



OUTREACH EMPOWERMENT DIVERSITY

Policy recommendations for European
and national/regional policy-makers and
for adult education providers

www.oed-network.eu

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Adult education, according to a European study on self-reported benefits of Lifelong learning, makes people happier, healthier and more self-confident. Learners participate more in society, tend to be more tolerant and better parents¹. We, the OED network², believe that adult learning has benefits on all levels and that as many people as possible should have the opportunity to join learning activities. Nevertheless, participation in learning is still low and this is especially true for low-skilled and/or disadvantaged people³. There are many creative ways to overcome barriers to learning, and in connection with active citizenship learning, real progress can be achieved. Built on the good practice examples of outreach we have collected and our empowering methodological guidelines, we have put together recommendations for European and national/regional policy-makers and for adult education providers. Additionally, we have provided a very practical guide for possible actions that will help policy makers to take concrete steps. We call on everyone to take the necessary steps in order to make outreach, empowerment and diversity in adult education a priority and therefore a reality.

¹ Benefits of Lifelong Learning in Europe: Main Results of the BeLL- Project Research Report, http://www.bell-project.eu/cms/?page_id=10

² The OED network is composed by 17 organisations from 14 countries. Visit the dedicated page of the OED website to learn more on the consortium: <http://www.oed-network.eu/index.php?k=118644>

³ Evidence coming from AES (http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/microdata/adult_education_survey), PIAAC (<http://www.oecd.org/site/piaac/>) etc.

European level

1. Make outreach, empowerment and diversity as priority in the European Agenda for adult learning

The national coordinators for the European Agenda have the opportunity to involve the national, regional and local levels in key discussions. We therefore propose to make outreach and empowerment for disadvantaged groups a key priority for the next period and to actively encourage the national coordinators to introduce action plans in this area.

2. Set up a European network for outreach, empowerment and diversity

The European Commission has the possibility to fund large-scale networks with a particular emphasis (see, for example, the literacy network financed by the school unit). A high number of partners across Europe in combination with a rigorous work programme and close connections to the policy and programme levels (National coordinators, the EC working group, Erasmus+ coordinators etc.) can make a real difference – a European network on outreach, empowerment and diversity for disadvantaged groups would therefore have a great impact.

3. Increase civil dialogue for lifelong learning

Partnerships and mutual learning on different levels (European, national and regional) and in particular a close cooperation with civil society organisations (CSOs), including learners, are needed. The sector needs to be able to work proactively rather than reactively to changes in policy. Participation of and dialogue with all relevant stakeholders (social partners, learning providers, NGOs, etc.) must become a regular part of decision making and policy development.

4. Put a (renewed) emphasis on learning for active citizenship, democracy, sustainable development and European cohesion

In times of crisis and/ or instability, employability has become the focus of most countries' interest in adult education. The results of the 2014 European elections but also the experiences of the good practices¹ collected in the OED network show that a renewed emphasis on learning for active citizenship, democracy, sustainable development and European cohesion are necessary. A renewed emphasis within the Education & Training 2020 strategy and its implementation is therefore necessary.

5. Increase cooperation and learning between policy, practice and research

A closer cooperation and mutual learning in respect of policy, practice and research can lead to improvements in all these areas through synergies. By, for example, organizing regular conferences or workshops on key issues, where good practice, the latest research and policy developments are presented and discussed in-depth, progress can be achieved. The results should then be linked to the national and local levels.

6. Introduce a participation benchmark on learners with low qualifications

One of the ET 2020² Benchmarks focuses on the participation levels of adults (25-64 years old) in lifelong learning, which should reach at least 15% in 2020. In order to be able to set targets and compare member states' progress in reaching out to educationally disadvantaged learners, a benchmark on the participation of educationally disadvantaged adult learners (e.g. based on ISCED) should be introduced.

7. Introduce better basic skills standards for EQF / NQFs

For people with very low skills, it can take a long time to reach level 1 of the EQF (and corresponding NQF levels). In order to encourage learning, validation of non- and informal learning and progress, a coherent approach that allows for smaller steps and achievements at lower levels should be proposed.

8. Recognise the importance of non-formal adult learning

Non-formal adult learning can reach out to people with bad experiences in formal education; it opens the world of learning for many. Nevertheless, many policy-makers tend to underestimate the possibilities of non-formal adult learning. The PIAAC³ and BeLL⁴ results clearly demonstrate the need for more adult education, and especially the need to increase its possibilities to reach out to disadvantaged groups. This needs to be a key part of all lifelong learning strategies at the European and national levels.

