europe are equipped with adequate digital skills.
 4. The '**Blueprint for Sectoral Cooperation on Skills**' to improve skills intelligence and address skills shortages in specific economic sectors.
 5. A "**Skills Profile Tool Kit for Third Country Nationals**" to support early identification and profiling of skills and qualifications of asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants.
 6. A revision of the **Europass Framework**, offering people better and easier-to-use tools to present their skills and get useful real-time information on skills needs and trends which can help with career and learning choices.
 7. **Making Vocational Education and Training (VET) a first choice** by enhancing opportunities for VET learners to undertake a work based learning experience and promoting greater visibility of good labour market outcomes of VET.
 8. A review of the **Recommendation on Key Competences** to help more people acquire the core set of skills necessary to work and live in the 21st century with a special focus on promoting entrepreneurial and innovation-oriented mind-sets and skills.
 9. An initiative **on graduate tracking** to improve information on how graduates progress in the labour market.
 10. A proposal to further analyse and exchange best practices on effective ways to address **brain drain**.

in co-operation with social partners and education and training providers, as well as local, regional and national authorities.

Non-formal education is key

EAEA agrees with several key points in the New Skills Agenda, such as the necessity to increase participation in lifelong learning and to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to attain at least the equivalent level to upper secondary education qualification. We also agree with the necessity to have skills recognised, especially for people who have acquired their skills through non-traditional or informal ways. The focus on the recognition of skills across borders is crucial in times of intense mobility of workers. Ensuring continuous skills development of the workforce is necessary to allow people to develop their careers and to ensure that they have the right skills for tomorrow's jobs.

EAEA would like to strengthen even more the role of learners not only as workers/employees but also as citizens, parents, voters, consumers, etc. It is crucial to understand the needs of the individual on the one hand but also society on the other. EAEA wants to underline the unique role of non-formal adult education in reaching out to and empowering learners. It is essential that strategies and policies include a focus on the wider skills such as critical thinking, problem solving or learning to learn.

III Transforming Our World: The 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development

EAEA believes that adult education and learning is key for achieving social change and reducing poverty levels around the world. It has the capacity to positively affect many dimensions of poverty, peace, reconciliation as well as conflict prevention as it creates change through enhancing employment prospects, improving health levels and financial capability. However so far these benefits were often not understood outside of the educational discourse. There has been a lack of recognition of the education sector when looking at development goals. EAEA has been working for the increased inclusion of adult education in development policies and strategies.

The advocacy efforts of EAEA, the International Council of Adult Education (i.e. the global body ICAE) and its sister organisations in other regions of the world paid off when the development framework 'Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' was agreed on by the UN on August 1st 2015. It includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets in the search to overcome poverty and for a sustainable future for all. As opposed to the Millennium Development Goals (the former international development framework), which was mainly aimed at developing countries, the SDGs are targeting all countries, including EU Member States. Additionally the SDGs were devised in an open debate with the participation of not only UN agencies and governments, but also civil society and other stakeholders, including ICAE, of which EAEA is a member of. Lifelong learning and adult education can be found in the '**Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all**', in further detail in these targets:

- **4.4:** By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and

entrepreneurship;

- **4.6:** By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.

The ICAE position paper⁶ makes clear that adult literacy, skills for life and work and the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities are integral to the SDG 4 as it has been stated. Moreover, there is wide recognition of the key role played by adult education in the achievement of all Sustainable Development Goals.

Having common aims...

These documents and results clearly illustrate that there is an urgent need to prioritise, promote and invest in lifelong learning opportunities for all. It is about:

- the necessity to increase participation in adult learning;
- the improvement of literacy and numeracy levels, skills and competences of adults;
- the continuous skills development to allow people to develop in their careers and to ensure that they have the right skills for tomorrow's jobs;
- the high quality adult learning offers for all;
- the recognition of the importance and benefits of non-formal adult learning and the understanding of the potential of non-formal adult education to reach out to and empower learners;
- the inclusion of wider skills (as critical thinking, problem solving or learning to learn);
- the necessity to have skills recognised, particularly for people who have acquired their skills through non-traditional or informal ways;
- the opportunities to have skills and competences assessed, validated, recognised and given parity;
- accessible learning provision, responding to the specific needs of individuals and of local labour markets.

