

## Why Adult Education Matters!

### Adult Education is unique

- ✓ Reaching adults that are hardest to reach
- ✓ Engaging in effective outreach, motivation and guidance
- ✓ Empowering people to engage in learning and become an active member of society
- ✓ Promoting citizenship and the common European values
- ✓ Delivering tailored and flexible learning opportunities to improve literacy, numeracy and digital competences
- ✓ Supporting health and wellbeing
- ✓ Building wider skills in adults returning to learning
- ✓ Including parent education, family learning and migrant education

### EU Initiatives rely on Adult Education

- ✓ Europe's 2020 goal (15% participation in lifelong learning)
- ✓ Upskilling Pathways
- ✓ European Pillar of Social Rights
- ✓ Paris Declaration 2015
- ✓ Renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning
- ✓ New Skills Agenda
- ✓ Key Competences Framework

### The EU needs Adult Education

- ✓ Promoting the idea of European integration, European values and a European identity
- ✓ Fighting the rise of populism and radicalisation
- ✓ Integrating the migrant population
- ✓ Promoting active participation in society
- ✓ Improving the level of skills and competences and providing citizens with a second chance
- ✓ Combating marginalization and social exclusion

### Adult Education needs Erasmus+

- ✓ Creating a rich European area of adult learning
- ✓ Supporting peer learning and the exchange of good practice
- ✓ Creating sustainable networks and communities
- ✓ Enhancing inter-cultural sensibility and competence
- ✓ Strengthening international relations of organisations
- ✓ Enriched knowledge and competence
- ✓ Enhancing the status of adult education organisations in the local and regional community

**Europe needs a strong Adult Education Sector in the Erasmus+ successor programme!**

## **Towards a strong Adult Education<sup>1</sup> Sector in the Erasmus+ successor programme!**

The Erasmus+ National Agencies in the field of Adult Education have formulated this paper to push for a strong Adult Education Field in the Erasmus+ successor programme.

We see this non-paper as a first step towards making recommendations towards a strong Adult Education Field in the Erasmus+ successor programme. It will outline the unique features of adult education approaches, which makes it uniquely placed to most effectively address Europe's broader societal challenges and policy concerns around low levels of educational attainment amongst those adults who are hardest to reach.

The Erasmus+ Mid Term Evaluation has shown that the adult education sector is significantly underfinanced to address the challenges which adult education is faced with rising inequality, increasing poverty and (youth) unemployment, together, more recently, with increased migration and the rise of violent extremism. We see this paper as a first step towards positioning the Adult Education Field as a strong sector and one that needs to be significantly better resourced as a field in the new Erasmus+ programme to address these challenges.

This paper also provides recommendations and is an opener for the subsequent discussion on the specific structure of the new programme.

### **Adult Education and Europe's Policy Goals**

The Adult Education Field has key features which make it uniquely placed to address the effective implementation of European policy and initiatives which we reference directly and indirectly throughout this paper including;

- Europe 2020 & ET 2020
- Renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning 2011
- Paris Declaration 2015
- Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults 2016
- The New Skills Agenda 2016
- Updating and further developing the key competences for lifelong learning and
- European Pillar of Social Rights where education, training and lifelong learning play an important role (Chapter I, Equal opportunities and access to the labour market).

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<sup>1</sup> Adult learning is the entire range of formal, non-formal and informal learning activities which are undertaken by adults after having left initial education and training including tertiary education and which is neither continuing vocational education and training nor tertiary education

### **Reaching adults that are hardest to reach**

Adult Education and its approach is indispensable for reaching **Europe's 2020** goals, in particular the goal of increasing adult participation in lifelong learning. According to Eurostat the share of adults, participating in learning does not seem to be increasing fast enough to meet the **ET 2020** benchmark of raising participation to at least 15 % by 2020. Over the last four years, the share stagnated between 10.7 % (2013, 2015) and 10.8 % (2014, 2016).<sup>2</sup> According to the results of the EU Labour force survey (EU-LFS) from 2015, 35 % of men and 50 % of women, aged 55-64 are not active on the labour market.<sup>3</sup> These persons do not have access to education and training delivered in a VET context. For people outside the labour force the provision of up-to-date adult learning opportunities is crucial. **Upskilling Pathways** provides recommendations on ways of reaching adults who are not eligible for the Youth Guarantee. The Adult Education Field is uniquely placed to engage in effective outreach, motivation and guidance, and provide tailored and flexible learning opportunities to those who have the greatest learning needs but are hardest to reach. Adult Education and its approach provides that key stepping stone needed for adults to progress to further education and training.

### **The right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning**

The **European Pillar of Social Rights** proclaims that everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market. Adult learning empowers people personally to engage in learning, to actively engage with social issues, and to become an active member of our societies. It also helps people to lead a decent life, in terms of health and well-being, culture, spirituality and in all other ways that contribute to personal development and dignity. No society can afford to ignore the productive contribution and experience of such a large social group.

