



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR
THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

ADULT EDUCATION IN EUROPE 2014

A Civil Society View



Adult Education in Europe 2014 – A Civil Society View

European Association for the Education of Adults

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ARMENIA

Recent developments

During the last two years, DVV International took substantial steps in Armenia, creating new collaborations with regional adult education providers like the Shirak branch of the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Sisian municipality in the Syunik region. In both cases, educational centres were set up, providing educational, social and spiritual services. In the Shirak region, cooperation with the Wilhelmshaven folk high-school in Germany created even more educational possibilities.

Elsewhere in the country, the Adult Education Centre in Ljevan started offering courses in “the basics of jewellery work”, in late 2013. The goal of the initiative is to create venues for extra income for the participants, get younger participants “of the streets” and strengthen the jewellery trade.

EAEA member Armenian Lifelong Learning League is an active partner in the leAGUe project (a network for developing lifelong learning in Armenia, Georgia and the Ukraine). The aim of the cooperation is to strengthen social inclusion, active citizenship, personal development opportunities and employability in the participating countries.

According to our survey, none of these undertakings were linked to the European Agenda for Adult learning and currently it's the organisations from civil society (NGO:s) that are driving adult education forward in the country, with some support from foreign partners.

Future focus

Our survey respondents report a need for a unified approach and strategy for adult education across the country. As of now, there is no clear strategy for national, unified efforts. EAEA members say momentum will therefore be built either on the local level or by cooperation with international organisations. In terms of national politics and policy, adult education is not prioritised, a fact most painfully evident in the lack of governmental funding opportunities. EAEA members say policies are fragmented, focusing mostly on vocational education and training (VET) and with no benchmarks to measure progress.

The Impact of PIAAC

Our survey gives no indication that the PIAAC-results created any form of discussion, or specific action in Armenia.

Member outlook

Our survey answers from Armenia show that continued international and European cooperation is key for future progress. Domestically, organised advocacy work and awareness raising campaigns might help get more policy makers interested in adult education, as well as spreading the word to the general public.

AUSTRIA

Recent developments

EAEA members say the participation rate for non-formal adult education is on the rise, moving from 39.8 % in 2007 to the current figure of 45.5 %. The growing demand for adult education is due to the need for vocational training, general education and civic education, according to our survey respondents.

As for recent political developments, the implementation of the “Adult Education Initiative” is creating new opportunities for organising cost-free basic training and compulsory education for adults. The initiative is based on a standardised framework including a curriculum and the accreditation of providers and trainers; it is funded by the federal state and the nine Bundesländer (provinces).

Our Austrian members say the European Agenda for Adult Learning greatly influences current domestic strategies.

Future focus

According to our survey respondents, adult education is currently in a state of transition. It is necessary for adult education to develop with and respond to the society at large. At the moment, that means coming to terms with unemployment and the economic crisis. The end goal is not only to affect employability and the economy, but also to further democracy and cohesion. This continues to be a challenge, according to EAEA members, as long as people with low levels of education are underrepresented in adult education activities. Adult education needs to be a meeting-place for people from all walks of life. For this reason, adult education cannot only be seen as a means to achieve other goals. Continued care for the traditional, core adult education activities must continue, with added efforts for reaching new target groups.

EAEA members think that the eight European Key Competences for Lifelong Learning should be influential in the continued endeavour to create the Austrian National Qualification Framework.

As in many other countries, survey respondents from Austria predict the need to further show why adult education is such a vital part of future democratic societies. And as always, funding remains key. For Austria, the situation beyond 2015 is still in the air. Federal adult education providers are financed through three-year contracts set up with the Ministry of Education. Further efforts are needed to ensure the continued development of structures and systems that help focus adult education endeavours.

The Impact of PIAAC

The first PIAAC results were presented to the adult education community in October 2013. Since then additional investigations have been carried out. The results of these investigations will be presented and published during the autumn of 2014. EAEA members say the results have helped strengthen the case for continued funding of basic education and compulsory education for adults – but too much focus might end up on the areas measured in the survey, thus forgetting that individual development is a complex process where needs and interests have to be combined.

Member outlook

Austrian EAEA members say it is important to show how the funding for adult education activities is being used, what benefits the activities bring and why it is important to increase money for non-formal education. Professionalisation of the adult education field is also important and in need for further development. Professionalisation brings a heightened demand for transparency, according to our respondents, meaning more standards and better framework should be on the agenda for the future. The eight European Key Competences for Lifelong Learning could provide guidance for future developments in these areas, according to our members. And, echoed by many other country reports, the need to find more networking opportunities and alliances within the adult education field is vital for future advocacy work as well as quality insurance and the coherence of educational offers across the nation.

The area of internet and online learning is also something that will be vital in the future – an area where our Austrian members feel further development and knowledge is needed. The challenge is to offer the same kind of structured learning environment online as adult education providers do in their normal activities.

Finally, on the topic of European cooperation, EAEA members say a strong European voice for adult education generates impact on the member state level, improving their systems and the working conditions for adult education providers.

AZERBAIJAN

Recent developments

Members from Azerbaijan report on establishment of several new corporate training centres as well as internal trainer pools and learning management systems. It seems that new areas for adult education are opening up within businesses. At the same time, the Ministry of Education are working on qualification requirements.

Future focus

As companies are seeing greater need for up-skilling of their workforce, new adult education initiatives might develop but established adult education providers might also be tasked with specific assignments.

The Impact of PIAAC

Our members report no specific impact from the PIAAC results.

Member outlook

Our members say the development of frameworks for quality and qualification is the most important endeavour for the future and they are hoping for European input and inspiration in that process.

REPUBLIC OF BELARUS

Recent developments

In 2011 the Code of Education was adopted, where for the first time adult education, formal and non-formal education were mentioned as part of the national educational system. Previously, legislations had only regulated vocational training.

Future focus

Although the legislation has changed, the state policy only considers the needs in the field of formal education. Moreover, the system of financing adult education in the country is not transparent and there is no equal framework for state and non-state institutions.

Professionalization of adult education is also an important issue. There is no special education on university level for teachers and very few research organised on this topic. The Republic of Belarus is not really included in international and European processes. Main cooperation countries are the GIS-countries.

The Impact of PIAAC

The results are not well-known.

Member outlook

Main activities are the preparation and sharing of publications on PIAAC in the regional languages for instance. Also, national or regional events for representatives of Ministry of Education and other experts are organised, and support is provided for fundraising.

BELGIUM (FRENCH SPEAKING REGION)

Recent developments

In the field of literacy or basic skills education, also called “alphabétisation” in the “Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, there have been reactions toward legislation changes concerning not directly adult education but affecting large parts of the association’s target audience as migrants, unemployed persons or beneficiaries of welfare services.