As the OECD PIAAC study states: "While countries cannot change the past, policies designed to provide high-quality lifelong opportunities for learning can help to ensure that the adults of the future maintain their skills" (*Skilled for life? Key Findings from the Survey of Adult Skills*, p.13).

⁶ International Council for Adult Education (ICEA) (2015) „Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development - Response from the International Council for Adult Education.“

The Role of Adult Education Providers and Civil Society

EAEA believes that long-term and wide-reaching strategies are necessary and therefore welcomes the fact that there are now three strategies at different levels that come together to increase adults' participation in learning, to widen access and to improve skills and competence levels across Europe.

Civil society is therefore best placed to contribute to policy developments in order to make them easier to implement and to guarantee their success. We are critical friends of the implementation process so that adjustments can be done in time.

Finally, we are the key actors for the success of the learning, education, training and upskilling. The roles outlined below clearly demonstrate that adult education providers and civil society organisations need to be at the heart of any successful strategy targeted at the learning and upskilling of adults.

1. Bridge builders – Outreach

Over the years, civil society organisations have built vast expertise in reaching out to disadvantaged groups, to people who have not had access to learning and who might not be very motivated to learn. We can build bridges between potential learners and learning provision, between sectors and institutions and provide the necessary entrance into a learning pathway.

Examples:

Greenwich Community College, Learning & Work Institute, United Kingdom:

As well as providing English classes with crèches in conjunction with Gurkha community groups, the project included research to measure the cost-effectiveness of early intervention, and guidance to help families obtain further qualifications and employment. This has led to a



connection being made with local schools in the borough, to deliver family learning as part of an ongoing process to ensure that the learning needs of the community are met. In cooperation with SSAFA Forces Help, a full-time worker was also employed to raise awareness of the project by means of further outreach work, carrying out research to determine language needs of, and existing ESOL provision for, the Gurkha community through learner and non-learner inclusion. Guidance and networking with the Nepalese community and the voluntary and community sector in Greenwich was also offered and the acquisition of ESOL skills promoted.

Dafni Kentro Epaggelmatikis Katartisis DAFNI KEK, Greece:

The communication and direct contact with everyone involved is one of DAFNI KEK's strong points. The centre organises an advice and support service for participants, runs various cooperative activities with the university, research institutes, further education providers, trade unions and also makes occasional private visits to its participants, for example when invited to a wedding. DAFNI KEK aims to reach out to people who do not normally or rarely get involved in further education through direct contact with independent migrant

organisations, Romany communities, associations for the deaf (using text messages or sign language interpreters) and the local church parish (as a means of informing job-seekers about courses and the benefits of participating).

2. Retaining learners – Empowerment

Once you have reached the learners, it is also necessary to retain them in the learning process. Appropriate and empowering teaching methodologies are necessary to keep people going and support them in achieving their goals. Adult education providers are doing their best to build trust and to empower.

La Ligue de l'enseignement – Flandre Youth Centre, France:

This city council-financed youth centre in the north of Paris is in an area with a high level of immigration. The youth centre is an information point for young people between 15 and 25. The centre's success is reflected by the fact that young people regularly attend. Many who have developed a trust in the centre take up other activities. The advice they receive helps them to access schooling or training for those in legal situations. For the others, the youth centre is often an important point of social contact or simply a shelter from the street that welcomes them.

FOLAC - Learning for Active Citizenship, Kvarnby Folk High School, Sweden:

The "Red Thread" course is attended by Roma women with a low level of qualification, most of whom only went to a school in their country of origin for a few years. Two participants on a previous course, themselves with Roma origins, helped Kvarnby Folk High School gain access to the women, seeking them out in their social environment to persuade them to join the course. To overcome their mistrust of institutions such as educational organisations, the course began with informal coffee meetings and open discussion about everyday life. A counsellor employed by the folk high school accompanied the course from the start, taking part in all the activities to build up participants' trust, enabling her to provide relevant advice. The course content and methods were mainly determined by the students themselves, even if the methods sometimes were old fashioned in a trained teacher's point of view. The main sign of the course's success is the fact that after it ended, 80 % of all students took further courses and/or found a job.

3. Spreading the information

Adult education providers and civil society are perfect multipliers and awareness raisers for adult education and upskilling.

