

*Manifesto for*  
**Adult Learning**  
*in the 21st Century*



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR  
THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS



## The Power and Joy of Learning

The European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) proposes, with this manifesto, to create a Learning Europe: a Europe that is able to tackle the future positively and with all necessary skills, knowledge and competences. We propose a European-wide effort to go one step up, to develop a knowledge society that is capable to deal with the challenges of our time. This demands sustainable investments now on the European, national, regional and local levels in adult education. This will pay off in the long-term from many perspectives: for competitiveness, well-being, healthy populations, growth and more.

Adult education can help change lives and transform societies – it is a human right and common good. Currently, the main European policy strategy is the European Agenda for adult learning, which is being implemented by national coordinators at the Member State level. EAEA believes that the Agenda needs to be strengthened but also that additional efforts are needed. This manifesto

will outline how much adult education can contribute to a number of European policies. However, in order to do so, solid public investments in adult education organisations and learners need to be made.

Many decision-makers, businesses and citizens are not aware of the extent to which adult education can help deal with societal, economic and individual challenges. This is why EAEA proposes a European Year for Adult Learning, which would raise awareness of adult education across Europe. The theme of the year would be “The Power and Joy of Learning”. We want to underline the transformative possibilities of adult education on the one hand and, on the other hand, the positive experience of learning. Many people are wary of learning because of their bad school experience, others feel that training might be another pressure they have to suffer from for their success in life. EAEA wants to underline the positive side, also because we know that this is the best way to attract those furthest away from learning.

## Challenges and answers

Adult education is a key tool for tackling some of the main challenges in Europe today. Europe faces growing inequalities, not only between people but also between regions and countries within Europe. More and more European citizens seem to question European values by voting for xenophobic and anti-European parties, while small groups of young men become so far radicalised that they commit acts of terror. In many regions and countries, unemployment (especially of young people) is very high. Growing digitalisation reinforces this situation but also demands new skills and competences of employees, citizens and consumers.

Migration and demographic change see shifting populations in Europe – people get older and therefore want to be active and healthy for longer, but we also need more migrants, which is in delicate balance or contrast with unemployment rates and growing xenophobia. More recently, Europe has faced an influx of refugees, which poses huge challenges

to European governments. This has led to a wave of support from European citizens on the one hand but to abuse and hatred by others on the other hand.

Climate change and other environmental challenges continue to pose threats to (not only) Europe’s future and necessitate more sustainable economies, societies and lifestyles. Adult education holds the positive answer to many of these issues. It can benefit the individual but also societies and economies.

Do we want an innovative, more equal, sustainable Europe in which the citizens participate democratically and actively, where people have the skills and knowledge to live and work healthily and productively and take part in cultural and civic activities from a very young to a very old age?

In this publication, EAEA will present arguments, studies, examples and learners’ stories that will illustrate our position.



# Active citizenship, democracy & participation

The EAEA and its members stand for a strong commitment to Europe and European values. We believe that intercultural exchange and cooperation are key to a Europe of respect, participation and cohesion.

Many adult education organisations were established as the result of emancipatory movements (workers, women, or religious organisations, etc.), and adult education still provides the knowledge and know-how as well as the space to develop democracy and citizen-

ship. Additionally, adult education can strengthen and regenerate civil society.

Increasing radicalisation in Europe has shown that democratic attitudes, tolerance and respect need to be reinforced. Intercultural and inter-religious dialogue can play a big role in this.

But adult education can also bring more democracy and participation to the national and regional levels, and enable transparency and the develop-

ment of a lively civil society as well as contribute to critical thinking and empowerment.

The PIAAC study<sup>1</sup> has shown a clear correlation between ‘trust’ and ‘political efficacy’ with skills levels. The lower one’s basic skills, the lower one’s trust is in institutions and the lower one’s belief is in one’s ability to have an impact. People who participate in adult education also volunteer more often.

