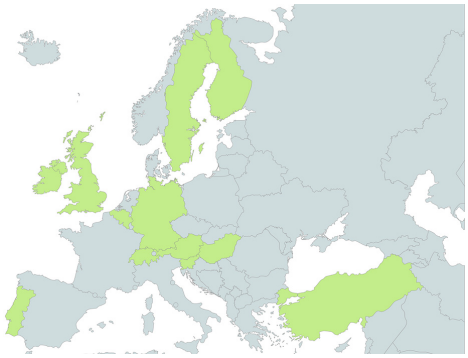
EAEA Country Reports 2024-25 – adult education trends across Europe



EAEA Country Reports provide a civil society view on the latest developments in adult learning and education (ALE) across Europe.

Based on a survey of 15 EAEA member organisations, this new edition of EAEA Country Reports presents policies, funding challenges, and adult education trends in 12 countries: **Austria, Belgium, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey**, and **the United Kingdom.**

The information gathered in the reports offers an in-depth grassroots analysis, aiming to complement official data such as the European Labour Survey 2023 and the European Adult Education Survey 2022.

The survey included questions such as members perspectives on the current focus on skills in European ALE policies, the use of Artificial Intelligence in adult learning and education, the participation of learners and civil society organisations in policy and decision-making, and the funding situation of adult learning.

Key highlights of the EAEA Country Reports 2024/25:

- National ALE policies follow the European trend, focusing mainly on employment and labour market needs.
- AI is being incorporated by 67% of the organisations in some capacity: as part of teaching and learning, as a valuable professional skill, or to support administrative tasks. The remaining 33% is still unsure due to the risks associated with the use of AI, such as ethical concerns.
- Civil society organisations in ALE continue to advocate for a seat at the table during policy-making processes, while adult learners generally lack opportunities to influence policy-making.
- Funding is a prevailing issue in ALE, both at the national and European levels, resulting in a myriad of problems, including a lack of access to learning opportunities for many adults. 50% of the respondents reported the funding situation in their country has deteriorated; 33.3% of the respondents stated the funding situation in their country has remained the same; 16.7% of the respondents indicated the funding situation in their country has slightly improved.

Explore this new edition searching by country, thematic tags, or through comparative graphs under Insights!

As part of the Country Reports, we would love to showcase good examples on how ALE has changed the lives of learners. If youre interested in sharing learners stories to be featured on the website, reach out to Greta Pelucco, Senior EU Public Affairs Coordinator at greta.pelucco[at]eaea.org and Maria Gonalves Ribeiro, Policy and Project Coordinator at maria.ribeiro[at]eaea.org.

Text: Beatriz Martin Pique

5 key trends emerging in adult education in Europe

The 2023 EAEA Country Reports provide a civil society view on recent developments in adult learning and education in Europe. This year, the reports also spotlight learner stories.

The reports illustrate that national adult education policies have a strong focus on labour market needs, and adult learners lack opportunities to influence policy making.

Imagine arriving in a new country without speaking the language. Having to reinvent your career in the midst of a war. Leaving school because of an illness without being able to get a diploma.

All of that happened to Fakhra, Oleksandra and Kayla. What was the turning point in their stories? Adult education. Yet, more needs to be done so that everyone can access quality education at any age and transform their life.

Members of the EAEA, which have supported the learning journeys of Fakhra, Oleksandra and Kayla (and thousands of others), take stock of the state of adult

education in the 2023 Country Reports.

Published today, the Country Reports provide a picture of the state of adult learning and education (ALE) in 27 countries. The Reports are the result of several months of research and are compiled annually based on data collected in collaboration with EAEAs members.

Key highlights of the EAEA Country Reports 2023

1. Civil society organisations in adult education are pioneering a wide range of new projects and initiatives on topical issues, including the green transition, community building and inclusion. This signals the vitality and potential of the sector, despite financial difficulties and multiple societal crises.
2. National ALE policies focus mostly on employment and labour market needs. Education for well-being and health, democracy and sustainability is less valued across Europe, despite the scale of societal challenges like the green transition and the recent Covid-19 pandemic.
3. In a majority of countries, adult learners lack sufficient opportunities to express their views and cannot participate in adult education policy making processes.
4. While most civil society organisations are aware of Erasmus+ funding opportunities, a considerable number of EAEA members report that lack of capacity and organisational resources to apply to the programme remain a concern, in particular for smaller NGOs.
5. There are insufficient levels of funding for adult learning and education, especially at the national and local level, in most countries examined. The majority of EAEAs members surveyed consider that many people still cannot participate in ALE, especially those coming from disadvantaged backgrounds.