### **European Values**

In times of growing Euro-scepticism, nationalism, xenophobia and violent extremism, it is essential to foster social cohesion, tolerance and human rights. European cooperation in the field of adult education can support democratic, open and inclusive European societies. Special challenges and concerns like the integration of refugees and migrants demand for innovative solutions, through cultural and educational programmes. European cooperation in adult learning enables people to deal with the challenges of an open society. It allows them to participate, to become involved in a democratic society and to deal with change. For example, evidence is reported that participants in continuing education are less at risk of adopting extremist attitudes and develop a more tolerant behaviour.<sup>4</sup> **The Paris Declaration 2015** outlines the need to strengthen actions in the field of education to

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<sup>2</sup> Eurostat, Europe 2020 indicators – education,

[http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Europe\\_2020\\_indicators\\_-\\_education](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Europe_2020_indicators_-_education)

<sup>3</sup> Eurostat, People outside the labour market,

[http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/People\\_outside\\_the\\_labour\\_market](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/People_outside_the_labour_market)

<sup>4</sup> Preston/Feinstein, Adult education and attitude change,

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130323035114/https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/WBL11.pdf>

promote citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education. The Adult Education field has been at the forefront in promoting these values within adult learning contexts.

### **Literacy**

The PIAAC survey of 2013 found that literacy skills have a significant effect on trust, social participation, political efficacy and health. Individuals with lower literacy skills are more likely to report poor health, to believe that they have little impact on political processes, and not to want to participate in associative or volunteer activities. They are also less likely to trust others. **Upskilling Pathways** connects with the findings of PIAAC and outlines the need to provide adults with flexible opportunities to improve literacy, numeracy and digital competences in appropriate learning settings. The Adult Education Field is best placed to deliver on this type of teaching and approach.

### **Health & Wellbeing**

Many studies during recent years have shown evidence of the links between adult learning and its benefits on health and well-being, employment and the labour market as well as on social, civic and community life.

Learning is related to life as a whole and learning throughout life is a necessity and a continuum. Lifelong learning is crucial to both economic prosperity and social cohesion. The UN has acknowledged the importance of adult learning in facing the world's development needs by including lifelong learning in the fourth of its 2015 Sustainable Development Goals: "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all."<sup>5</sup>

The GRALE III report<sup>6</sup> shows that there is strong evidence for positive links between health and education. This relates to

- Healthier behaviours and attitudes
- Longer life expectancy & disability-free life expectancy
- A reduction in lifestyle diseases
- Lower costs for acute healthcare <sup>7</sup>

### **Wider Skills**

Wider skills (social skills, health literacy, financial literacy, civic engagement, critical thinking, openness towards new ideas and change, problem solving or learning to learn) are often neglected even though 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 study) found for example that adults, who attend adult education courses, are 13 % more likely to vote. <sup>8</sup> These wider skills are referred to in the **New Skills Agenda 2016** and **Upskilling Pathways** as generic or transversal skills and are spoken about in terms of 'building resilience' and are skills that 'that equip for adult life,

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/education/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://uil.unesco.org/system/files/grale-3.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2016: Third Global Report on Adult Learning and Education

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.eaea.org/media/policy-advocacy/eaea-statements/learning-and-skills-for-adults\\_final.pdf](http://www.eaea.org/media/policy-advocacy/eaea-statements/learning-and-skills-for-adults_final.pdf)

further learning and working life'. Adult learning is unique in its emphasis and approach to building these skills in adults returning to learning.

### **Parent Education**

Parental and family learning seem to be an underappreciated factor of society development. In the UK, studies have shown that family learning can increase children's academic achievement by as much as 15% points.<sup>9</sup> Parent Education is outlined as a concern in the recommendations of **Upskilling Pathways** which relates parent's low levels of educational attainment to children's risk of educational underachievement. In addition it states that efforts in education are critical in reaching immigrant adults, and by virtue of this their children, to be active and successful participants in society. Erasmus+ and predecessor programmes can provide many examples of how projects in the field of Adult Education and adult learning have addressed parent education, family learning and migrant education.

### **Financing Adult Education – Makes Financial Sense**

Regardless of the fact that the approach of monetizing the impact of adult learning is highly controversial and that it does not capture the intrinsic value of adult learning, studies underline that individual benefits and well-being have a positive impact on the economy. People who are healthier and happier are less likely to need costly medical treatments or therapies and will be more active in their private and professional environment. In their 2009 report "Learning through Life", Schuller and Watson calculated a public benefit of some 40 million GBP annually if learning could help an older adult merely to postpone his entry into hospital or residential care by just one month.<sup>10</sup> Similar benefits are reported in respect of crime and prison.

### **The value of European Cooperation in the Adult Education field and for Adult Learning**

European projects have contributed enormously to innovation and in the creation of a European area of adult education by supporting peer learning and exchange of good practice. They have created networks and communities of practice, developed new innovative approaches to common challenges, and supported the sharing of practice among adult education providers.