<sup>1</sup> [www.oecd.org/site/piaac/surveyofadultskills.htm](http://www.oecd.org/site/piaac/surveyofadultskills.htm)

## Good practice

The Citizens First project in Romania has made a sustainable, nation-wide difference in small communities, in particular in the rural area. The project implements active citizenship to give people the voice to decide what is a priority for their community, and provides them with the tools to create solutions they themselves can implement. Together they identify communal problems, vote on issues that will be addressed first, and collaboratively develop action plans. The Citizens First project went beyond the sheer implementation of the action plans. It produced a mindset shift from perceiving the public authorities as decision-makers to relating to them as partners for development. The question becomes: “what is to be done and what can we do ourselves for us and for our community?”

## Good practice

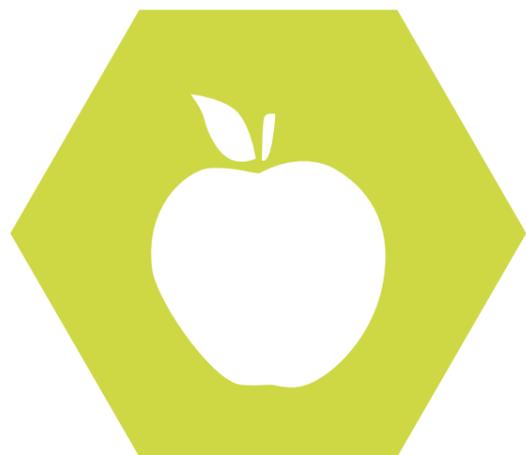
The Swedish Muslim study association Ibn Rushd ran a peace project: Att främja islamisk fredskultur (The promotion of Islamic Peace Culture) Young Muslims across the country were to be Peace Agents. They have been given the knowledge and tools needed to work with peace issues, anti-violence and human rights. The long term aim is to combat Islamophobia – fear and animosity towards Islam, mainly by people in the West – and Westphobia – fear and animosity towards the West, mainly by Muslims. The foundation for a Muslim peace movement, Svenska muslimer för fred och rättvisa (Swedish Muslims for Peace and Justice) has been laid.

## Research proof

Regarding societal cohesion, the main contributions of education are greater trust, more civic co-operation and lower levels of violent crime. Additionally, the individual engagement in education is a predictor of engagement in public life because “the more students are engaged in their education, the more willing they are, on average, to play a positive role in public life” (p. 20). Adult education leads moreover to an increase in racial tolerance and a greater likelihood of voting. Preston (2004) analyzed the impact of adult education on participants’ civic lives and on the formation of values, particularly tolerance. He found that learning can have an impact on informal and formal civic participation. Concerning informal civic participation, it has helped individuals to build, maintain, dismantle, reconstruct and enrich their social networks.

Additionally, the formation of values can be influenced by learning. For example changes in tolerance, understanding and respect were reported by respondents. Civic and social engagement (CSE) as learning outcome has been analyzed by the OECD (2007).

Read more: [www.eaea.org/media/policy-advocacy/piaac/piaac-analysis\\_wakeup-call-for-europe.pdf](http://www.eaea.org/media/policy-advocacy/piaac/piaac-analysis_wakeup-call-for-europe.pdf)



# Life skills for individuals

Adult education can provide a number of skills and learning experiences that have a number of benefits and purposes: from basic skills to language learning, from leisure courses to vocational training, from family learning to health provision, adult education can provide a number

of ways that will support individuals throughout their careers and lives.

But it is not only the direct learning outcomes that are important for people: research shows that participating in non-formal adult education has a number of benefits.

Adult education can transform lives and provides new opportunities. It can offer new job opportunities, open the pathway to formal learning, help school dropouts return to education, help parents in their tasks, activate people's artistic and cultural passions and lead to healthier lifestyles.