Since the law of the 4th of December 2012 that modified the Belgian nationality code, it has become very difficult for migrants to get the Belgian nationality. For example, in Wallonia, knowing the official language is a requirement. There have been protests on this issue against the idea of compulsory programmes and the required level in the foreign language i.e. A2 both in the speaking and writing based on the CEFR. NGOs were also involved in the protests, as the last modifications to the Belgian Code had effects of exclusion towards the target public, rather than helping them to integrate in the Belgian society.

As regards the European Agenda for Adult Learning, there is no major news. The Agenda (or recommendations derived from it) was not a topic of discussion inside the “Comité de pilotage permanent sur l’alphabétisation des adultes”, the service created in 2005 in order to plan and coordinate the multiple policies and actors involved in adult literacy. In this regard, the words of the Council Resolution on a renewed European agenda for Adult Learning (2011/C 372/01) can better describe the challenges that should be met: “In order to achieve an adult-learning sector capable of supporting the Europe 2020 strategy, much more remains to be done in relation to effective and efficient financing; in relation to the provision of second-chance opportunities and the acquisition of basic skills such as literacy and numeracy (...)”.

Future focus

About 700.000 adults living in the French-speaking region of Belgium have low basic skills, i.e. the “CEB” primary certificate that young people usually get at the age of 12. One of the major challenges for our members for next year is the provision of adequate and high-quality trainings, which respond to the real needs of the participants, regardless of their level and status.

Moreover, there is a challenge to involve groups that are currently underrepresented, especially natives (people who went to school in the country but didn’t obtain an elementary level), since participants to literacy courses are predominantly migrants (in the formal and in the non-formal sector), and people at work.

Finally, it is important to find good information channels so that adult education staff can easily know what the European Commission is doing in the field of adult education. So far, few documents describe the situation of adult education in Belgium.

The Impact of PIAAC

The French-speaking part of Belgium is one of the few European countries that have never participated in any of the OECD surveys on adult literacy: either IALS or ALL, nor the last one, PIAAC. According to the survey results, our members in the area haven't been very inclined to this participation for a long time, since these surveys are not focused on low competences and are very expensive, so that the cost/benefit ratio seems weak in comparison to more important needs, such as the request for more financial supports for actions on adult literacy. However, even if the information provided is partial, one member, "Lire et Ecrire" decided to participate in the survey. The participation to PIAAC was discussed at the "Comité de pilotage sur l'alphabétisation", as well as an alternative option: the adaption of the French survey "Information Vie Quotidienne" (IVQ) with a focus on low levels. Later on, because of the lack of information on PIAAC concerning the region itself, the "Comité" compared their own results with Flanders or with some other similar countries.

Member outlook

According to our members, funding opportunities as the Grundtvig programme, ESF and EIF are very useful, as they contribute to funding national projects. Peer pressure can be a motivation to move on with certain issues; this is why the "EU 2020 benchmarks for education" can be useful (eg: fewer than 15% of 15-year-olds should have low skills in literacy, numeracy and science; at least 15% of adults should participate in lifelong learning, etc.). There is a need for regular updates on the situation of the different EU countries so that organisations know how far they are from the objectives.

Moreover, campaigns promoting lifelong learning have to be organised. Adult education policies are increasingly oriented toward specific goals only such as employability, integration of migrants, acquisition of the national identity. In order for basic skills training to be efficient, education and training policies should make sure that anyone asking for such training can follow it. The lack of basic competencies affects indeed all areas of life: political and cultural rights, access to social rights, health, and employment. In order to meet unemployment challenges, integration of foreigners or other specific policies, new policies supporting cooperation and partnerships between the actors in the field of basic skills should be implemented.

BULGARIA

Recent developments

For Bulgarian EAEA members, developments at the European level are hugely important. Survey answers suggest that ventures like the European Agenda greatly influence national focus and undertakings. In line with the European strategy, the Bulgarian government are dedicated to reducing unemployment in general and youth unemployment in particular. Newly launched, a dual system combining education and labour market measures is the country's latest attempt at upgrading the workforce with new skills and experiences to fit the labour market needs. Initiatives are however slowed down by funding issues caused by the turbulent economic situation. AE-providers are finding that online solutions are interesting alternatives that create opportunities for education with different operating models.

Future focus

For the foreseeable future, funding remains the core challenge for all AE-undertakings. EAEA members say many efforts are dependent upon EU-programs like Erasmus+. The intermediate period between program-periods will therefore present added difficulties.

There are new, government-funded grants for the education of adults who left school at an early age – to be educated in literacy – but only formal and governmental institutions are currently allowed to host such classes. EAEA members feel that this sector should be open for NGOs as well.

The survey answers indicate that youth unemployment is now so severe that many young Bulgarians are leaving the country to study abroad – and going on to seek unemployment outside of the country. Bulgarian salaries cannot compete with other European countries – and even within the country employed people in need of up-skilling for new tasks cannot afford relevant education if they need to pay for it privately.

The Impact of PIAAC

The PIAAC results for Bulgaria show big differences between urban and rural areas of the country, with better results in the major cities. This has sparked debate on how equal the education system is across the country.

Member outlook

When looking towards the future, EAEA members again underline the importance of allowing NGOs equal access to government funded contracts for unemployment measures and literacy measures. Survey participants also stress the importance of clearer rules for assuring quality education across the country – including rural areas. There should also be extra support for entrepreneurs who seek to create new business opportunities in poor regions.

For the European level, Bulgarian members yearn for more mutual projects, a joint partnership database for applying to EU-programmes, dissemination services and a calendar for publication of events and trainings – in short, a lot of the EAEA services currently on offer, but perhaps with greater participation from all member countries.

Outside of EAEA, the survey indicates a need for EU-support beyond the programme periods, as well as for a better distribution of funds – based on the actual situation in and needs of various countries.

CROATIA

Recent developments

The most important activity in Croatia in the field of education, and particularly adult education was the development of the Strategy for Education, Science and Technology and the further discussions on it. It was the first comprehensive education strategy in the Republic of Croatia, based on the life-long learning approach, where adult education has been included as an important element. It will replace the former National Strategy of Adult Education.

There are also initiatives, mostly from the Agency for VET and Adult Education and Croatian Adult Education Society, which are focused on improving the professionalization of adult educators. For instance, the Agency has stressed its role regarding how to improve the training and monitoring processes providing professional trainings and quality assurance in adult education. The Second Andragogical Symposium “Professionalization of adult educators” organized by the Agency, dealt with these issues. Moreover, the Croatian Andragogy Society has organized conferences and published journals dealing with high education, professional autonomy and professional accountability, as key preconditions for professional development and improvement of the adult education system.

