

# Developments: New adult education policies coming into force

The position of adult learning and education is strengthened within educational policy, as Finland has undertaken structural reforms, such as the Reform of Continuous Learning, that will be relevant for both formal and non-formal adult education. The recent extension of compulsory education up to 18 years old will give a more solid educational ground for further study paths. In adult learning and education there will be focus on underrepresented groups to keep them employable. For seniors, there will be a new supply for prolonging work careers and promoting active citizenship.

One reason for the improved situation is the current education-friendly government. Adult learning and education institutions have received public support and compensation for losses in income caused by the pandemic and restrictions.

Civil society takes an active part in the design of adult education policies. Finnish Adult Education Association (FAEA) is also involved in the CONFINTEA VI process and will take part in the Finnish delegation.

## New policies in Finland

[New Education Policy Report of the Finnish Government](#) was published in May 2021 and defines guidelines for the advancement of education to the 2040s. The target state encompasses a strong educational foundation, the well-being and educational equality of learners. The Report proposes measures that span from early childhood education to

liberal adult education and continuous learning.

**Continuous learning reform** The changing demands of work will significantly increase the need for upskilling and continuous learning. The term continuous learning was introduced in Finland to emphasise the importance of continuous upskilling and reskilling in working life. This reform will reach full strength in the year 2022.

**Integration training for immigrants** The role of popular education is strengthened in language training and basic skills-training programmes for adult learners, especially for women staying at home with children.

## Covid-compensation for adult learning providers

The state funding frame is created always for four years in advance and calibrated each year. The next frame is for the years 2022-2025 which makes educational policy more predictable.

The funding situation has slightly improved since the previous year. Covid19-compensation for losses in income reached a total of 21,5 million euros in 2020. There will also be added funding from the EU as some Finnish recovery and resilience funds will be allocated to the Reform of Continuous Learning.

Generally, adult learning and education in Finland are funded via a multitude of channels: through structural funding, projects, programmes, vouchers, fees, donations and based on the number of participants. As a result of the pandemic, the share of participant fees has decreased.

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# Challenges and plans: A focus on sustainability and funding

Digitalisation has been the most striking change in adult learning and education last year as digital content and course supply has boomed during the pandemic. Due to the pandemic, more people now have a good command of digital technologies and can access digital learning activities. However, almost one million Finns are still mainly excluded from digital services in adult learning.

There has also been a qualitative improvement in the digitalisation of adult learning and education. For example, new methods and digital tools for outreach have been developed in Study Centers through NGOs :s. Also, the European accessibility directive and its guidelines have been applied to many digital services of the Finnish adult education sector.

As seen in many countries, outreach has required much more effort from adult education providers than before. Despite that, participation rates in adult learning and education have decreased due to the shift to online learning. The volume of participation has gone down particularly among the disadvantaged groups. The qualitative improvement of online training is not yet reflected in the participation rates. However, there are signs that recovery of participation has started in autumn 2021.

## A new roadmap for sustainable development

FAEA finds social and environmental sustainability very important and has a plan to promote sustainability in the work procedures and learning programmes. FAEA is has

also undertaken two further education projects in the period 2020-2021 on transformative learning, ecosocial bildung and deep bildung as a co-creative process.

There is a coordination strategy for the implementation of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) in the adult education sector, but the implementation should be further improved. The Finnish ALE sector is mainly focused on the SDG 4.7. FAEA has acquired Certification with OKKA foundation for Teaching, Education and Personal Development on sustainability. The goal is that by 2030 all the liberal adult education institutions have the certification.

FAEA is also represented in the National Commission on Sustainable Development and has made strong advocacy in creating a national road map for implementing Agenda 2030. The preparation of the roadmap will be launched soon.

## Follow-up of the continuous learning reform

- FAEAs focus in 2021/2022 will be in the follow-up of the continuous learning reform. There is a strong wish to get new public funding for adult education through the reform and the new ecosystem which is set up.
- FAEA also continues advocacy to strengthen funding for integration training of immigrants. There is a political will to find solutions to the skills deficit in working life, but at the same time, there is resistance from right-wing populist parties that also gain support.
- Adult education must be innovative also on a regional level to reach out to underrepresented groups. Popular adult education is also advocating for better accessibility for higher education to reach the goal 50%.
- In addition to sustainability issues, cooperation with other Nordic-Baltic countries will be strengthened through for instance Nordic folkbildung (Folkbildning Norden) and NVL.
- The preparations have started for the year of Bildung (Sivistys) in 2024, when

Bildung will be celebrated and advocated in and outside Finland. 2024 will also be the 150th anniversary of the Finnish Lifelong Learning Foundation (Kvs).

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