Examples:

Mannheim Evening Academy, Germany:

At the start of the project, staff at Mannheim Evening Academy asked migrant women what active role they played in their own process of integration and what they had personally experienced as being the basic necessities for participation. A group of migrant women with good German skills, an open-minded approach to the topic of integration and a willingness to come to terms with their own background of migration and social skills came together to be trained as "multipliers". Their task would then be to support women and men with similar cultural backgrounds in developing a positive attitude to life in Germany and help them to reflect on and further their own process of integration.



Future multipliers are prepared in modular theoretical and practical seminars to work on integration courses by giving participants information, sometimes in their own languages if there are comprehension problems, on the subjects of health, food, New Media, schools and parenting. Alongside seminars on presentation and hosting techniques the training course also laid particular emphasis on visits to the local authorities which women and men on integration courses have to deal with, e.g. the public health department or the registration office. The academy staff themselves learned a lot from the multipliers which they were able to integrate into their teaching material and methods, discovering from the multipliers' experience how to organise their future courses.

Lifelong Learning Week, Slovenia:

The Lifelong Learning Week (LLW) in Slovenia has been paving the way for a profound understanding and implementation of the culture of lifelong learning by attracting public attention to more than 7,000 inspiring educational and promotional activities, providing information and guidance as well as other social and cultural events country-wide. The festival has grown into a movement, annually involving around 1,000 institutions, NGOs, interest groups and other stakeholders. The national coordinator is the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, working in close cooperation with about 30 to 35 regional and thematic coordinators, mainly Adult Education Centres. They in turn cooperate with their own networks at the local level, addressing target groups that are locally prioritised. This is achieved through events, information stands, open information phone numbers, websites and many other activities. Various media outlets are important partners in this endeavour.

The event has improved image of adult education and lifelong learning in general, with better informed citizen and more aware politicians. It has motivated citizens through learners' life stories. With strong cooperation and networking between different event providers, i.e. educational institutions and others, throughout the year, the LLW was a huge success. A key element of that success was creating a fair balance between top-down approach (national coordination) and bottom-up approach (regional/thematic coordinators).

4. The bigger picture

Basic skills are important but EAEA would like to underline the need for a more holistic approach to adult learning – we believe that life skills are what’s needed. Political developments also demonstrate that civic and intercultural competences as well as critical thinking and democratic approaches are more necessary than ever. Adult education providers have long experience in offering holistic approaches that take the whole person into account and are firmly rooted in solidarity, democracy and humanism.

Examples:

The Adult School of La Verneda-Sant Martí, Spain:

The Adult School of La Verneda-Sant Martí is democratic, pluralistic and participatory where the process of decision making and the control of activities is managed by all learners through several organisational structures. The school has a deep-rooted understanding of inclusion and equality, expressed in its basic principles and existing relevant committees that promote the participation of groups with a risk of social exclusion.

Dialogic learning based in the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire is the pedagogical basis of the project organisation that also inspires cultural creation and encourages participation. The main points of dialogic learning are: “egalitarian dialogue”, “solidarity”, “creation of meaning”, “instrumental learning”, “cultural intelligence”, “equal differences” and “transformation”. Teaching is organised by volunteers (about 150) made up of former or current learners of the school, neighbourhood residents, university staff and Spanish or international placement students among others. They are trained to carry out their work on an introductory course.

Pavee Point Travellers' Centre, Ireland:

Pavee Point Travellers' Centre is a non-profit organisation committed to supporting Irish Travellers. It was founded in 1983 as a continuing education provider promoting the development of skills and solidarity in the Traveller community and today represents Traveller interests at a national and international level. The aim of its members, both Travellers and non-Travellers, is to improve the quality of life and living circumstances of Irish Travellers, through working for social justice, solidarity, socio-economic development and human rights. Their work, which is based on working with Travellers instead of for them, builds upon the basic principle of recognising and respecting ethnic cultures.

In July 2012, the organisation established an Education Advocacy Initiative which aims to take two pronged approaches to effectively addressing the education needs of Travellers through:

- promoting Traveller inclusion in the education system by working in partnership with education providers;
- combating Traveller exclusion from the education system by working effectively with the Traveller community.

Our recommendations

EAEA has always seen adult education as having a key role in overcoming significant societal challenges. The documents and strategies we have referred to are confirming this argument and clearly demonstrate the need for more adult education. Adult education needs to be a key part of all lifelong learning strategies at the European and national levels.