In this regard, The Croatian Qualifications Framework is a reform instrument, for regulating the system of qualifications at all levels in the country, through standards based on learning outcomes and following the needs of the labour market, individuals and the society. Additionally, the development and decision making on the National Operational Programme under the investment for growth and jobs goal, which includes adult education is very useful to improve the connection between education and labour market.

Finally, all stated activities were connected with the European Agenda for Adult Learning, and also with other EU activities focused on achieving competitiveness of labour force. For instance the Ministry of Science, Education and the Sport Department for Vocational Education and Adult Education in the period from 2012 to 2014 has been carrying out the project “Implementation of the European Agenda for Adult Learning” which is part of the Lifelong learning programme – Grundtvig of the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), which has paid great attention to the improvement and networking of adult education stakeholders on the local and national level, with the objective of improving the quality of adult education in Croatia.

Future focus

According to our survey, the main challenges in Croatia for 2014/15 will be the decision and implementation of the National Education Strategy. It means changing legislation and developing policy tools for adult educators and adult education providers, in order to improve their autonomy and the respect of their professional competency. Increasing the number of adult participants in different adult education programmes will be the key goal and key challenge as well, since 2,5 % is one of the lowest participation rate in Europe. Another challenge will be the ability of the Croatian economy and society to use new competencies of adult students. This issue in Croatia is mainly defined as educational response to labour market demands.

Moreover, one more key challenge will be the implementation of operational programmes under the investment for growth and jobs goal. It means that the coordination between different ministries (Education, Industry, and Social Welfare) will be crucial for a coherent implementation with the inclusion and accountability of key actors (entrepreneurs, adult education providers, trade unions). Within the Croatian education policy, the implementation of CROQF is the key policy tool to link education to the social and economic needs. All these changes will take place within the specific political environment (presidential and parliamentary elections), which will be more focused on personal recruitment rather than on the development of new approaches to adult education.

Croatia also accepted that the implementation of the Croatian Qualifications Framework and the Strategy on Education, Science and Technology is pending, but it should improve the educational outcomes and align them with the labour market needs.

The Impact of PIAAC

PIAAC was not conducted in Croatia and only general remarks were discussed during the last few years. Discussions on PIAAC were only mentioned in few professional articles and the results are only used as arguments in discussions regarding new models of adult education (Ministry of education) and in few regional projects about changing adult education provisions.

Member outlook

According to our members, the main problem of the country concerning education is that the government has been neglecting Croatian experiences and practices for more than 100 years. Education administration is more oriented toward foreign practices than domestic (past or present) good examples or critical evaluation of the national experts' community. Without the respect of the national (or regional) tradition and the empowerment of national professional resources, the implementation of European agendas will be very difficult.

In this regard, considering the activity of the European Commission, the fact that EAEA sees adult learning as more than just vocational adult education is very important, according to our members in Croatia. Also, co-organizing international conferences, disseminating articles and establishing networks of news editors, especially with the contribution of EAEA, would be very useful. Moreover the financial support of the European Commission is very important, as the national financial crisis has reduced all the resources to be invested in adult education.

CYPRUS

Recent developments

Our survey tells us that EU-projects play an important role for adult education in Cyprus. Cooperation with other adult education providers and funding from EU programmes create a vital framework for domestic development. The European Agenda for Adult Learning sets the agenda for the European cooperation.

Future focus

EAEA members from Cyprus define basic skills, upgrading of skills and a further framework for training trainers (within adult education) as top priorities for the coming years. As in many other European countries, unemployment is a major challenge in Cyprus. The economy has a long way to go in terms of recovering from the crisis and adult education funding remains difficult.

The Impact of PIAAC

The PIAAC results created some discussion in Cyprus, putting further focus on the importance of basic skills and the upgrading of skills to fit the labour market. EAEA members are positive, saying that the PIAAC survey will provide a new dimension for adult education in Cyprus, creating new tools to track relevant developments.

Member outlook

European collaboration is key for adult education providers in Cyprus, according to our survey. EAEA members say they need to continue to cooperate and discuss issues with their European colleagues. Funding from EU programmes remains crucial and it is important for adult education providers in Cyprus to know and understand the proceedings surrounding such grants. The domestic funding situation is unlikely to change anytime soon. At the same time, adult education is a vital key for the addressing basic skills and the upgrading of skills needed to create positive movement towards a more secure financial future for the country.

DENMARK

Recent developments

There have been several noteworthy adult education developments in Denmark in recent years, as indicated by answers to our survey. EAEA member DAEA (the interest organisation for non-formal adult education in Denmark) and their think-tank, “Kredsen”, presented eight recommended areas for Danish civil society to focus their efforts on, last year – pinpointing an additional four specifically for the field of adult education:

- Inclusion for all
- We are also Europeans
- Courage and ability to express views and take part in debates
- Necessary knowledge and competences

2013 also saw the premiere of a brand new institute for non-formal education, called Vifo – after long-running efforts from adult education stakeholders and others. In 2014 permanent funding was secured for the venture, courtesy of the Ministry of Culture. The institute is working with three main goals:

- To create an overview and provide insight on the field of non-formal education (a form called “Folkeoplysning” in Danish)
- To analyse the sector
- To initiate public debate on key questions and trends

Finally, in 2013, a new law allowed Folk High-schools to be both boarding schools and provide learning activities to the local community, simultaneously and in combination.

Moving on to 2014, the government earmarked 1 billion DKK for the up-skilling of adults.

Also in 2014, a new law for VET creates possibilities for two-year educational courses aimed at youngsters, combining efforts to prepare participants for upper-secondary school and vocational training. This opens the door for new combinations incorporating non-formal education and further collaboration between different education providers.

Similarly, a new government initiative to shorten the period where unemployed people are left without action puts renewed focus on efforts for basic skills – an area where adult education providers are currently performing one third of all activities.

Our survey answers indicate that these efforts relate to the European Agenda for Adult Learning through the challenge of “providing learning opportunities for all” ... “essential to competitiveness and employability, social inclusion, active citizenship, and personal development”.

Future focus

For the future, our survey answers indicate that the overall ambition is to get more people active and engaged in society – especially those who are currently marginalised. In order to achieve this, steps must be taken to maximise the outcome of the reforms and decision from 2013 and 2014. DAEA administers government funds for innovative projects among its member organisations – and for 2014 and 2015 priority will be given to projects that focus on the recommendations given by DAEA (as described above). Plans are also underway to offer additional courses to adult education providers, including the training of staff and teachers. Additional focus will be given to activities that enhance European identity.

Non-formal adult education providers are preparing new partnerships with organisations from formal education, in order to apply for new grants opening up as part of the VET reform. The call for applications is expected for autumn 2014.

EAEA members also expect to play a big role in preparing young school drop-outs for participation in VET activities; the new reform includes a minimum level of prior studies for entry.

Adult education providers in Denmark also expect to work even more with basic skills, due to the new strategies from the government.