9. Develop higher quality and innovation in adult education

A European quality framework for the adult community education sector based on good practices, methodological guidelines and innovative approaches is needed.

This framework needs to

- take the specific non-formal nature of adult education into account and encourage the principles of outreach, empowerment and diversity.
- focus on a learner-centred approach of outreach, empowerment and inclusive participation.
- be compared with other countries and structures, especially their ability to reach out to, empower, include and integrate learners.

¹ Outreach - Empowerment - Diversity: Collection, Presentation and Analysis of Good Practice Examples from Adult Education Leading towards an Inclusive Society - <http://oed-network.eu/index.php?k=118659>

² http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/index_en.htm

³ <http://www.oecd.org/site/piaac/>

⁴ http://www.bell-project.eu/cms/?page_id=10

National level

1. Reach out to under-represented groups

Tailor-made learning offers that are relevant to the groups concerned are needed. Attention needs to be paid to the different under-represented groups and target groups who may need personalised measures to attract them back to learning. Our best practice collection¹ shows many innovative ways how to reach out, but adult education providers will need support for implementing new ways of working.

The implementation is the responsibility of providers, but policy makers need to make outreach and empowerment a policy priority so that real progress can be achieved.

2. Enable progression

Better links, progression routes relevant to personal circumstances, guidance and signposting between local informal and formal learning opportunities should be provided in order to support learners in their learning and work paths.

3. Recognize and promote the personal, social, environmental and economic benefits of adult learning

Recognition of the importance of non-formal adult education in strengthening the democratic society and of the wider benefits of adult education and lifelong learning is needed. These benefits of adult education (particularly liberal adult education), according to a recent European study², go beyond the economic and employment-related, extending to social benefits, higher self-esteem, and well-being.

4. Analyse and then remove barriers

Barriers that keep people, especially from disadvantaged groups, from participating in adult education need to be examined in depth. We urge member states to analyse their legal and financial frameworks function in terms of promoting or hindering the participation of disadvantaged groups.

For example:

- Financing tools should encourage adult education providers to reach out to disadvantaged groups and those learners that are otherwise hard to reach, rather than to prefer to work with more traditional learners (this happens when payment is based on graduates of courses)
- Support migrants' opportunities to attend free or low-cost courses right after they arrive in the country.
- Make sure that validation systems are in place that might make the entrance into learning easier.
- Encourage adult education providers to try new and democratic forms of outreach and learning

A thorough analysis of the legal basis and financial tools can reveal built-in barriers which can then be removed.

5. Integrate adult education in existing strategies

In quite a few countries, there are social inclusion strategies for disadvantaged groups but they do not take adult education into account. By integrating adult education into existing initiatives and policies, these will, in turn, be improved, and learning is mainstreamed.

6. Prioritise and invest in adult learning

Increased public investment in learning for adults that ensures long-term funding for adult education is needed. It is essential to keep the costs for learners either free or very low to promote access for all. (Estonia, for example, invested ESF funds for adult learning and worked very closely with the EAEA members in order to implement the strategy. The participation in adult education as well as skills levels have risen significantly as a consequence. In the UK for example, Community Learning providers collect fee income from people who can afford to pay and use where possible to extend provision to those who cannot).

7. Fund and support learning in communities

Communities are essential when it comes to including potential learners who have had the least opportunities in the past. Adult learning providers, including the voluntary and community sectors, need more support and funding. This will benefit both learners and communities – better skills, more participation, more active citizenship and more social cohesion are a win-win situation.

8. Strengthen non-formal adult education structures

Stronger structures for non-formal adult education through legislation, institutional development and continuous financing is needed in order to establish or sustain the work of this sector. Non-formal adult learning can be much more flexible in responding to learners' needs and interests than other forms of education.

9. Adult education needs the best trainers and staff

We call for the development of staff capacities through high quality education and in-service trainings. Thus the training of trainers working with disadvantaged groups needs to be supported and best quality needs to be ensured. This needs to be seen in the context of trainers' working conditions. In quite a few countries, the majority of trainers are free-lancers, and while this might bring advantages (e.g. specialists from certain fields that bring their expertise to adult education or teachers/professors that teach an evening class), it does mean that many trainers in key areas for outreach are paid very little in order to keep the costs of these measures low. Volunteers also regularly work in adult education – for them, training and professional development are also crucial. We therefore suggest a serious consideration of the costs and benefits of trainers' working conditions, especially of those working with disadvantaged groups.

