

Developments: Civil society holds strong

Although the pandemic complicated many aspects and deteriorated the situation of adult education in Switzerland, it was also an opportunity to rethink priorities and move provision digital. EAEAs member SVEB continues to communicate about public initiatives, events, international reports and participates and animates activities of civil society.

Over the past year the situation of adult education in Switzerland has slightly deteriorated, but there have been important changes in the policy. Civil society in Switzerland has an active role and is regularly consulted in policy making. The European Pillar of Social Rights and Upskilling Pathways are not implemented in Switzerland and the European Semester is not applicable. Policies that regard the Sustainable Development Goals are coordinated by the Swiss government. SCVEB collaborates closely with UNESCO, organizing networking events in the sector.

Challenges: Public initiatives are needed to increase participation in adult learning

The main challenge remains the access to and the participation in lifelong learning,

guaranteeing equity for all. Participation in adult learning and education is heavily depending on formal qualification, employment status, age, migration status and social background. People with a tertiary degree participate twice as much (80%) in adult education as graduates of the upper secondary education in Switzerland (40%) (source: Bundesamt für Statistik, Mikrozensus Aus- und Weiterbildung, 2017).

Civil society is aware that public initiatives are necessary to tackle this challenge. The most urgent challenge for 2020/21 consists in recovering from the consequences of the corona pandemic.

SVEB took the role of information hub during the pandemic

The adult learning sector and SVEB were significantly affected by COVID-19. The entire work program adapted to tackling the pandemic (85% needed to change their provision) and SVEB took the role of information hub for the providers. SVEB also organised training to use digital tools in teaching. A survey conducted by SVEB revealed that adult education providers will not be able to offer 28% of their courses on average during the whole year 2020 (according to a survey of 540 providers conducted by SVEB). During the peak of the pandemic (March- May) 56% of the course offer was cancelled.

SVEB expects that the demand for adult education remains low during the next months. Another obstacle will be a decrease of private investments by the participants and employers, who are likely to decrease their funding, as the economic situation deteriorates. Also, there are still restrictions for courses in some regions (e.g. mask obligation), which lower the demand. Another challenge is quality assurance, which comes into question when education moves digital and society demands flexibility in education offers.

SVEB pushes for equal access to adult education

The focus for the next year will be advocating for the improvement of access, coordination, funding, quality, transparency and innovation in the Swiss adult education sector. Other areas of focus are dealing with the consequences of COVID, adapting to digitalisation, providing equal opportunities, working on sustainability and the recognition of the non-formal adult learning and education sector.

Voicing a recommendation to the Swiss government, SVEB wants to push for equal access to adult education, improving social and market security for marginalised people. They recommend to provide more training on basic skills, promote adult learning information campaigns and provide financial incentives to make education accessible to more people in Switzerland.