This year, the Country Reports also feature the stories of incredible learners such as Fakhra, Oleksandra and Kayla, illustrating the impact of adult education on peoples lives.

For more information about the Country Reports, please contact **Raffaela Kihrer**, EAEA Deputy Secretary-General and Head of Policy, raffaela.kihrer(at)eaea.org or **Davide Muraro**, EAEA Policy & Project Coordinator, davide.muraro(at)eaea.org.

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The European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) is the voice of non-formal adult education in Europe. EAEA is a European NGO with 120 member organisations in 43 countries and represents more than 60 million learners Europe-wide.

Text: Davide Muraro

Country reports 2022 out now

Each year, EAEA asks its members to respond to our country reports survey, which offers unique civil society view on adult learning and education (ALE) in Europe. We are proud to present the 2022 EAEA Country Reports.

Although the situation of adult education in Europe is very fragmented and strongly depends on the respective country and its approaches to and traditions, there are some trends that can be observed across Europe.

A frequently expressed concern is the fact that much less attention is paid to ALE than to normal education, i.e. the formal education sectors. However, EAEA members emphasise that the ALE sector is very active. Moreover, the situation of ALE seems to have become more stable since the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Positive outlook on the financing of adult education in many countries

EAEA members seem to be slightly more positive about the funding situation of adult learning and education in their country in 2022 than in previous years. A change in the priorities of their government(s) was the most frequently cited reason for these changes. EAEA sees this as a very positive development, which we will continue to monitor closely, especially in the context of the energy crisis which intensified in the second half of 2022.

Non-formal adult learning not visible on the country reports of the European Commission

At the end of May 2022, the European Commission published its country reports and country-specific recommendations in the framework of the European Semester. Some countries reported that the country reports only partially reflected the situation in their country. A frequently heard answer as to why this was not the case, was that not enough attention was paid to non-formal ALE in the country reports. This also underpins the

feedback often given to EAEA by members that the country reports do not fully capture the entire education landscape.

Some members also reported that the situation in their countries is, from their perspective, fundamentally different to what the EU country reports describe. They noted that the reports were not evidence-based or did not take into account evidence from non-formal ALE, that civil society was not involved in consultation processes, and that there were no concrete plans to implement the recommendations at the national and regional levels.

2022 was an important year for adult education policymaking

CONFINTEA VII, the UNESCO Conference on Adult Education that takes place every 12 years, was held in June 2022. Some EAEA members attended the conference, either as civil society or as part of the national delegation. The conference was a key issue for many EAEA members, especially those from non-EU countries where CONFINTEA is the central framework for ALE policy. However, some members reported that they had tried to engage in the process at the national level, but could not reach the relevant ministries. Generally, the EAEA's members consider the outcome of the conference, the Marrakech Framework for Action (MFA) a relevant adult education policy document in their countries.

Sustainable Development Goals: the implementation varies

Sustainability continued to be an important issue for EAEA members last year. Many organisations reported having a strategy to promote sustainability in the sense of a

"whole-institution approach" in their workflows, while others were still in the process of developing one. Another visible trend was the different implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in learning programmes across European countries. EAEA members reported that this varied in their countries from one organisation to another, and overall there is potential for further implementation. EAEA will take up this topic in the annual theme of 2023, which will be dedicated to the ALE and green transition.

Raising awareness on ALE and campaigning for digital skills

In the past year, EAEA members have been involved in various campaigns and advocacy activities. In countries where the adult education sector receives less attention or focuses too much on vocational education and training, the advocacy work focused on raising awareness of the importance of (non-formal) ALE.

In general, organisations have focused their attention on campaigning to improve adults' digital skills. This is also linked to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Many EAEA members stated that learning opportunities remain hybrid even after the pandemic has ended.

