Developments: Territorial network for lifelong learning set up

The Italian government introduced a territorial network for lifelong learning (Reti Territoriali per l'Apprendimento Permanente), serving as the backbone of the Italian lifelong learning system. The networks connect the institutions and the providers that educate adults. They include the set of education, training and work services linked to strategies for economic growth, access to work for young people, welfare reform, active aging and active citizenship. However, the implementation of the networks has faced several complications because of a lack of cooperation among key adult education actors.

According to EAEAs members, the situation of adult education has stayed the same in the last year in Italy, if you leave out the effects of the pandemic. Centro Internazionale per la Promozione dell'Educazione e lo Sviluppo (CEIPES) works mainly to provide education and training for youth and adults, while FORMA. Azione provides support in vocational education and training. In the last year CEIPES has grown exponentially and they were able to recruit additional internal staff and therewith, expand their number of projects. EAEAs members are funded on different schemens and hence have been differently affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and its financial consequences.

Innovation for the recovery phase

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected the adult education sector in general, including EAEAs members. Many providers were able to continue with their training for the three months of lockdown during the covid pandemic as they moved activities

online. Upon return to the office, CEIPES adjusted to the new precautionary regulations, with the ambition to carry out face-to face activities. Many organisations were financially affected by the pandemic, but CEIPES managed well and did not have to reduce staff.

According to EAEAs members the recovery phase in Italy should prioritise employment and work, but also set a focus on adult education. Adults do not only need to adapt to a new world of work, but they also require technological skills, and the skills for their personal life. Transversal skills are needed as part of new learning systems, which supports adults not only to become more competitive at work but also to manage their personal lives by trying to create an environment more dedicated to well-being.

Italy striving for sustainable development

The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) has been implemented in some areas, but neither of the responding organisations was involved in a consultation process. CEIPES believes that the EPSR plays an important role in promoting new national/regional policies and frameworks. Italy has implemented some policies on Upskilling Pathways and the Sustainable Development Goals.

According to the Alleanza Italiana per lo Sviluppo Sostenibile ASviS (Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development), the last year demonstrated important movement towards sustainability across sectors: from civil society to the businesses, national government, regions and autonomous provinces. EAEAs members mention, however, that the successful implementation is hindered by a lack of a clear and shared strategy for the Agenda 2030. The "Benessere Italia" (Wellness Italy) control booth, announced in May 2019 by Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, was established "to coordinate, then to monitor, measure and improve the policies of all ministries in the name of the welfare of citizens. The program includes a platform for Italian teachers to enroll in an e-learning course on the "Agenda 2030 and Objectives of Sustainable Development".

Challenges: The pandemic as a wake up call

COVID-19 was a wake-up call for many adult education providers as it made them realise that the tools in formal education are limited when social distancing is necessary. Organisations experimented using digital tools. Some experiments were successful, especially when they were offered free of charge and were accessible to everyone.

CEIPES calls on the government to use this occasion to establish a Digital Learning Platform, with a strategic plan for digitalisation, including distance learning and tools that enable adults to combine work with lifelong learning. Competence development and the upskilling and reskilling of low skilled adults will be crucial in the upcoming months, especially for those who lost their jobs.

Focus areas for 2020/2021

For 2020/2021 CEIPES has a range of priorities. They mainly seek to promote inclusion and social innovation, using sport, STEAM tools and non-formal education. Their activities are targeted to all types of learners and above all, aim to contribute to the development of the local community by running an innovative socio-cultural centre. The target groups are young people, youth workers, adults, teachers, etc, mainly those with fewer opportunities or who come from disadvantaged situations.

The focus for the next year of FORMA will be capacity building for adult education networks and the upskilling and reskilling of low skilled adults. Furthermore, they want to focus on Media Literacy and Digital Education, while implementing new approaches and methodologies to teach the Sustainable Development Goals to adults. FORMA

recommends that the government works on the implementation of the Territorial Network for Adult Learning and invests more in adult education.