

# Developments: Deterioration of adult education in Serbia

According to EAEAs member Serbian Adult Education Society (SAES), the situation of adult education in Serbia has dramatically deteriorated in the last year. There have been no new policies, except one reform that mainly promoted vocational adult education.

The financial situation is a major obstacle for the work of civil society actors in Serbia. While Serbia is one of the countries that receives most European financial support, the majority of the funding ends up in the government sector. Funding is politically determined. The so-called GINGOs (governmental NGOs) benefit the most from funding, while civil society organisations, like the Serbian Adult Education Society, are left behind. Smaller NGOs often lack the resources and experience to apply for European funding. European policies do not arrive on the ground

Serbia receives a lot of European donations and policy recommendations have good intentions, but EAEAs member Serbian Adult Education Society (SAES) argues that they often are not applied. Hence, the EU should stop praising Serbia for its progress, when very little of the promises become reality on the ground. Another aspect relevant to funding is that the most funding is allocated to vocational education, while many donors do not recognize the importance of non-formal and informal learning.

In a country, where democracy is facing dramatic challenges, adult learning and education is necessary to equip the citizens with critical thinking, life-skills and the knowledge how to execute their democratic and civic rights. Therefore, SAES does not only advocate for the importance of adult learning and education, but also points out the

issues in the government and its relation to civil society.

Civil society in Serbia is rarely consulted in policy making. There have been some new policies for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

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## Challenges: NGO's in Serbia need European support

In 2019 the Serbian government established a group at the High Level political Forum and provided a Voluntary National report. This report, in the eyes of civil society is sugar-coated and does not reflect the reality of the country. Progress on gender equality and civil society involvement does not align with the experience of SAES. The governments treatment of migrants and the Roma population in the country remains highly problematic, also mentioned in the [Freedom House report](#). The voluntary national report praises Serbia for its progressive outlooks, but on the ground digital technology is not accessible or working for youth, the future generation of Serbia. Furthermore, each year many high qualified young adults leave the country.

A major issue are the partisan policies in Serbia, which dominate all areas of life. The Freedom House report (2019) has shown the issues that Serbia still faces major challenges, in regard to corruption, freedom of speech and democracy. Serbia is classified as a hybrid regime (transitioning towards democracy). Nevertheless Serbia is often treated as a democracy and receives too little criticism from the EU, according to SAES. Funding streams require more control and monitoring to ensure that European

funding does not end up solely in the hands of governmental NGOs.

## The pandemic has restricted civic rights

COVID-19 has hit the adult learning and education sector in Serbia and showcased how the government is infringing upon citizens human and civic rights. The measurements taken to limit the spread of pandemic, restricted freedom of speech and civil rights in Serbia. Many of the adult education providers had to close their doors, unable to provide training online. With low digital literacy rates in Serbia, digital learning and ICT skills are a major challenge in Serbia. Even though the education sector has been significantly affected by COVID-19, the work of SAES has only slightly been affected.

Overall, the civil society NGOs in Serbia need more support to adequately provide adult learning and education for the vulnerable and marginalized groups. Enhancing cooperation, exchanging information and contacts across adult learning and education in Europe can enhance the visibility and resilience of the organisation in this difficult situation.

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