Learner voice

In the 2022 survey, a new topic was added to the EAEA country reports, namely learner voice. EAEA wanted to know what opportunities there are for adult learners in member countries to get involved in decision-making processes on learning programmes, but also ALE policy-making and governance.

About two-thirds of EAEA members indicated that the voice of learners is represented by ALE associations, while one-third of respondents indicated that adult learners do not currently have a representative body or the opportunity to engage actively in decision-making processes. More than 80 per cent of respondents indicated that legislation does not currently require adult learners' voices to be included in decision-making processes. However, as this topic has become more significant in recent years, several members are launching initiatives to bring in the perspective of learners.

2022 country reports are based on responses from 22 members across 19 countries. Some of the reports are not public yet, we are still adding new reports to the website in December 2022.

Country reports 2021 published

EAEA is proud to present the 2021 country reports, offering a civil society perspective on the state of adult learning and education (ALE) in Europe. This year, we have asked our members about sustainability, funding and the impact of COVID-19 on the ALE sector.

In 2021, EAEA members reported updated ALE strategies being drafted or adopted. In some countries, new strategies on sustainability are being launched, encouraging cross-sectoral cooperation to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). That said, in

many countries the implementation of SDGs and the involvement of the ALE sector remain fragmented.

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to affect adult learning provision. While a shift to predominantly online learning encouraged new learners to enroll, it also constituted a significant barrier for the most vulnerable adults. Those who did not feel digitally competent or confident, facing inadequate digital infrastructure or equipment continued to lose out on learning opportunities. To encourage participation in ALE, several ALE organisations in Europe improved their outreach work in 2021, for example by strengthening collaborations with local services.

The 2021 country reports also clearly indicate that the ALE sector in Europe uses a diversity of funding tools, which include project funding, programme funding, fees and structural funding, to name a few. Some members reported that the policy response to the COVID-19 pandemic had led to more funding for ALE; others regret that recovery strategies target predominantly the labour market, leaving out liberal adult education.

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The survey was conducted during autumn 2021, so the responses reflect time from mid-year 2020 to mid-late 2021. While the reports offer valuable contributions to country specific situations, it is important to mention that the data is subjective and represents the view of EAEA member organisations, so it may not be shared by all adult learning and education organisations in the country.

Adult education trends in 2020

Although the situation of adult education is fundamentally dependent on the respective country, there are some trends that can be witnessed across Europe.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been an overarching topic across countries, as it forced some adult learning and education providers to close their doors, but also enabled others to accelerate their transition to digital learning.

A year of closing programs and unexpected new beginnings

There have been no major shifts in the past year in adult education policies, as many countries have run strategies and programs until 2020 and have yet to decide on the priorities of the upcoming year. Nevertheless, some countries reported that the adult education sector was supported by some emergency policies and funding opportunities that were put in place to deal with the consequences of the pandemic.

Adapting to crisis: mapping future

skill needs

2020 was a year of rapid adaptation. The long foreseen but slow move into digital learning was suddenly accelerated to ensure the provision of learning in the first place. The pandemic led many organisations to apply changes to their work programs and acquaint learners with new types of learning formats. The drastic change revealed the lack of digital infrastructure and skills across Europe and once again demonstrated that many adults are missing basic and life skills. While health literacy and critical thinking became a priority during the crisis, many adults were educationally alienated by a lack of financial means or competing priorities, especially those from a lower socio-economic background, the unemployed, low skilled and minority groups. Evidence shows that outreach and access have been dramatically complicated by the crisis.

2020 Policy Trends

In a year dominated by adaptation to the COVID crisis, many of EAEA members centered their work around local policies and projects, supporting learners on the ground. Only a few organisations were consulted on the European Pillar of Social Rights and often its implementation was not directly witnessed by EAEA members. Upskilling Pathways continued but has not been mentioned by adult education organisations and providers as a political priority during the last year. Both examples show that visibility is key to ensure that European policies are known, recognised and referred to on the local level. The Sustainable Development Goals, on the other hand, continue to have an important role, as they are increasingly interlinked with local and national policy frameworks.