## Research proof

The data show that adult learners experience numerous benefits from liberal adult education. They feel healthier and seem to lead healthier lifestyles; they build new social networks and experience improved well-being. Moreover, adults who participate in liberal adult education appear to feel more motivated to engage in lifelong learning and view it as an opportunity to improve their lives. These benefits were reported by learners across all course areas, ranging from languages and the arts to sport and civic education. [...] People with a low level of education benefit particularly from adult education (ISCED 1: 32% and ISCED 2: 22 %)

*Read more: [www.bell-project.eu](http://www.bell-project.eu)*

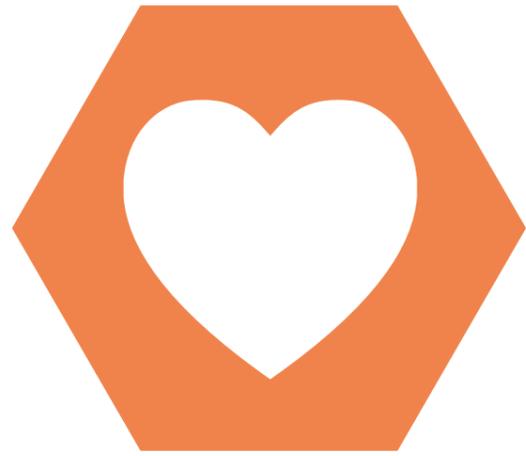
## Good practice

Mel from the UK had been agoraphobic for thirteen years when, in September 2007, she plucked up the courage and enrolled on a literacy class. Despite extreme nerves, she started the class, finding it got easier each week. Mel enjoyed the course with Hull Adult Education, passing entry level 3 and levels 1 and 2 in Literacy. She completed her next goal, too, and passed Numeracy level 1.

Mel wanted to help others so she completed in-house volunteer training and started to volunteer in a class for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities. Wishing to become a tutor, Mel passed NVQ level 1 in Learning Support and progressed to the Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector course, which she hopes to complete soon. Now having the confidence, Mel enjoys days out with her family, has lost six stone in weight and volunteers at Dove House Charity Shop as well as continuing to learn.

"There is no stopping me now. I have gone from nothing to gaining a new life – all because I returned to learning," smiles Mel.

*Read more: [www.alw.org.uk/winners-stories/winner-story/2011/melanie-turner](http://www.alw.org.uk/winners-stories/winner-story/2011/melanie-turner)*



# Social cohesion, equity & equality

Educational levels have a huge impact on people's opportunities in life. This ranges from the kind of jobs they can attain to life expectancy. The positive effects of education tend to be reproduced by the fact that those with higher educational levels tend to continue to learn and be given more opportunities to continue learning than those with lower levels.

Adult education can compensate a lack of education in earlier life and enables social mobility. From basic skills training to second chance schools and language learning for migrants, adult education provides many opportunities to improve individuals lives but also to equalise societies on a larger scale and to create fairer societies as well as more economic growth.

Outreach to groups that are not participating in learning is necessary in order to achieve more social inclusion. With the right methodologies, people will be able to participate more: in society, democracy, economy, arts and culture.

## Good practice

At adult school La Verneda - Sant Martí, welcoming people who come to the school for the first time is considered an important task that must be done individually. Time is taken for each person who comes to the school. Participants from previous years play a crucial role in the reception, registration and assignment of groups as they have the communication skills and an understanding of what it is like to come for the first time. The decision, which level a new participant is assigned to, is based on dialogue and consensus. Attention is paid to the fact that each person understands the process he or she is in and is placed in the group and level where they will learn the most. Staff and volunteers are careful to avoid the feeling of being tested.

## Good practice

In Sweden 'Study motivating folk high courses' encouraging young job-seekers to continue their studies has seen very good results. After the course, some 40 % of participants continued to either more studies or work, and over two-thirds feel motivated to study and believe that education is a route into work.

Special folk high school courses for immigrants to support their settling in Swedish society and study circles for refugees who are seeking asylum are taking place all over Sweden.