Our survey respondents regard it crucial to raise the municipalities' minimum funding to non-formal adult education providers to 1/3 of the providers' training and staff expenses. Today, 1/3 is the maximum – a (reduced) level introduced in 2002. Our members say this change needs to be adopted by law – and strong forces within the non-formal adult education sector are working for this important change.

The Impact of PIAAC

EAEA members say reactions to the PIAAC-results have been surprisingly few, so far. Our survey respondents believe more funds are needed for raising basic skills, based on the results.

Member outlook

EAEA members from Denmark say that there is currently a focus on employability and economic growth due to the European Agenda for Adult Learning and the on-going struggle to stop the effects of the crisis. However, more focus is needed for issues concerning social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development. Our members feel that these are areas we need to highlight together in the European context: It is crucial, respondents say, to support open humanistic and democratic values as a basis for adult education and for the future of Europe. Our survey respondents express great support for the recent initiative by the Danish Minister of Culture, aimed at developing a national strategy for non-formal and informal adult education in dialogue with the stakeholders of civil society. This will be reflected in the local policies on non-formal adult education by the municipalities. In the long term it may also inspire European initiatives.

ESTONIA

Recent developments

Last year was significant for adult education in Estonia, with several policy documents that heavily affected adult education providers. The government adopted a new Lifelong Learning Strategy, stretching from 2014 to 2020. The strategy covers all areas of learning during a person's lifetime, including formal education and in-service education as well as non-formal and informal learning.

Here are the main principles for the new programme:

- The learner's active participation and responsibility
- Cooperation and learning from each other
- The quality, flexibility, transparency and trustworthiness of learning opportunities
- Consideration of special needs in the organisation of studies and learning environments
- Gender equality
- Openness, tolerance and international cooperation
- Continuity of the Estonian state, its language and culture
- Sustainable development
- Evidence-based decision-making

Our survey also includes reports from the AGENDA project – a project dedicated to implementing the European Agenda for Lifelong learning. The target group for the project is people with a low level of formal education. The project uses alternative methods, like motivational support and cooperation between different stakeholders.

The Civil Society Development Plan (KODAR) is being renewed for a continuation until 2020 and focuses – among other things – on civic education for adults. Finally, the government adopted a new strategy for active ageing, focusing on getting the elderly involved in lifelong learning. These new policies are heavily influenced by EU agendas.

Future focus

With so many new policies launched for adult education during the last year, 2014 and 2015 will be a period of new beginnings for adult education providers, according to our survey responses.

The Impact of PIAAC

EAEA members from Estonia have been actively launching the PIAAC results as a means to create discussion on adult education and skills-upgrading, something that's been largely successful: Our survey answers indicate that policy makers are taking notice and the input is helping to shape future endeavours.

Member outlook

With so many new policies taking effect, EAEA members say it is important not to neglect the training of trainers, for instance within the “second-chance education”. Quality needs to be maintained and emphasised, even during times of change and new policy. For the national level as well as for the European level, EAEA members from Estonia say it is important to support and highlight non-formal education and amplify the benefits of adult education.

FINLAND

Recent developments

At the moment, adult education in Finland is experiencing financial challenges. EAEA members inform us that the current government grant will be reduced by 20% over the upcoming two years. Additionally, the structure and financial model for adult education providers will be re-evaluated. Despite the above, EAEA members say the non-formal adult education institutions are functioning well, with representation in the entire country and with demand at a constant, healthy level.

Meanwhile, in the formal school system, the compulsory age for school attendance is to be prolonged by one year to include seventeen year-olds. The government also launched a “youth guarantee” that amounts to educational activities, a trainee position or a fully-fledged job for all youngsters under the age of 25 who have finished compulsory school. Folk high-schools and other adult education providers are stepping in to provide education for young immigrants within the framework of this guarantee – while simultaneously pushing for more opportunities to be a part of this new initiative.

There’s new research within the field too, with three Finnish universities cooperating in creating the FRPAE-program (Freedom and Responsibility of popular Adult Education). Together with the national associations of liberal education, the aim is to strengthen research on various aspects of adult education. The first results will be presented at the end of 2014.

Finnish EAEA members say the European Agenda for Adult Learning did not greatly influence recent national developments.

Future focus

With the budget cuts described above, the obvious challenge for the foreseeable future will be to cope with and adapt to – or try to advocate against – the reduced financial scope for adult education providers. There is great concern within the sector as to how this will be possible. The Ministry of Education recently implemented a working group to analyse the structure and prerequisites of adult education in order to create new proposals for the future.

The Impact of PIAAC

Finland scored very well in the PIAAC study, overall, creating positive media “buzz” for a limited time. The PIAAC results were widely presented in the head research publication of adult education in Finland, the “Aikuiskasvatus”, as well as in the LLine (Lifelong Learning in Europe) web journal. EAEA member Kansanvalistusseura also presented the results in seminar form – thus spreading the results to Finnish Adult Education colleagues.

However, the somewhat less impressive results for digital skills (as part of PIAAC), especially among the elderly and older workers, created discussion concerning future initiatives. No new strategies have been presented based on the PIAAC results, but adult education providers are using various elements of the study to advocate for the importance of non-formal adult education.

Member outlook

EAEA members answering the survey say that new investments into adult education would be more beneficial than the planned cutbacks. But given the current strategy of government savings, survey participants are calling for more collaboration between different adult education providers in order to create awareness for all the benefits associated with non-formal adult education. There needs to be a strong mutual message coming from all parts of the sector.

FRANCE

Recent developments

In France, there is some confusion about the terminology of adult education. On the one hand, the term is used to describe measures taken to fight unemployment – but on the other hand the term is traditionally used for a form of popular education close to the non-formal/liberal adult education of the Nordic countries. More and more though, adult education is used when discussing the economic crisis and how to up-skill the working force to match the needs of the labour market – something that, while not negative in itself, shrouds other uses and benefits of various forms of adult education.

The answers to our survey show no significant link between recent developments and the European Agenda for Lifelong learning.

Future focus

Our survey answers indicate that the focus on measures to tackle unemployment will remain, perhaps with a slight shift towards ICT skills. Overall though, the overarching agenda forced by the economical crisis is in a way limiting the scope of what adult education can be, according to our survey answers.

The Impact of PIAAC

Discussions were organised by national organisations, mostly in the vocational education and training (VET) field.

Member outlook

EAEA members feel that adult education stakeholders need to unite in advocacy work to promote greater support for non-formal / general adult education rather than concentrating exclusively on VET initiatives and unemployment measures – at least in such a way that the term “adult education” can be used more widely without causing confusion (now the term is used for two different applications). Our survey respondents hope that organisations at the European level can help in this endeavour.