Let us underline that this is largely a financial issue rather than an organizational one!

10. Establish coherent lifelong learning systems through validation and recognition

Real lifelong learning systems in Europe, which include more exchanges and more equality between formal, non-formal and informal education and learning, are needed. The OED-Network demands setting up and supporting an integrated system with an emphasis on recognition and validation of all kinds of learning, including guidance and counselling. Validation is a key tool in order to promote lifelong learning, to ensure more flexible learning pathways, to encourage learners and build their self-confidence as well as to create a more comprehensive understanding of competences.

11. The positive dimensions of diverse societies should clearly be emphasized

The super diverse nature of modern societies needs to be acknowledged: the populations both in rural but foremost in urban settings are composed of people with diverse backgrounds, social living conditions, legal statuses and educational opportunities. This situation needs to be addressed in a positive way, which avoids Othering and the construction of so called parallel segments of society especially by media but also by politicians. This entails the development of guidelines for fair and accurate reporting as well as training materials for capacity building to enable media specialists to acquire mastery of the complex aspects could go a long way in this regard.

¹ Outreach - Empowerment - Diversity: Collection, Presentation and Analysis of Good Practice Examples from Adult Education Leading towards an Inclusive Society - <http://oed-network.eu/index.php?k=118659>

² http://www.bell-project.eu/cms/?page_id=10

Adult Education Providers

1. Include learners' voices

All learners should have a say in their learning. Starting from regular consultation of learners to learners committees and advisory boards, there are many possibilities to include learners in the management, organisation and teaching of adult education organisations. Adult education providers become more democratic and have a much better understanding of their learners' needs.

In order to make all kinds of learning possible we call for close cooperation with civil society organisations and representatives of all learners as well as for a better legal representation.

2. Encourage participation even more

Disadvantaged groups need opportunities to empower themselves and thus have an active role in society. By making sure that their voice is heard (see point 1 above), a first step in this direction is already achieved. This can be further promoted by making use of new social media technologies so that learners can participate and connect. Learning should be seen as an enterprise amongst equals.

3. Increase diversity in adult education

More staff, management and facilitators from disadvantaged groups themselves are needed in order to ensure the necessary diversity in adult education but also for being role models for potential learners.

4. Reach out to under-represented groups

We need tailor-made and participatory learning offers that are relevant to the groups concerned. Attention needs to be paid to different under-represented groups who may need personalised measures to make learning attractive for them (e.g. migrants, minorities, older people, prisoners, etc.). In order to find out what these groups need we need to carry out research that involves them as subjects. Our best practice collection¹ shows many innovative ways how to reach out – please take it as an inspiration!

5. Encourage your staff and facilitators to use innovative and empowering methodologies

Have a look at our methodological guidelines² – they have been put together by training and adult education specialists and have been successfully tested in a number of European countries. Hopefully you'll be inspired by them – please use them and ask your staff and facilitators to use them – we're certain that you will have positive feedback!

¹ <http://oed-network.eu/index.php?k=118659>

² <http://oed-network.eu/index.php?k=118638>

A ROAD MAP FOR POSSIBLE ACTIONS

SOME CONCRETE SUGGESTIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS ON WHERE TO GO NEXT

Many policy makers are interested in reaching more learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. How can this be achieved? We hope to provide some ideas on how to approach this, which you can find below. You probably have very good instruments of how to plan, organize, implement and monitor initiative. We, as adult education organisations and civil society, have expertise, ideas and approaches that you might not be aware of – based on these, please find some suggestions below!

We would also like to draw your attention to the good practice collection¹ that we put together during the Outreach – Empowerment – Diversity Grundtvig network and which will provide you with a wide range of approaches from different European countries. Additionally, we have elaborated methodological guidelines for adult education providers and trainers so that they can adopt new, empowering methods: such guidelines are available in EN², FR³ and DE⁴ in the dedicated page of the OED project website⁵. Please feel free to disseminate both publications as widely as you like!

1. Identify the issues

What are the key areas that you want to tackle and potential learners you want to address?