EAEA and its members have much experience working with learners. Our expertise in this area can contribute to more practice-based policies and initiatives.

We recommend the following steps:

A. Outreach

What do we mean by outreach?

"{Educational} Outreach is a process whereby people who would not normally use adult education are contacted in non-institutional settings and become involved in attending and eventually in jointly planning and controlling activities, schemes and courses relevant to their circumstances and needs."

(Kevin Ward, Replan Review 1, August 1986)

Outreach is important in order to reach people who are currently not taking part in organised learning. The proposal for the Skills Guarantee clearly references outreach as a key part of its initiative. Within the OED network (see <http://www.oed-network.eu/>), EAEA and its partners have developed a number of recommendations linked to outreach.

- **Integrate adult education in existing strategies**
In many countries, there are social inclusion strategies for disadvantaged groups but they do not take adult education into account. By integrating adult education into existing initiatives and policies, these will be improved, and learning will become mainstreamed.
- **Prioritise and increase investment in adult learning**
Public investment in adult education and learning is crucial especially for those who left initial education without any qualifications and those who are living in socially disadvantaged environments. Particular attention needs to be paid to adult education for people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties and prison education.
- **Recognise the importance of non-formal adult learning**
In times of crisis and/or instability, it is easier for countries to focus on employability as the main interest and outcome from adult education. As a result, policy makers often underestimate the potential and possibilities of non-formal adult learning. However recent European political developments illustrate that a renewed emphasis on learning for active citizenship, democracy, sustainable development and European cohesion are necessary. Recognition of the

importance of the role non-formal adult education plays in strengthening the democratic society, active citizenship and of the wider benefits of adult education and lifelong learning is needed.

- **Structurally support non-formal adult education providers**
Better infrastructure for non-formal adult education through legislation, institutional development and continuous financing is needed. This can further support an individual's opportunities for re-orientation, a new challenge, social recognition and become an important tool for empowerment.
- **Increase dialogue with various stakeholders**
Close partnerships and mutual learning between governmental organisations and in particular a close cooperation with civil society organisations (CSOs), including learners, are needed to raise awareness, develop appropriate measures and make use of the synergies of all social actors. Also, cooperation in respect of policy, practice and research are necessary for improvements in all these areas.
- **Fund and support learning in communities**
Communities are essential when wanting to support increased participation of potential learners who have had the least opportunities in the past. Adult learning providers, including the voluntary and community sectors, need more investment including support and funding. This will benefit both learners and communities – better skills, more participation, more active citizenship and more social cohesion are a win-win situation. Learning in communities will also strengthen cohesion, resilience and openness within them, making it essential for dealing with any challenges of the 21st century. This is also true for remote and rural areas, where adult learning should be made possible.
- **Identify and then remove barriers**
Barriers that hinder people, especially from disadvantaged groups, from participating in adult education need to be examined in depth. We urge member states to analyse their legal and financial frameworks function in terms of promoting or hindering the participation of disadvantaged groups.
For example:
 - Financing tools should encourage adult education providers to reach out to disadvantaged groups and those learners that are otherwise hard to reach and engage with, rather than to prefer to work with more easy to reach/traditional learners (this happens when payment is based on graduates of courses).
 - Support migrants' opportunities to attend free or low-cost courses right after they arrive in the country.
 - Encourage access to learning for older learners.
 - Make sure that validation systems are in place that might make the entrance into learning easier.
 - Encourage adult education providers to try new and democratic forms of outreach and learning.

A thorough analysis of the legal basis and financial tools can reveal built-in barriers which can then be removed.

B. Validation

EAEA has also done considerable work in the area of validation, and has, together with its partners, developed an Action Plan for Validation (<http://www.eaea.org/en/projects/eaea-coordinated-projects/ava/action-plan.html>).

In order to upskill people, it is necessary to start from their knowledge, skills and expertise. Many low-qualified and / or low-skilled people will have acquired skills through their everyday lives and their work. It is therefore enormously important that they have the opportunity to have their skills assessed and validated so that they can continue on the appropriate learning pathway.