GERMANY

Recent developments

According to the EAEA members answering our survey, the need for adult education in Germany is growing. With the mobility brought by EU legislation and new eastern members, new migrants put new demands on the educational infrastructure. There are growing numbers of illiterates and people with low basic skills. Coupled with the increasing average age of the general working population – and the increasing demand for a high skilled workforce – our members see a picture emerging of a country with a continued need for strong adult education providers, especially for ICT and ODL-solutions. At the same time, EAEA members state that adult education is a broad field with education opportunities for a broad range of topics. Currently there is a risk that adult education is simply viewed as a tool to “repair” education inequalities from the formal sector. Basic skills are a big and important area for adult education, but it’s not the only area where adult education is applicable.

EAEA members report that recent studies on basic skills confirm that a push is needed. Regional funding through European Social Fund (ESF) has not been prolonged. Our members identify funding for basic skills and for counselling and guidance as key challenges.

The promotion of adult learning in Europe, in the framework of the EU 2020-strategy and the strategic framework education and training (ET 2020), and in Germany should not focus exclusively on the demands of the labour market and should not be limited to formal education and vocational training. Learner-centered non-formal and especially political education open for all society members should be included. That would imply to integrate social partners and organizations for adult education and not to focus on businesses and companies when trying to implement successful policies for all kinds of adult learning - this will be a main challenge.

Another objective will be to implement the new programme Erasmus+ and the new possibilities to apply for grants in the field of adult education.

EAEA members report strategies and projects are being introduced, focusing on inclusion – guiding people to the panoply of opportunities offered by adult education providers. There is a focus on intercultural exchange – and on creating a welcoming society for everyone. Our members say there are also new opportunities for seniors seeking employment –with learning positions offered at small and medium-sized companies.

According to EAEA members, the actions described above can be linked to the basic skills and literacy and demography focus within the European Agenda for Adult Learning – although other answers suggest that the European Agenda is not largely influential in national German education strategies, due to weak resources to address the issues.

Future focus

EAEA members specify new initiatives are needed for the following target groups:

1. Immigrants
 2. Illiterate people
 3. Muslim women
 4. Senior citizens
-
1. “Immigrants” is a very broad term, incorporating a large number of people – with different needs and with different skill levels. Our member survey suggests adult education providers must therefore develop courses within a local context, to best fit the needs of the actual individuals in each and every case.
 2. To tackle illiteracy, the German EAEA members answering our survey suggest a broad initiative with courses and opportunities, provided by a collision of forces within the educational field.
 3. EAEA members identify that Muslim women, often mothers, are not engaged in society at the same level as other groups. Local initiatives are needed to incorporate the group in activities and courses.
 4. EAEA members want to see more education on health and quality of life for senior citizens.

Additionally, our survey suggests that there needs to be expanded focus on counselling services and regional cooperation.

All in all, our members say these challenges are mentioned in the country specific recommendations for Germany, but there is no clear solution or course of action on offer. As Germany is a federal state, there are large differences in how these issues are tackled across the country. The folk high schools, for instance, are largely funded on the municipality level – and there can be major differences in pre-requisites.

The Impact of PIAAC

The recent PIAAC results created discussion and talks between adult education providers and politicians and decision makers, our members report. Some “one-time events” to show off the possibilities offered by adult education were organised but so far EAEA members say there have been no decisions that greatly influence the overall educational infrastructure or framework.

Member outlook

From the German EAEA members the focus for the future is clear. Inclusion and literacy must be high on the agenda. In the formal school system the number of pupils in each class is too large and the teachers are unable to provide specific support to children with special needs. Smaller classes and individual learning plans would go a long way towards a more equal society with higher skills and more inclusion.

EAEA members also suggest awareness raising activities in order to show politicians as well as the public how adult education can make a difference. It is also vital that different actors within the field start to cooperate in a more organised way, despite the federal system.

Just as German society in general is facing a future with an enlarged senior population, EAEA members say the average age of adult education staff is similarly increasing. Adult education providers need to diversify in order to appeal to a broad audience.

On a similar note, EAEA members say adult education providers face a tough challenge in bringing attention to international and global issues in the face of growing nationalism (as seen across Europe).

In regards to what the members expect from the European level, our survey shows a desire for greater pressure on the European countries to lessen the number of pupils in classes (at all levels of education), improve the transparency of national commitments and recognise that quality adult education is worth investing in and for. It is important to conceptualise adult education and demonstrate what it can do. Adult education must also play a part in fighting the renewed nationalistic trends threatening a peaceful and inclusive Europe.

GREECE

Recent developments

EAEA members from Greece say that the European Agenda for Adult Learning has greatly influenced proceedings on the national level, leading to a tighter focus on different education providers and how they can work in cooperation and without addressing the same areas. Recent developments also enable more organisations to be recognised as providers of lifelong learning, something that EAEA members view as positive. During the later part of 2013, workshops were organised for adult education providers and other educators, designed to address educational needs and opportunities. Despite this, EAEA members feel that the events of 2013 focused more on dissemination of successful projects and less on forming new strategies for the future. Our members say a lot of work remains – especially in forming real discussions and strategies.

Future focus

EAEA members say outreach efforts will be key in coming years. Adult education providers need to reach out to people in long-time unemployment and to people in marginalised areas. Adult education needs to be opened up to include new ways of learning, not always with a focus on experts training beginners. The same goes for adult educators themselves, who might benefit from skills in various learning techniques. Another area that is underdeveloped at the moment is peer-to-peer learning through online resources.

The Impact of PIAAC

The results for Greece are expected to arrive in 2015 but EAEA members say the initial result from other countries provide enough indication for immediate action. There are already strategies to minimise early school dropouts, strengthen ICT skills and provide different “second chance”-initiatives. However, our survey participants say greater efforts are needed for literacy campaigns and in order to reach people in marginalised areas. The survey indicates that this process is just starting up.

Member outlook

EAEA members from Greece say a unified Adult Education Strategy is needed, communicating a holistic and broad definition of what adult education can be. For that to happen, further efforts are needed in order to enlighten both policy makers and the general public as to what adult education can be and mean. Adult education can certainly help fight unemployment but must also be seen as something that incorporates all aspects of life. Also, members say the accreditation system for adult educators needs to be broadened and focus more on facilitating mutual learning, rather than forming experts who simply instruct others.

For the European level, Greek survey participants say continuous interaction, advocacy and monitoring are key activities. Furthermore, European officials should visit local adult education providers and see different realities, in order to fully understand and take into account all aspects of the field.