These successful special efforts are made possible because they are based on existing competences and organisations within a national structure of adult learning, state funded on a regular basis. A sustainable model for adult learning which is also flexible to meet new needs and challenges in society.



## Employment & digitalisation

The positive link between employment and learning is obvious: Learning workers and employees are important for innovation, productivity, competitiveness and entrepreneurship. Workplace learning is one of the key drivers for adults' participation in lifelong learning, and cooperation with all main stakeholders, especially the social partners, is essential. While EAEA agrees with the importance of up- and reskilling, we would like to underline that all learning is good for employment.

EAEA promotes an approach to learning that supports key and transversal skills. A purely technical approach is in danger of teaching a limited set of skills which might become obsolete soon. If you include learning to learn, innovation and entrepreneurship

together with a more in-depth interest in the field in the learning experience and outcomes, one can create lifelong learners who will be able to combine in-, non- and formal learning to stay up-to-date.

Forecasts clearly demonstrate that Europe will need more knowledge and fewer low-skilled workers in the future. The best example is the development of digitalisation. We are at the cusp of enormous changes – from e-governments to online shopping to automation and all the changes that the internet will bring. This means that we need to close the digital gap and make sure that everyone is comfortable using computers, tablets or smartphones but also all other related tools. We can also assume that many jobs are

and will be disappearing and new ones will be created. Europe will need knowledge workers that can adapt quickly to these changes, and learning is the key for this capacity. Many governmental services and tools for civic participation are now available online. Digital skills ensure digital inclusion and participation.

Additionally, the service industries will also see radical changes, which will also mean a reduction in human contact. The same is true for e-learning, which offers many possibilities but which also reduces the social aspect which is important for many learners. Adult education can provide the necessary meeting spaces that are part of the well-being, mental health, solidarity and social cohesion that Europe needs.

### Research proof

The BeLL study shows that participation in liberal adult education generates multiple benefits for individuals. These benefits are likely to have also an impact on their immediate social groups like family, work place and other social networks, and therefore liberal adult education generates benefits for society as well. Out of the 8646 respondents, 70 -87 % have experienced positive changes in learning motivation, social interaction, general well-being and life satisfaction. Less frequently experienced changes relate to work and career and to active citizenship, but even here 31 - 42 % have experienced some positive changes.

Read more: [www.bell-project.eu/cms/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/BeLL-Survey-results.pdf](http://www.bell-project.eu/cms/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/BeLL-Survey-results.pdf), p. 122



## Migration & demographic change

Adult education can play a vital role in the current refugee situation in Europe. Through civic education and intercultural learning a mind-set of active citizenship and hospitality can help create an integration-friendly culture amongst the Member States. In providing language and basic skills training for migrants from inside and outside of Europe, the migrants will be enabled to become active citizens in their new home countries.

The implementation of cultural dialogue can foster an exchange between the indigenous and new

citizens of the Member States, both helping migrants to understand the cultures and social contracts of their new home countries and giving the host citizens the chance to adopt new habits and develop their countries into future-oriented democracies. In the long-term, Europe will need these – and more – migrants in order to cope with the demographic changes that have already started taking place. On the side of demographic changes, active aging will only be guaranteed if learning in later life is provided for. Research shows that learning seniors are more active,

volunteer more, work longer and are healthier. Learning seniors are therefore a solution for the demographic crisis and increase their beneficial effect on European democracies.

Furthermore, intergenerational learning enables both older and more experienced people and the young to profit from each other's knowledge; and on the other hand the joint measures will strengthen intergenerational solidarity within the European societies and therefore foster the democratic dialogue which is needed in times of crisis.

