

Developments: Slovenian Presidency highlighted adult education

The Slovenian Institute for Adult Education (SIAE) , communicates that although adult education was strongly affected by the COVID-19 epidemic in 2020/21, the ALE situation has generally improved in Slovenia.

The National Master Plan of Adult Education 2013-2020 expired in 2020. A new National Master Plan of Adult Education 2021-2030 is being prepared, which should be adopted by the end of 2021 in the National Parliament. Also new guidelines for the implementation of counselling activities in ALE, implemented as a public service, were approved in June 2020 by the Expert Council for Adult Education.

In the second half of 2021, Slovenia held the Presidency of the Council of the EU and placed adult education at the forefront of its presidency in the education sector. The basic activity was the preparation of a draft Resolution on the new European Agenda for Adult Learning 2021-2030. Slovenian experts in cooperation with national and European stakeholders prepared a draft Resolution. SIAE worked closely with the presidency working group on this document.

In addition, SIAE helped to prepare the dual conference Adult Learning and Education - The Resilient Response to Future Challenge. They also had a say in drafting the Declaration of the before mentioned conference which is the professional statement on ALE in Europe 2021.

Climate strategy adopted

In July 2021, the National Parliament adopted a Resolution on Slovenia's Long-Term Climate Strategy 2050 and an Action Plan for the Implementation of the Climate Strategy until 2030. It sets a clear goal, namely to achieve net zero emissions or climate neutrality by 2050. It also sets strategic sectoral targets for 2040 and 2050, which individual sectors including ALE must strictly adhere to and incorporate into their sectoral documents and plans.

Funding

The main funding income of ALE Slovenia comes from project and programme funding, structural funding and fees paid by individuals or employers.

In 2020/2021, there were no changes in the method of financing ALE. However, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly reduced the absorption of funds from the state budget, at the expense of reduced activities and the implementation of education, especially in the field of general non-formal education, education for the unemployed and education for employers.

CONFINTEA VII

SIAE confirms their involvement in CONFINTEA VII the Seventh International Conference on Adult Education in 2022 but the presence of some representative of the organisation in the conference is still unknown.

Challenges: Digital gap increased during COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the existing digital gap: those adults that were already digitally competent were able to continue learning in a virtual environment, while those with lower digital skills dropped out or struggled to keep learning. Those who lost out were especially vulnerable target groups.

As early as March 2020, when the epidemic was declared, the situation in the field of adult education changed drastically. Government measures to completely close down adult education activities in classical forms and methods have forced adult education organizations to reorganize education through new forms and methods of distance education and hybrid education. Additional training of teachers and other professionals in the field of ICT technologies, e-platforms and e-education was intensive. Thus, training in publicly valid programs, programs for acquiring a profession, continued successfully.

However, adult education in the field of general non-formal education has significantly decreased. The involvement of vulnerable target groups has also decreased significantly. SIAE estimates that adult education providers and other national institutes have responded relatively well and adapted accordingly to the new conditions and conditions of adult education during the epidemic.

The digital gap has increased during the COVID19 pandemic. Those that already had very good digital skills were able to continue learning in a digital environment and further improve their digital skills, and those who did not have any or good digital skills dropped out of learning activities. Participation rates in ALE have decreased in the vulnerable groups due to problems with ICT equipment or lack of digital competences.

For some groups of adults, participation rates in ALE have increased due to the shift to online learning. Digital environment has also attracted new groups of learners. The evaluation data showed that online learning in the case for example of employed people, or adults with small children, helped to remove situational barriers such as time, traveling to the education institution, finances etc.

Sustainability

SIAE considers it relevant to involve social and environmental sustainability within its organisation and they have a plan for it. SDGs are cited in the introduction into the existing but also upcoming Masterplan for Adult Education. Unfortunately, they are poor and inconsistent, so the basis for SDG implementation is weak in Slovenia in terms of inadequate recognition and understanding of SDG interdependency. However, the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning and the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport actively cooperate in enforcement of adaptation to climate change. This has a role in implementation of the SDGs' objectives in the field of adult education. The Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning aims to finance a project (2021-2023) "Climate goals and contents in education" developed together with the national educational institutions.

The key focus of the project is to offer a comprehensive program of learning and education to respond to climate change in the context of ESD. The project will also update national guidelines for ESD, which are expected to overcome the currently prevalent instrumental approach to environmental education and recognition of sustainability as a concept.

Only a few ALE programmes (one since 2007 and the other since 2016) are in line with intertwined SDGs but there are rich and scattered local practices. Research dedicated to

SDG achievements is absent while national promotion is well grounded). Cooperation is highly recommended but financial flows rather stimulate competition between public providers (e.g. folk universities) and other ALE providers like NGOs, (rare) private enterprises and cultural institutions (museums and libraries). SDGs are therefore present in the ALE sector but their implementation is yet to develop.

Looking Forward

2022 main focus for SIAE will be:

- Increase participation in ALE- analysis and plan for improvement for different groups of adults, promotion of ALE
- Develop literacies and sustainable development- climate change /goals and content for education
- Quality assurance
- Developing reading literacy - implementation of National Strategy for Reading Literacy
- Developing financial literacy
- Improving digital competence for adults and for educators /didactics of distance and blended learning
- Work with vulnerable groups
- Counselling in AE for employees
- Professional training
- Awareness-raising and outreach

Recommendations

SIAE strongly believes that ALE is the pillar for inclusion, so in order to build a learning culture, raise productivity, enable personal growth and social inclusion, it is essential that governments understand, encourage and finance various LLL programs for all adults

with emphasis on the variety of vulnerable social groups.

In the meantime, by 2022, SIAE is concluding the development perspective of European cohesion policy. Programmes and projects co-financed from ESF funds are being completed. Agreements on the financing of projects and programmes in the new ESF perspective have not yet been harmonized and signed. Therefore, there is a great danger of an intermediate period when there will be no new projects, development activities, funding and consequently layoffs of experts working on former projects. Consequently, there is a need for particularly intensive cooperation and pressure on policy to agree and launch a new ESF perspective as soon as possible.
