

# Developments: New reform for continuous learning

In the fall 2019 the Finnish government launched a policy reform on continuous learning, which focuses on the skills development of working age people and seeks new solutions to combine work and study. The new policies will be published by the end of 2020. One of the key issues the reform seeks to resolve is how non-formal and informal learning could be better exploited in competence development and how the learning outcomes could be made more visible. The social rights are also a fundamental part of the reform in which the education system, social welfare and working conditions are to support citizens' competence development.

## The pandemic has highlighted the importance of digitalisation and inclusion

During the past year, one of the major changes in Finland has been the digitalisation of learning due to the pandemic. The Finnish adult learning sector had a fairly smooth transition to distance learning, even though there are some institutions that offered only a few courses online.

The funding for the adult education sector stayed the same, and additional state support was given to compensate the losses caused by the pandemic. Overall, the situation of the adult education sector in Finland has slightly deteriorated mainly influenced by the COVID-19 crisis.

In the field of advocacy, the pandemic caused more work and led to intense interaction between adult education institutions on all levels. In some institutions, staff had to be temporarily dismissed as institutions closed down. Folk high schools and summer

universities suffered the most. On the other hand they received almost full compensation in the governments first round of financial support. For the upcoming year the main challenges are largely based on the consequences of the pandemic, adapting to new rules and regulations.

## Civil society has an active role in the policy development

Civil society representatives are often consulted in the policy development. According to FAEA, the Upskilling Pathways strategy is clearly implemented in Finland and the reports of the European Semester mirror civil societys experience. The global and national Agenda 2030 programme is evaluated annually by the government and civil society. Especially the sustainable development goals 4.5. (equal opportunities), 4.6 (basic skills such as literacy and numeracy) and 4.7. (education for sustainable development) are connected to the strategies of adult learning and education in Finland. The national evaluation of the goals raised some specific challenges to adult learning and education. The implementation of the goals in different regions is affected by urbanization, access to education, wellbeing and welfare services.

## Social rights are at the core of the Finnish system

The social rights (i.e. equal rights to education, fair working conditions, inclusion) are at the core of the Finnish welfare society model. Thus, the European Pillar of Social Rights is well implemented. EAEAs members have also been involved in the civil society consultation process of the pillar.

With the current leftwing-center government, the principles of inclusion and accessibility of education are at the center of the government program for 2019-2023. The COVID-19

pandemic has also highlighted inclusion as a key issue, as learners with lower socio-economic positions were excluded from learning in many instances.

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## Challenges: More holistic vision of continuous learning is needed

According to EAEAs members, Finland needs a more overarching vision of continuous learning. One of the challenges recognised in non-formal adult education is the accumulation of learning to the active citizens. Thus, one of the focus areas in adult learning is outreach to under-represented groups (i.e. asylum seekers, immigrants, persons with disabilities, mental illness and the unemployed). The OECD ([Continuous Learning in Working Life in Finland 2020](#)) recommends that Finland diversifies its adult education provision to make it more relevant for working life.

Finland should also use economic incentives to encourage reskilling and upskilling. Special attention should be paid to outreach and guidance services to adults with lower basic skills. The adult learning and education sector in Finland is responding to these needs, while it waits for the continuous learning reform to provide the new policy framework and financing.

### Focus areas for 2021

Finnish civil society actors have ambitious objectives in the upcoming year, promoting

adult education for all. There will be advocacy work for the local elections in spring 2021. The focus of EAEAs member will be on social rights, inclusion, re- and upskilling and basic skill training. Furthermore, digitalisation, inclusion, outreach and access for adult learners will be a priority.

Some of the 2021 focus areas of FAEA are:

- Strengthening the cooperation between liberal adult education researchers and field workers
  - Promotion of ecosocial bildung on a broad scope, e.g. cooperation with the Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra to enhance a future-oriented debate
  - Advocacy and impact on the Educational Policy Report in Finland which will be published in 2/2021
  - Push for the recognition of non-formal learning.
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