### Good practice

Fatima arrived in Ireland in November 2013 with her mother and two brothers. She lived in Dublin for three months and then moved to Tullamore with her family. Fatima is a refugee and she is originally from Afghanistan. She travelled through Iran and then onto Syria where she lived for three years. She was supported by the Department of Justice with language classes when she arrived in Ireland. She found the classes too segregated and wanted to integrate with Irish people. She was then told about a VTOS option and has just finished her first year. The VTOS course is a two-year course and although students typically take Junior Cert in year one and Leaving Cert in year two, Fatima felt that she was capable of sitting two Leaving Cert subjects this year and was supported by the Tullamore Further Education Centre to take Physics and Chemistry. She also availed of facilities in Athlone IT for her practical work. Fatima is very ambitious and has excellent English, she feels that she has been greatly supported by the Laois and Offaly ETB and she has high hopes for her future.



# Sustainability

Sustainability in all areas is becoming a real challenge for Europe – from environmentally friendly consumption and transport to energy efficiency – European citizens need a lot of information on the one hand and innovative spaces on the other hand to develop new lifestyles, new projects, new approaches. Adult education can help provide the information, the debate spaces and the creativity.

Adult education is a driver in the interconnections of the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic social and environmental) and can contribute to the UN's 2030 Agenda. There is a real need for education for sustainable development, and especially non-formal education has a very high impact.

Adult education can make a huge contribution to both the Lisbon

agenda for sustainable, smart and inclusive growth as well as Juncker's agenda. Adult education can boost jobs and growth and the digital single market. By supporting sustainability, adult education can contribute to the energy union and a forward looking climate change policy. Adult education can strengthen the single market, for example by providing the skills for the free movement of workers as well as shore up European values and trust.

## Research proof

Adult education has a central role for sustainable development. The pilot course [...] leans on the Nordic tradition of civic formation "folkeopplysning". [...] The target groups that the students work with in their daily work are divided between adult learners, broadly: local citizens and school teachers. Thematically the projects that the students will work with during the course cover the following:

- sustainable buildings and materials;
- sustainable food;
- organising of partnerships between local authorities, civil society and local private sector – how to revitalize the Local Agenda 21 approach;
- systems for environmental certification and sustainable management;
- ethical consumption and global citizenship.

## Good practice

The "Umweltberatung" in Austria (eco-counseling) has developed the Energy Efficiency Driving License (EEDL). The EEDL is a tool for energy saving in private households, in small and middle-sized enterprises and in communities in order to meet the needs for climate protection and energy savings. Energy saving in everyday life contributes to the reduction of energy costs, which is particularly important for people and households at the risk of poverty. A conscious use of energy and the development of energy-efficient lifestyles and behaviours is therefore also a contribution to the reduction of costs and helps combat poverty. The conscious use of energy in the work context contributes to increasing competitiveness through cost reduction. Enterprise-supported resource-handling can also encourage employees to contribute to sustainability in their own private lives.

*Read more: [www.umweltberatung.at/ueber-uns-international](http://www.umweltberatung.at/ueber-uns-international) and [energie-fuehrerschein.at](http://energie-fuehrerschein.at)*



# Adult education & European policies

Adult education contributes to:

- European strategies for a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.
- The values at the center of the European strategy as equity, social cohesion, active citizenship, and also creativity and innovation.
- Raising Europe's employment rate by getting people (back) into work, by validating their skills and competences or upskilling them.
- Efforts to reduce the high number - 80 million - of people with low basic skills who benefit

less from lifelong learning than more educated people: adult education does outreach and empowerment actions to reach out to them.

- The EU target of having at least 20 million fewer people in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion as education allows them to gain self-confidence and find ways to be socially included and find a job (or a better job).

From jobs and growth to the digital single market, from climate

change to the internal market, from migration to global issues and democratic change, adult education contributes to both EU 2020 and Juncker's agenda. Additionally, adult education is a key tool for achieving the UN's Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In order to progress to a cohesive, prosperous, peaceful Europe that is able to deal with the challenges of the future in a positive way, adult education is essential.



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



**EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR  
THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS**

Mundo-J, Rue de l'Industrie 10, B-1000 Brussels

Tel. +32 2 893 25 22, [eaea-office@eaea.org](mailto:eaea-office@eaea.org)

[www.eaea.org](http://www.eaea.org)