The benefits of European cooperation in the field of adult learning are evident in different ways and at different levels. At individual level, staff and learners benefit from enriched knowledge and competence such as improved foreign language proficiency or enhanced inter-cultural sensibility. Participants in European projects report enhanced motivation of

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

<sup>10</sup> The Positive Effects of Lifelong Learning are Evident, <https://www.die-bonn.de/doks/2013-die-zeitschrift-wertorientierung-en-01.pdf>

staff and livelier organisations in general. Sustainable professional networks develop as a long-term resource.

At institutional level, the adoption of new contents, methods and tools account for the concept of learning organisations. Strengthened international relations bring on an enhanced status of adult education organisations in local and regional communities. European project cooperation has led to an increase in competences and experiences of educational staff, and project results have positively influenced know-how and expertise of the institutions. It has also inspired to innovation and changes in organizations, and positively changed the image of institutions. European project cooperation contributes to the creation of new and more stable collaborations and networks.

And even more, Erasmus+ leads to a stronger conviction of the need for European unity, however defined. It promotes the idea of European integration, European values and a European identity.

### **Adult Education Field in the Erasmus+ programme post 2020**

As we have outlined broadly above the Adult education field is integral to addressing difficult social and economic challenges experienced by adults in our society, and by virtue of this more effectively address the concerns and goals of European policy.

Europe and the future Erasmus+ Programme post 2020 have an important role to play to support the Adult Education Field and adult learning by;

- Supporting the development and implementation of lifelong learning strategies and opportunities, both on a smaller and on a larger scale. It contributes to increase the significance and visibility of non-formal learning in educational systems and strategies;
- Helping establishing a broad common European understanding on the supportive contribution of adult learning to social cohesion, inclusion and sustainable development;
- Promoting the wider benefits of adult learning such as health and well-being, community development, employment and environmental protection as aspects of inclusive, equitable and sustainable development.
- Supporting our European values and European citizenship: Erasmus+ should stimulate the idea of European integration, European values and citizenship as well as education and learning as an important precondition for participation in society
- Opening up opportunities and supporting people with fewer opportunities. It should fight exclusion, marginalisation and discrimination and contribute to the personal

and social progression of all citizens. Adult learning and growing self-efficacy and self-confidence are closely interlinked and interacting

- Supporting the efforts of education systems to prepare people for learning and their working life including changes throughout life by helping people to develop their general ability and motivation to learn and deal with change. Employability is one of the genuine aims of adult learning.

### **Erasmus post 2020 – Some recommendations for the future Programme**

In line with the paper of the directors of Education & Training NAs<sup>11</sup> this paper appreciates Erasmus+ and the predecessor programmes as best measures to promote the value of education as well as our common European values. Erasmus+ comes close to the citizens and has a wide reach. One of its main strengths is that it covers the whole continuum of lifelong learning with a strong focus on cross-sectoral cooperation. In this light, Erasmus+ post 2020 should continue with its successful actions and adapt its structure and management where necessary, finding an even balance between continuity and the requirements of a common, integrated European programme and the different needs of the education sectors.

Support of adult education staff and institutions in their personal and organizational development by international mobility actions should be expanded. European cooperation projects should continue and should be developed further in a way that they include suitable formats for funding European cooperation of local or regional educational networks. Adult learning often takes place at a municipal or local level. Adult education institutions operate embedded in municipal and local educational contexts. They are part of learning strategies and have an educational mandate. Participants learn from each other and are themselves contact persons for local politics and administration. In this way, European networks can generate a European added value in a very particular way. Transnational Youth Initiatives could be considered as a blueprint for a more open format, which supports the establishment of networks or round tables on community learning by funding activities like debates, conferences, events or consultations. Other initiatives around European topics for the benefit of the local communities (e.g. volunteering and support to vulnerable groups such as minorities, migrants, disabled persons, etc.) are conceivable.

Overall, Erasmus+ should provide easy access for small and community-based grassroots organisations as well as for newcomers. Formats and instruments are needed which permit equal and non-discriminatory access to the programme for all.

Further alternative ways of international cooperation should be explored and supported. Virtual mobility could reinforce or accompany physical mobility. Online platforms like EPALE offer a place to meet and discuss, as well as to exchange ideas and materials in order to

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<sup>11</sup> Erasmus+ expectations for the future, A contribution from the NA Directors Education & Training, March 15, 2017

support professional practice. Online platforms should be a sustained core element of the future programme architecture and incorporated in the programme decision.

Virtual mobility and online-communities could open up opportunities especially for seniors and support their participation in society. The quick evolution of ICT development as well as the increasing diversity in society cause isolation and withdrawal from active participation. In an ageing society European programmes should address this challenge.

*30 Representatives of Erasmus+ Adult Education NAs, September 2017*