- Providers often know very well who they can and cannot reach – they can be an important source of information as are NGOs.
- Develop a differentiated picture of the people you want to address, avoid grouping them into groups that do not exist, e.g. ‘the Muslim women’

2. Invite other departments and ministries

People from disadvantaged groups often face multiple challenges and barriers, so cooperation with other departments and ministries makes a lot of sense. Also, co-operations across different sectors can often facilitate outreach (e.g. reaching migrant women through the schools of their children, reaching people through healthcare providers, early school leavers, etc.) There are also potential learners, for whom cooperation with relevant ministries is necessary: prisoners, refugees, etc.

- Possible cooperation partners to think of: Labour (employment), Culture (outreach, new learning environments), Health and Wellbeing (outreach, but also benefits, active aging), Consumer affairs (consumer education, financial literacy, and outreach), Justice (prisoners), Social affairs (minority groups, connection to social work, active aging...),

3. Introduce qualitative targets and goals

What do you want to achieve? Setting quantitative and qualitative targets – together with civil society – can help with the implementation and monitoring.

- Quantitative targets can help to justify projects to funding institutions
- Qualitative targets can add to the overall understanding of an initiative, e.g. how do participants think they have benefited? Collecting learners’ stories can also be enormously useful for awareness raising, both for the learners themselves and for other groups.

4. Invite stakeholders

Stakeholders such as social partners, learning providers and NGOs can link initiatives to the grassroots level and make sure that the implementation of the initiative works smoothly. A close cooperation with them will contribute to the success.

- Is there an umbrella organization for adult education in your country? Providing support for an umbrella organization can be a win-win situation for civil society on the one hand and policy-makers on the other hand. Policy makers have one main partner who can work with them and who coordinate its members. Adult education providers will have a body for advocacy and networking.

5. Identify barriers

What are the main issues that keep the potential learners you want to reach from participating? There has been considerable practice and research concerning barriers and how they can be overcome, so once you have identified the barriers, you can draw on the experience across Europe (and beyond) to help find adequate and practical solutions.

- Leisure courses are often the best courses to attract people into learning. Policy makers often underestimate the possibilities of courses such as belly dancing, yoga, cooking or singing – for people who have negative experiences with school, such courses can be the entrance to further learning and a new life!

6. Provide capacity building

In order to go ahead with the implementation of outreach, empowerment and diversity, adult education providers and their staff and trainers might need support and additional training. In order to make the best and most out of the money policy makers will spend on an initiative, initial and possibly continuing capacity

building might be necessary.

- Do check out our methodological guidelines⁶ as inspiration!
- Remember that critical reflection of what you are doing, on all levels, i.e. the institution, program management and facilitators is a very efficient way of development.

7. Think of an awareness raising campaign

Adult education has many benefits – for the individual but also society. In order to draw people’s attention to this, an awareness raising campaign can be helpful. EAEA has put together a number of good practices⁷ (such as adult learners’ week to the adult education bus) and recommendations⁸ for awareness raising campaigns.

8. Check for unintended consequences

When monitoring the impact of the initiative, do check for possible unintended consequences – has the initiative had an impact on other target groups? What about the providers?

- Certain strategies have consequences that are not necessarily obvious at the start of the implementation, for example, paying providers according to the number of graduates of a provision will very probably lead to ‘cherry-picking’, i.e. providers picking the participants that are most likely to finish. This means that the ‘more difficult’ people are left behind.

We thank you in advance for your efforts – please do contact us for questions or feedback. If you decide to work with our suggestions, do let us know! Francesca Operti (francesca.operti@eaea.org) and Gina Ebner (gina.ebner@eaea.org) on behalf of the OED network

¹ <http://oed-network.eu/index.php?k=118637>

² <http://oed-network.eu/doc/OED-methodological-guidelines-EN.pdf>

³ <http://oed-network.eu/doc/OED-FR.pdf>

⁴ <http://oed-network.eu/doc/OED-DE.pdf>

⁵ <http://oed-network.eu/>

⁶ <http://oed-network.eu/index.php?k=118638>

⁷ <http://www.eaea.org/en/projects/eaea-coordinated-projects/arale/best-practice-collection.html>

⁸ http://www.eaea.org/media/projects/eaea-coordinated-projects/arale/conference-report/arale_dfs_recommendations_8pages_opslag.pdf

