

Finland introduction

Finland is addressing new issues in the adult education sector, now aiming to create individual learning pathways and to tackle the challenge of changes to working life. To cope with this, several reforms plan to raise the funding capacity, and implement new strategies. Finland is still making efforts in carrying out the SDGs, especially goal number 4. Sustainable development, environmental-social education and transformative learning for liberal education will also be at the centre of educational policies and initiatives there.

Recent developments in Finland

In 2019 Finland experienced positive changes in the sphere of adult education which have raised hopes for the future of the field. To start with, following the parliamentary elections in April 2019, the new leftist-central-liberal government declared in June 2019 that there will be a "redeeming of honour of education" with an increase in funding. For two years before that, in 2016-2017, the public funds had been reduced by the previous government.

Meanwhile, the Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra has been working on developing recommendations for cross-sectional policies in lifelong learning. In 2018 and 2019 the fund published reports on future lifelong learning policy making and public-private finance guidelines. The aim of this project is to speed up the transition to a lifelong learning policy in which competences and work are seen as the building blocks of well-

being. In the publication "Towards lifelong learning - the shared mind-set, funding principles and challenges" representatives of 30 key organizations shared a common vision on future directions, and identified eight challenges that are currently impeding the required reforms.

Following the work of Sitra, the Ministry of Education and Culture launched a working group on continuous learning, with a mission to reform educational efforts to meet the challenges of the labour market. In particular, the working group is concerned with questions of upskilling, competence assessment and flexible arrangements for creating individual learning paths as a response to the big learning challenges and changes in working life.

In a mid-term report published in April 2019, the group proposed a national reform of continuous learning. The report suggests that a national strategy on continuous learning, extended until 2030, should be drawn up, which would offer reform implementation schemes and measures. The strategy should at least include the following objectives:

1. Explore the possibility of adopting skills-mapping for people of working age.
2. Modernise and bring together guidance, including digital services and individual study, and career guidance.
3. Increase the visibility of competences acquired in working life and elsewhere.
4. Create a proactive restructuring model.
5. Increase public awareness of the benefits and opportunities of continuous learning. Develop concepts for study opportunities that target different audiences.

Links to EU and international policy in Finland

Finland actively participates in the implementation of SDGs in its internal and external policies. Within the country, Finland is putting to use society's commitment to sustainability to ensure the involvement of all stakeholders in the commitment to Agenda 2030.

FAEA's member, the Finnish Adult Education Association (FAEA), is focusing on implementing goal 4 of the SDGs. In the autumn of 2019, the association considered themes from Agenda 4.7, with special focus on global citizenship education (GCE). In collaboration with the Finnish development NGO, Fingo, the association arranged a round-table discussion on GCE as a part of the UNESCO Terms of Reference Case Study: Adult Learning and Education for Global Citizenship in Finland. The data from the round table was collected in September 2019. In November 2019 FAEA hosted a seminar where the results were presented and discussed together with Fingo experts. The topic of global citizenship education was also in focus during the seminar with International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) and Fingo, which was held during the Finnish EU-presidency period.

In 2019/2020 sustainable development, environmental-social education and transformative learning for liberal education will also be in the centre of educational policies and initiatives in Finland. In accordance to this, special attention will be paid to the development of professional qualifications of teaching staff and leaders.

Challenges and recommendations in Finland

The Sitra Fund identified some challenges that the Finnish lifelong learning policy may face in the near future. One of the challenges is the changes to the job market and the current inability to predict the skills required by employers in the future. The main requirement of new policies is identifying the relevant stakeholders who must attempt to guess how to deal with these upcoming changes. The sector must also track the allocation of funding to different players in the field of competence-building of adults and make sure the distribution is done in a fair way. Moreover, the issue of increasing funding needs and necessity of finding new sources remains topical.

In general, adult education in Finland is facing such issues as the demographic changes related to the ageing society, low birth rates and labour shortages in some sectors. The goal of the Finnish government is to reach 75% employment rate and find effective tools and measures to face the challenges of continuous learning. Therefore, implementing Agenda 2030, not only in education but other areas as well, remains a goal for society as a whole