In order to achieve the best results, we have the following recommendations:

- Increasing the accessibility and transparency of the systems benefiting all candidates, especially those who are disadvantaged.
- Setting up a structured validation process that will make the entire validation process and the individual stages in the process understandable and visible for the candidate.
- Developing or enhancing a structured and cross-sectorial dialogue between validation stakeholders that will increase reliability and trust for the validation results as well as foster the cooperation among them.
- Increasing the use of the existing tools and to study their transferability to different contexts.
- Develop a (national / regional / local) strategy that includes all lifelong learning sectors as well as comprehensive information about validation. Make sure that the strategy sees disadvantaged candidates as a key target group and that the non-formal sector is adequately heard.

C. Implementation

- **Ensure that adults can go “One step up”**
We call for initiatives that will qualify to secondary-level schooling. It is essential that possibilities for adults to go one step up in terms of qualifications become a permanent feature of adult education and training, so as to enable social mobility and the growth of competence, particularly for individuals with low qualifications.
- **Make real lifelong learning systems in Europe a reality**
Real lifelong learning systems in Europe, which include exchange and equality between formal, non-formal and informal education and learning, are needed. The integration of informal and non-formal learning in the European and National Qualification

Frameworks is a crucial development. EAEA recommends setting up an integrated system with an emphasis on recognition of prior learning, validation of all kinds of learning and a coherent approach that allows for smaller steps and achievements at lower levels. Validation is a key tool in order to promote lifelong learning, to ensure more flexible learning pathways, to encourage learners and build their self-confidence as well as to create a more comprehensive understanding of competences.

– **Adult education needs the best trainers and staff**

EAEA calls for the development of staff capacities through high quality education and in-service training. In a number of countries, the majority of trainers are freelance and/or volunteers. Training and professional development, in particular for those working with disadvantaged groups, to ensure high quality learning is crucial. New challenges such as ICT also necessitate further training for adult education staff.

– **Provide access to and skills for ICT**

With the ever-increasing use of computers and “smart devices”, a significant number of citizens are becoming isolated for lack of access, lack of knowledge or for disinterest. Adult education can help to bridge this ‘digital divide’.

– **Include learners’ voices**

All learners should have a say in their learning. Starting from regular consultation of learners, to learners’ committees and advisory boards. There are many ways to include learners in the management, organisation and teaching in adult education organisations. Adult education providers become more democratic and have a much better understanding of their learners’ needs. In order to make all kinds of learning possible we call for close cooperation with civil society organisations and representatives of all learners as well as for a better legal representation

– **Refugees and migrants**

Any policy paper on adult learning in Europe 2016 is not complete without taking into account the many refugees a number of EU member states have taken in. Currently, a lot of effort is going into providing language courses for these refugees, many of them by volunteers and civil society. EAEA nevertheless believes that the main teaching should be done by professionals and that volunteers should have the main task of practicing.

Additionally, EAEA, together with its partner EBSN, would like to underline very clearly that the learning of a foreign language is not the same as basic skills learning. There are clear didactical differences in the teaching of foreign languages on the one hand and basic skills on the other, which demand different teaching knowledge and competences.

EAEA and EBSN have also seen that, in some cases, the budget for basic skills learning has been shifted to refugees’ training. We would like to underline that this pitches one vulnerable group against another one and might cause rifts between people in the receiving countries and newcomers.

Summary: Learning is everybody's business

Therefore at EAEA we believe that adult learning as well as wider skills are often neglected, but have essential implications for the well-being including self-esteem and increased social skills of individuals and society. The impact of skills and learning goes far beyond earnings and employment. A focus on these outcomes understates the role that adult learning can play in the lives of individuals and communities.

EAEA recently published the 'Manifesto for Adult Learning in the 21st Century'. It clearly demonstrates the positive impact that a well-financed, high-quality adult education system can have on the development of Europe. EAEA underlines that adult learning results in considerable economic and social benefits for individuals and for society as a whole. PIAAC proves the requirement for continuous learning in Europe, emphasising "a strong positive relationship between participation in adult education and skills proficiency". There is still a call for a holistic attitude towards education's benefits, beyond qualifications, certifications and economic benefits, acknowledging that education often produces impact in learners' homes, workplaces and communities. We need a 'Learning Europe' where everyone can and wants to participate in learning and finds high-quality, inclusive, affordable and inspiring offers to do so.

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