A need for recognition (and elevated financing)

EAEA members across Europe repeatedly reported cuts in funding and depicted the

financial difficulties that many of their learners faced, due to the COVID-19 crisis. In some cases organisations had to terminate employment contracts of their staff or completely close their provision. Emergency funds were only available in some cases and mainly directed at employment-directed training courses, leaving the non-formal learning sector behind. One major obstacle of financing is the lack of recognition of non-formal adult learning. Subsequently, validation schemes are perceived as an opportunity not only to support the sector financially, but also to increase participation and access for those with competing priorities.

A demand to enhance the voice of civil society

Involvement of civil society is entirely subject to the country. There is no visible trend in terms of heightened involvement of civil society or new opportunities for involvement throughout COVID. In some cases governments consulted civil society groups in their emergency response plans, preparing the way for more recognition and hence, funding. Many organisations would recommend their government to establish closer ties with civil society.

It is clear that adequate, widely accessible and quality adult education should be a priority for governments coping with the consequences of the crisis. It is no longer a secret that citizens demand governments to prioritise investment in adult learning. (CEDEFOP survey 10.11.2020) The country reports are herewith, not only a window into the experience of European adult education providers, but also a call to action to make lifelong learning a reality for all.

New edition of country reports 2020

EAEA is proud to present the 2020 country reports and therewith offer a civil society perspective on the state of adult education in Europe.

As announced in 2019, we will publish the country reports in digital format from now on. This step towards the digital presentation does not only allow us to continuously develop on the data; but it also enables users to find and compare information through thematic tags, enhancing accessibility for all.

2020s country reports are based on responses from 44 members across 31 countries and depict the diversity of experience across the European adult learning and education sector. (The survey was conducted during summer/autumn 2020, so the responses reflect time from mid-year 2019 to mid-year 2020.) While the reports offer valuable contributions in the way they shed light on country specific situations and opportunities, it is important to mention that the data presented is subjective and based on data collection through a survey. The country reports highlight the importance of qualitative data, in addition to the quantitative data that surveys like the Labor Force Survey and the Adult Education Survey provide.

EAEAs country reports give a voice to civil society organisations and grass-roots movements at the European stage. The country reports open a window of individual experiences and serve to inform adult education stakeholders across Europe, enabling actors to compare the developments and inspire providers and policy makers with innovative practices and ambitious policy reforms.

Facing the challenges of the global pandemic, adult education providers across Europe have struggled throughout the last year but also shown resilience and commitment to adult education. The crisis exacerbated existing forms of inequality, but also drew attention to the pressing needs of our time: equitable access to and free provision of healthcare and education, ensuring everyone has basic digital skills. Many societies realised the importance of adult education in paving the way for critical thinking, health literacy and preparing the grounds for socially cohesive learning communities, which are essential to cope with the consequences of any major crisis.

Find out about adult education trends in 2020

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Please note that we are still developing the website, and adding new functionalities to it. Also, more thematic tags will be added to the texts describing adult education situation in different countries.

EAEA country reports now published in digital format

We are proud to present to you the sixth edition of our country reports - now in digital format.

Since 2014 EAEA has been collecting outlooks from across our members in Europe on the adult education sector: recent developments, strengths, challenges and how policy in their country reflecting international policies and initiatives relating to adult learning at present.

It is important that we begin by making clear- this is a civil society perspective; the country reports are not a scientific analysis of data. The information we present is collected through surveys sent to all EAEA members which they use to express their views about the sector in their country. The views represented, therefore, may vary dependent on our members focus group, geographical position, the level on which they operate, and the extent of consultation they conducted before they responded to the survey.

This report offers professionals in adult education across Europe an opportunity to

express their perspectives, relay learners views, and look to the future: providing recommendations, predicting future challenges, and expressing their plans for the upcoming year. It bridges the gap between citizens involved in adult education at a grassroots level, governing bodies, and institutions writing policy.

Many of our contributors noted this year that in the future they hoped their governing structures would put less of an emphasis on adult learning from employment, or vocational training as the most important forms of adult education, also giving recognition (and vitally, funding) to learning programmes for citizenship, personal development and well-being.

Another challenge facing many of the civil society representatives in Europe is encouraging participation from those without a strong background in education. Outreach is difficult, and breaking down the stigmas they may attach to lifelong learning is a complex process.

