

Developments: New funding and responsibilities for adult education

According to the Finnish EAEA members, Finnish Adult Education Association (FAEA) and the Finnish Lifelong Learning Foundation (Kvs), the situation of adult education has slightly improved in 2021/2022.

The Covid restrictions have finished, which shows positively in the participation numbers. New types of courses have attracted some new target groups to adult education.

The new Strategy for Continuous Learning came into force in 2021. Along with the strategy, a new service centre for continuous learning and employment was opened by the Ministry of Education in 2021. In the new strategy, the non-formal adult education sector (also called liberal adult education) is responsible for the underrepresented groups in learning. The sector has received four million euro for regional projects. According to EAEA members, liberal adult education field has also been more recognised in the general discussion about education politics.

Finnish adult education organisations have received more funding for training of migrants. Additionally, the discussion on basic skills course offering has become livelier. The National Agency for Education is planning new national learning badges for basic skills. Digital platform -thinking is also making its way in the liberal adult education sector, and the sector is involved in the planning of new digital services for citizens.

Some other recent developments are:

- A new law on extending the age of compulsory school education came into force in August 2021, and along with it, the folk high schools have a new responsibility in offering courses to students.
- Competence-based learning has been a theme this year, including validation of learning and strengthening the capacity of teachers in competence-based learning made possible through digitalisation.
- On regional level, summer universities have worked a lot on improving accessibility and equal participation to academic courses and work based competencies.
- Kvs has opened a new science centre for learning and education with the funding from the Ministry of Education and Culture and the National Agency for Education.
- Liberal adult education has worked proactively on regional and local levels to offer education opportunities for Ukrainian migrants.

Participation in policymaking

FAEA has taken part in consultations about the new service centre for continuous learning, as well as consultation about lifelong learning strategy, teacher education and integration training for migrants. Kvs has taken part in consultation on ESF/ERDF funding.

FAEA has campaigned in the communal elections in summer 2021 and promoted the role of adult education colleges in furthering the general well-being of people.

Learners voice

In Finland, the learners are not directly involved in the policymaking and its not required

in the law. The learners voice is represented by adult learning associations, based on their experience on the learning needs of their target groups.

Sustainability

The government taskforce for sustainable development completed the Roadmap for Sustainable Development 2022-2030 in spring 2022. FAEA took part in the task force and liberal adult education is included in the strategy. Implementation of the SDGs is mainly focused on SDG 4.7, but FAEA is also promoting Agenda 2030 in general in their advocacy work.

According to FAEA, there is a stronger focus on social sustainability, for instance the extension of compulsory education where Finnish folk high schools play an important role as bridgemakers.

Sustainability issues are shown in different sub areas as following:

- FAEAs educational projects and staff training, for instance a project named Deep Bildung and planetary pedagogies in learning environments and a project called The Trailblazers of Global Bildung
- Commitments, contracts and certificates: ALE organisations are committed to sustainable development goals and contracts, such as Agenda 2030 and Contract 2050.
- In 2022, the adult education centre hosted by Kvs was one of the first organisations to acquire a certificate of sustainable development and future indicators.
- A new road map 2030 for popular adult education in Finland was prepared during the first half of the year 2022. This road map identifies core values for the whole field, such as equity and equality, and lines up three paths of change until 2030.

Country reports of the European Commission

According to the Finnish members, the country reports of the European Commission reflect the situation in Finland to some extent and ALE programmes and projects aim to address issues indicated in the country reports and the country-specific recommendations.

Financing of adult education

There are no changes in the funding sources of non-formal adult education in Finland. It continues to be funded with operating grants, project and programme funding, fees and employer contributions.

Funding has slightly increased in 2021-2022 as new streams have been made available by the new service centre for continuous learning since spring 2022. Next year, the budget will also include extra funding for Ukrainian migrants. Even though the national financial outlook is gloomy, this doesn't yet show in the funding for liberal adult education.

FAEA's new finance task force has been active since summer 2021 and works proactively in predicting, preparation and discussion of funding. They discuss financial matters, but don't have decision power. This is a very good practice that they also recommend to others.

CONFINTEA

In Finland, civil society was involved in the preparatory process for CONFINTEA and a representative from the Finnish Lifelong Learning Foundation was taking part in the

national delegation.

The Finnish members believe that the outcome of the conference, Marrakech Framework for Action (MFA) will be a key guiding document for ALE over the next decade and it is a concrete tool to develop national ALE policies and strategies. However, its not sufficiently taken into account in national policymaking. Reforms at all levels of the ALE system in Finland would be necessary to implement the MFA, as well as an increase of funding.

Challenges and plans: Preparation for the year of Bildung 2024 kicks off

In Finland, Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in lasting changes in the learning provision and hybrid courses have become more common. More people now have a good command of digital technologies and can access digital learning activities. Shift to the digital environment has also attracted new groups of learners.

Inflation and rising energy prices pose challenges in the future, especially to folk high schools which have large premises to heat up.

Plans for 2023

- In 2022, Kvs has acquired funding for a new Erasmus+ project on transformative learning and green transition. The project activities will start in 2023.

- In 2023, FAEA is planning an advocacy campaign in connection to parliamentary elections.
- FAEA members are planning and coordinating learning programmes for underrepresented groups with the new funding from the Ministry of Education and Culture.
- Preparation for the year of Bildung 2024 (sivistys) in Finland will start. The whole liberal adult education sector will be involved in the planning.

FAEA would like to recommend to the Finnish policymakers that the role of liberal adult education should be seen as a promoter of equality and integrity of the nation:

- As a platform of lifelong learning, liberal adult education is targeted to all Finnish nationals as well as newcomers.
 - Liberal adult education is a trusted partner in education and integration, offering holistic approaches to learning.
 - Liberal adult education can help to close digital skills gaps of individuals and balance the trend towards digital divide in the society.
 - Digital skills enable participation and help foster active citizenship.
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