HUNGARY

Recent developments

The focus in the adult education community is currently on senior citizens and on family issues. In our ever-changing society, and faced with new challenges from the economic crisis and the need for more drastic measures, what happens to the family and who will take care of senior citizens when society lacks the means to fully support elderly care? With more stress in everyday life, both for those working and for those fighting poverty, local communities, family values and intergenerational learning runs the risk of being overlooked in the pursuit of provision. Adult education providers in Hungary seek to halt that kind of development by offering learning opportunities focused on softer values. The activities are mostly organised by NGOs, sometimes as part of larger European projects. There is no immediate link to the European Agenda for Adult Learning.

Future focus

The next challenge for adult education in Hungary is the issue of fighting youth unemployment. However, to do this successfully, EAEA members say funding opportunities and a broader organisation of efforts are key.

The Impact of PIAAC

Hungary did not participate in the PIAAC survey and the overall results gained limited exposure in the country – mostly in professional magazines and education discourse.

Member outlook

EAEA members say education policy is fragmented. In the last couple of years, the ministry of national economy handled issues related to adult education. There is no real coordination between government portfolios and adult education stakeholders are not satisfactorily organised and therefore in no position to conduct any lasting advocacy work.

For the European level, our survey indicates that Hungarian members wish to see more comparison between different European regions and a greater focus on areas currently struggling to gain sufficient government support for adult education actions. Survey answers also suggest that current efforts to highlight positive achievement – as well as challenging obstacles – need to continue.

ICELAND

Recent developments

Iceland is currently working on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) for adult education and trying to build bridges between formal and informal system.

Future focus

They will put their efforts on the active participation of people in the education, and work on the goal founded on the policy document Iceland 2020 - that the rate of Icelanders between 20–66 years old who have not finished a formal secondary education will have fallen from 30 % to 10 % in 2020. Additionally the implementation of the European Qualifications Framework levels as well as National Qualification Framework will be taken into consideration.

The Impact of PIAAC

Iceland did not participate in PIAAC.

Member outlook

Many efforts will be done in the introduction and promotion of new ideas pertaining adult education and the methods of implementation of both the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and NQF. More emphasis on the participation of unemployed people in adult education, and on the creation of a link between adult education and the labour market, in terms of building bridges between adult learning and formal education.

IRELAND

Recent developments

Major changes are forthcoming in Ireland, with a new government policy designed to streamline and amalgamate education and training about to take effect. The new policy incorporates different forms of adult education, including vocational training – and links them with further education and training initiatives. EAEA members say this presents a whole new set of challenges as the strategy seeks to combine two sectors with very different histories and funding arrangements. Even the status and ethos of adult education is considerably different from formal education, according to one survey response. The new legislation brings the birth of a new authority for further education and training, called SOLAS. The new arm will be responsible for co-ordinating, funding and monitoring further education and training undertakings, delivered by 16 local Education and Training Boards (who in turn replaces the previous local education authorities and the FAS, State Training Agency). EAEA members suggest that the changes are a direct response to the economic crash and the agenda set by EU/IMF funders who bailed out Ireland after the collapse of the banking system. Earlier this year, SOLAS launched the first five-year strategy for further education and training, after a period of consultation, assisted by the Irish Economic and Social Research Institute.

EAEA members say it is unclear how much the new changes are influenced by the European Agenda for Adult Learning, instead suggesting – as mentioned above – that the major influence is the requirements of the bailout.

Future focus

The survey answers from Ireland list a number of challenges for the years ahead. First off, there is some worry concerning if the new ETB:s (local Education and Training Boards) will have the capacity and influence to carry out the goals provided by the new strategy for further education and training. There is also a worry, among EAEA members, that the focus on employment and the needs of the labour market may overshadow the wider purpose of adult education and lifelong learning. Our survey answers indicate that further efforts are needed to ensure the survival of non-formal community education – preferably with opportunities for further development – during the current, crisis-driven focus. We must highlight, members say, the quality of adult education – and not just numbers or quotas. Efforts must be made to further develop the skills and professionalism of the people working within the field. How can people working at ground level adapt to the new agenda? Will they have enough resources to deliver?

The Impact of PIAAC

Other than discussions organised by EAEA members and adult education providers, the PIAAC results have not caused any major ripples in the overall political and social debate. EAEA member AONTAS, together with the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) hope to improve the situation with a new proposal for discussion and dissemination of PIAAC findings. AONTAS is now the designated national coordinator for this endeavour, appointed by the Irish Department of Education and Skills.

Member outlook

As with all transitions, there will be a need to monitor and evaluate the new strategy and authority in the years ahead. EAEA members indicate that it is especially important to care for the learners' possibilities to profess contention and feedback on the educational opportunities they partake in. EAEA member AONTAS is already a key collaborator in developing the further education and training strategy and will continue to work with SOLAS, particularly on ways for the learners to voice their opinions. Furthermore, our survey suggests a strong focus on initial and continuous development for adult education providers and people working within the field. The different stakeholders need to work together to develop a strategy for how best to go about that challenge.

As for the European level, Irish members say that they will continue to work with EAEA and they hope to influence the European Agenda with project work that they are already involved in. Lastly, they also stress the need to work at government level to influence the EU.

ISRAEL

Recent developments

Adult education providers in Israel are currently preparing for next year, as 2015 will be a year of commemoration – it will be 50 years since the passing of professor Martin Buber, who was influential in introducing adult education in the country. EAEA member the Israel Adult Education Association (IAEA) are leading the charge with a number of initiatives set to show the relevance of the professor's teachings to a new audience. There are also links to German adult education providers, as professor Buber was born in Germany, and there's plan for mutual initiatives.

In other news, there is a new committee dedicated to re-examining adult education aims and activities. The committee was initiated by the IAEA and is chaired by an "outside expert".

Future focus

Members from Israel are hoping that next year's focus on Martin Buber will help introduce adult education to new target groups. According to our survey, there should also be interest outside of the country as Martin Buber was an international figure with a lot of acknowledged research to his name. The IAEA are hoping that next year's activities will interest other EAEA members as well.

The Impact of PIAAC

The PIAAC results were not largely discussed in Israel. Our survey respondents say it was not deemed relevant for their circumstances.

Member outlook

Israel is not eligible for Erasmus+ (as they are not part of the European Union) and our members say funding remains a critical issue for adult education providers in the country. The IAEA are hoping for more collaboration with European partners, as well as to one day be allowed to apply for funding from EU programmes.

LIECHTENSTEIN

Recent developments

As in many European countries, recent developments in Liechtenstein (within the educational field) focus on basic skills and employability. 2013 saw the implementation of a “counselling centre” providing support for those in need of transition, either on the job market or for educational undertakings. There’s also new support for providing courses designed for up-skilling those without or with low basic skills. EAEA members say that this initiative is already proving meaningful, with early effects becoming visible. EAEA Members also state that these efforts relate to the European Agenda for Adult learning.