From here on in, we are going digital. The 2019 edition, and each one following on from that will instead be added to our country reports database. There are a number of benefits to our new digital system. In the future editions you will be able to effortlessly compare situations and initiatives from multiple different countries. Instead of having to flip between pages of our physical copies, and you will be able to explore the changes in adult education over the last number of years, in one country, or many. The data will remain much the same: a civil society view, but presented in a more innovative and accessible way

Gina Ebner, Secretary General of EAEA
Uwe Gartenschlaeger, President of EAEA

How to use the country reports?

The country reports are an opportunity to compare the current situation of adult education in different countries. They also provide new insights and information for advocacy work.

The country reports are based on a survey sent to EAEAs members, asking them about the state of adult education in their country. The views expressed are thus dependent upon our members contexts, outlooks and focus: many of our members are umbrella organisation for example, representing providers, others may engage in research or policy advocacy and some work on a local level as adult education providers. As such their survey responses can provide a very specific view, or experience, of adult educations status and role in their area or country.

We didn't receive replies for the 2019 survey from some countries (Italy, Latvia, Moldova, Russia, Serbia, UK) so those webpages have no information at the moment.

Our members can use the survey as an opportunity to share their experience

throughout their work in the field, as well as this they are able to consult providers and organisations within their networks to gather and reflect their views. Some country reports are based upon one member: this can mean that their report reflects the geographic reach of their work, dependent on the level on which they operate (as a national institution, NGO umbrella organisation, or as a regional or local provider for example), and the extent of consultation they conducted in order to formulate their response to the survey.

Adult education trends in 2019

Based on the country reports, what are the current trends and policies of European adult education? In the 2019 country report survey, EAEA asked members to reply to questions about several European policies.

European Agenda

While only two of our participating members (Greece and Georgia) explicitly mentioned using the European Agenda for Adult Learning as a guideline for changes in the sector there is evidence of its influence in a number of countries. For example, a vast majority of our members noted the importance of flexibility in adult education provision, and many noted examples of policy makers or governing bodies beginning to recognise this

as well. Innovative approaches to provision and engagement were also noted by a number of respondents.

Sustainable Development Goals, United Nations

Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is occurring, albeit in varying degrees, across Europe. Our survey encouraged members to discuss their countrys relationship with the goals. Despite some members relaying that their policy makers were designing strategies that responded to the goals, but that it was not directly mentioned, most responses noted that the SDGs were reflected in their country. Some countries even went beyond goal 4 (providing inclusive and quality education for all). Our Croatian member, for example, is working to promote the SDGs on a wider scale. In Slovenia our members are working to implement goal 10 (reducing inequalities) through adult education for vulnerable groups. In Switzerland there is a Strategy in place directly relating to all 17 of the goals.

Upskilling Pathways

The Upskilling Pathways initiative had a mixed uptake: some of our members reported that it formed the basis of most of their countrys policy at present, while others noted that it was not being explicitly implemented at all. A number of members did mention the presence of the values of the initiative being present in their local adult education sphere, through the work of civil society organisations or our members themselves.

Involvement of civil society

Our Norwegian and Irish members noted that civil society organisations (CSOs) in their

respective countries were being provided with the opportunity to involve themselves in the designing of policy and strategies relating to adult education. This is excellent for CSOs in these contexts, however, other members called for greater civil society engagement, recognising the extent to which these organisations can play a role in advocating for adult learners. In the Netherlands, Erasmus + funding has allowed civil societys capacity to increase. Our member also notes how collaboration between civil society organisations from different contexts can help further develop effective systems of support for vulnerable learners.

Validation

Especially when working with vulnerable adults, validation of learning was clearly a priority for many of our members. Vocational Education and Training (VET) was mentioned explicitly by a number of members who feel that without appropriate certification for VET learners moving back into employment (or seeking better employment opportunities) is less likely. However, recognition for trainers in the sector (professionalization) was also recognised as a key issue in adult education at present.

Engaging new learners

It is recognised within the adult education sector that those who need it most, often have very limited access to learning. The European Commission has coined the term low-skilled trap: where those with low-skills or low levels of qualification are often in jobs where they are not provided with training. They are also less likely to seek out or participate in learning opportunities outside the workplace due to negative experiences and stigma. Our members are developing a number of innovative approaches to dealing with the difficulties involved in encouraging worse-represented groups to participate in adult education. However, many of them still saw it as a major challenge facing the field.