Future focus

The survey answers from Liechtenstein indicate that there is need for further advocacy work in the years to come: non-formal adult education is not yet recognised as a vital part of a prosperous society. Awareness-raising activities, both towards policy makers and towards the general public is needed in order to show how non-formal adult education can help both in the fights towards greater employability and growth – and for lifelong learning that benefits the individual no matter your background or situation.

The Impact of PIAAC

Liechtenstein did not participate in the 2013/2014 PIAAC survey and the overall results did not cause great debate within the state.

Member outlook

The feedback from Liechtenstein indicates that greater efforts for awareness-raising are needed in the coming years. It is vital for politicians and possible learners alike to understand the potential of non-formal adult education.

In order to do the above adult education providers in Liechtenstein depend on mutual undertakings at the European level. Our member survey tells us that it is important to be part of European networks and umbrella organisations, like EAEA, in order to get figures, facts and studies that can be used to influence policy makers at home. There is simply no organisation large enough – within the modestly sized monarchy – to work on such material independently. European co-operation is thus at the heart of Liechtenstein’s development.

MALTA

Recent developments

For the very first time, professional training is now offered to adult educators in Malta. As many of the professionals in the field have a background in formal education, a new toolset with different pedagogy and andragogy is often needed. There is now a diploma in adult teaching available, organised by the Directorate for Lifelong Learning.

Also, as in many other European countries, the up-skilling of adults is an undertaking that adult education providers in Malta are prioritising. As of late, adult education providers have been working with major companies, creating opportunities for workers to upgrade their skills. The idea is that such activities are beneficial both for the workers and for the companies.

The Directorate for Lifelong Learning recently introduced a mapping exercise designed to show the number of public service employees lacking in basic skills. Hopefully this endeavour will create further opportunities for skills upgrading. Adult education providers in Malta are also focused on community learning, strengthening their presence and educational opportunities in local communities.

Future focus

Our survey answers indicate that the main challenge for the foreseeable future is to reach adults who currently state that they do not wish to participate in any form of learning. Recent statistics show that 62 % of the men and 48 % of the women not involved in lifelong learning believe that they do not need to learn anything new in organised activities. At the same time, 4 % of the adult population are illiterate. Making the public understand the possibilities that adult education brings is key for a stronger participation in the future. Of course, in order to do that, the quality of adult education in Malta must increase, according to our survey responses.

The Impact of PIAAC

Malta did not participate in the PIAAC-survey and our survey shows no indication of these results creating major discussion within the country.

Member outlook

EAEA members pinpoint dissemination of adult education opportunities and quality insurance of adult education activities as key areas for future focus – in order to tackle the skills imbalance in the country. As for the European dimension, EAEA members from Malta say that the European Agenda offers substantial support for pushing adult education initiatives domestically. They also believe that there is improvement on the first call, making it more flexible for implementing initiatives. Even so, our survey answers say that we need to put adult education in greater focus on the European – as well as on the national political agenda.

THE NETHERLANDS

Recent developments

In the Netherlands, survey answers paint the picture of a country where focus on adult education is decreasing as policy makers prioritise other areas. The Ministry of Education is gradually moving away from issues concerning adult education. Funding venues are now further decentralised and run at municipality level. Some private education and training providers have even gone bankrupt in the last year.

Still, adult education providers in the country continue to organise the annual Lifelong Learning Week, even with less formal funding available for the activities and coordination.

Future focus

EAEA members say that coordination is key for future development. As one survey answer put it – survival is the most immediate goal for adult education in the Netherlands, and in order to survive, new alliances – both locally and nationally – are essential. Incorporating new media and e-learning tools into adult education courses are also high on the agenda for the future, according to our survey results. And perhaps most importantly, adult education providers have to find new ways to accumulate political support.

The Impact of PIAAC

The PIAAC results did not cause major debate in the Netherlands but it did highlight some areas of specific vulnerability, like educational alternatives for immigrants and the elderly.

Member outlook

For EAEA members, the road ahead must be paved with new forms of cooperation and new alliances. Adult education providers must create venues for permanent discussion in order to form mutual strategies and agendas for the future of adult education in the Netherlands.

As for the European level, EAEA members in the Netherlands wish to see clear policy statements that can be used effectively in advocate work and lobbying.

NORWAY

Recent developments

According to our survey responses, the situation for adult education in Norway remains healthy and stable. During the last few years, there's even been a small rise in participation across the activities organised by the study associations (from 480 000 to 500 000 participants).

There was a new law related to adult education, passed in 2010. So far, there have been no major changes or outcomes related to the new bill but EAEA members say some small changes might still come.

There is a national programme for skills learning at work, and during the last four-year period, the budget for this endeavour was almost doubled.

All in all, EAEA members report good developments across the board. More and more perspectives and views are offered on the possibilities of adult education. Norway is taking part in the European process for creating a mutual qualification framework and the Nordic cooperation is as strong as ever. Our survey answers also indicate that methodology and pedagogy from the non-formal sector are being adopted in higher education and in the formal sector.

Perhaps the most important development for the future is the new working group appointed by the Ministry of Education, to develop better validation tools for learning that takes place outside of the formal school-system. Results are expected in 2015.

EAEA members say that many of the recent developments in the country somehow relate to the European Agenda for Adult learning – as even though Norway is not a member of the European Union, they often follow EU recommendations in various fields, including adult education.

Future focus

The newly elected government (2013) is launching a white paper for Lifelong Learning, in 2015 and EAEA members are expecting this report to set the agenda for future developments. There is some worry, in our survey responses, that grants for adult education might shrink as a result of cutbacks – however, there are no current indications that grants and funding structures will change right now. As for areas of future focus, EAEA members suggest more focus on education for immigrants and education in prisons.

The Impact of PIAAC

The PIAAC-results created a sustained debate in Norway and EAEA members are active in showing how adult education plays a vital part for the future.

Member outlook

EAEA members believe they are working “in the borderlands” of education and culture, something they need to demonstrate to policy makers and the general public. They need to be close to policy makers in order to work for better visibility and improvement.

As for the European level, Norwegian adult education providers rely on umbrella organisations like EAEA for documentation, statistics, information and advice.

POLAND

Recent developments

Recent progress has been done in the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, survey led by the OECD, including Poland for the third time and showing the difference and progresses realized in reaching the OECD level. However, a low level of adults' skills in surveyed fields has been shown through the project "The development of a set of national standards of professional competence required by employers", a project developed on behalf of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (2012-2013). The main project result is the descriptions of 300 professions set up in the arrangement: knowledge, skills and other requirements, including social skills. These standards of competence facilitate the communication between employers and job seekers. They are also a tool for designing training courses based on diagnosed competency gaps supporting the informal education and confirmation of acquired skills

Future focus

The new objective is to support the process of changing the educational paradigm from "teaching" into "learning", to cooperate with different institutions and to establish partnerships for adult learning, as well as help in the training of low-skilled adults and disadvantaged groups.

The Impact of PIAAC

Some discussions at different levels (research institutes, ministries) about the adjustment of the educational offer to the labour market have been raised, such as the pre-conditions for young people to enter the labour market and the different skills levels acquired in different systems of education and also the pre-conditions for an equal access to education and international mobility.

Member outlook

Information about innovations and directions for future action in other European countries is important to our members in Poland. It is also essential to keep a wide space open for different institutions to share their opinions about the recommendations and initiatives that are planned to be implemented by the European Commission and EAEA in the future.

PORTUGAL

Recent developments

Due to the nation's struggle to restrict the effects of the economical crisis, funding for Portugal's acknowledged efforts in validation and recognition of prior learning came to a complete halt in 2013, with the decision to interrupt support for the country's "new opportunity centres" – thus leaving such operations to fend for themselves without government grants. Overall, new cutbacks are limiting possibilities for adult education in general. Overall this is bad news, of course, but EAEA members say it has also put adult education providers to the test – challenging them to come up with new concepts and operation models, thus broadening the scope for what adult education can be and mean. Most of the money for adult education was reserved for VET and CVET – as a way to solve unemployment issues and – again – address the economical crisis.

Across the country, regional workshops on the European Agenda have been set up to stimulate further discussion. EAEA members report a lot of adult education providers are looking towards EU initiatives and programs for alternate funding and opportunities during the national funding drought. New opportunities within the Erasmus+ programme are opening up for cooperation ideas across different sectors and fields. Across the board there is newfound interest for European development.

Future focus

EAEA members say national policies often deal with youth unemployment and upgrading skills for new jobs. This is a worthwhile focus, but our survey indicates that other areas might be overlooked – challenges linked to an ageing population, for instance, are not addressed enough. Survey participants also say civil society actors are not satisfactorily included in the dialogue to shape initiatives for the future. Although a new programme to renew recognition efforts for informal and non-formal competencies has been announced, answers to our survey propose uncertainty in how transparent and open this development will be – and what kind of financial opportunities might emerge. In response, centres for skills recognition and validation are setting up their own network to advocate for influence and to explore future funding opportunities. There is hope, among EAEA members, that this endeavour might result in a fully-fledged umbrella organisation in the future – to better focus and deliver input from the sector.

The Impact of PIAAC

Portugal did not participate in the PIAAC undertaking but EAEA members following the results from other countries suggest that a key challenge in achieving better results for the future is reaching people with poor literacy levels and engaging them in adult education. Portugal has adopted the skills strategy, promoted by the OECD.

Member outlook

Our survey participants say the debate on future initiatives for skills validation needs to be opened up for further participation from actors within civil society. A bottom-up approach is needed – where key adult education stakeholders can help with portraying the current landscape. Different sectors need to cooperate to find the best strategies. Companies should pick up some of the costs for adult education and continuous training costs linked to skills upgrading. More investments in adult education are vital. For this to happen, EAEA members say adult education providers need to network – both on the national level and on the European level.

For the above-mentioned networking initiatives, EAEA-members from Portugal say they depend on partners at the European level for policy recommendations, manifestos, and materials that can be translated and used to advocate on the national level. It is also important that the flow of information goes both ways – meaning it should be easy for local actors to provide information and input that will be considered on the European level. Furthermore, European networks and collaboration can help organisations with limited economy to share knowledge with each other – for initiatives, best practises and funding opportunities alike.

ROMANIA

Recent developments

For Romania, support from EU programmes like Grundtvig – although now a part of Erasmus+ – are essential for the development of adult education activities. In fact, the launch of the new Erasmus+ programme was accompanied by a big promotion initiative, continuing the strong and growing tradition of Romanian NGOs (as well as individuals) taking advantage of the opportunities within the EU programmes and the European Social Fund. In 2012, over 6850 applications were submitted for possible funding by the Lifelong Learning Programme. Romania is also among the top countries when distributing unused funds from other countries.

To drum-up support and awareness for adult education within the country itself, a national version of the Adult Learners' Week, called "Festival of your chances" is organised annually.

Among many outstanding adult education initiatives organised in Romania, the "Citizens come first"-initiative, started in 2005, is perhaps one of the more established – providing basic skills training and encouraging active participation in community life via a national network of community facilitators in 30 different locations.

The European Agenda for Adult Learning plays a major role in Romania.

Future focus

The Ministry of Education is currently busy with the framework for Lifelong Learning – setting the stage for developments from 2014 to 2020. EAEA members answering our survey feel that further advocacy work is needed in order to work non-formal and informal learning into the framework – because as of now, only vocational training and teacher training is in focus.

Still, the floor for discussion is open as proved by a number of key conferences taking place in Romania during 2014, including "Keeping young people in employment, education or training" (organised by various ministries), the fourth International Conference on Adult Education and the sixth International Edu World conference, focusing on "education facing world issues".

The Impact of PIAAC

Recent PIAAC results have not generated any discussion or statements.

Member outlook

EAEA members call for the implementation of a board focused on developing adult education, consisting of experts and practitioners. According to survey answers, there is a big gap in what is put down on paper and the local realities where policies have to be implemented. There is more coordination needed, especially for cultural centres across the country – a potential platform for future adult education. Finally, more advocacy work is needed in order to show the potential of non-formal and informal learning.

EAEA members from Romania are happy with efforts being made at the European level and thus put the need for development mostly on the national level.

RUSSIA

Recent developments

In April of this year, the 15th Russian Adult Learner's week was organised with "the culture of learning throughout life" as an overarching theme. The initiative served both to raise awareness on the benefits of adult education and to bring together stakeholders and experts to discuss issues for the future. Workshops, seminars and demonstrations were organised in over 60 regions, with a main festival in St. Petersburg.

Some of the topics discussed in Russia at the moment include the social and professional effects of adult education as well as charting new models for activities. During the Adult Learner's Week it became clear that adult education in Russia is on the rise, with new goals that include reaching more young people, seniors, unemployed people, migrants and other specific target groups in need of specific actions. As in many other countries, Russian adult education providers are tackling the up-skilling of low-skilled people as well as providing basic skills and fighting illiteracy. Our members also say they believe adult education is a tool for fighting extreme nationalism, chauvinism and xenophobia. Adult education can also be a way to bring communities together and for people to explore their own potential.

Our survey respondents are unsure as to how recent developments in Russia are influenced by the European Agenda for Adult learning and there are no official ties from the government or the regions. The PIAAC survey is important for comparing results with other countries.

The Impact of PIAAC

Our survey says the PIAAC results are now starting to create discussion, with the national coordinator for PIAAC in Russia having just finished analysing the results.

Member outlook

Our members say adult education needs more attention from the government and the public. More advocacy work and awareness raising is on the agenda for the future.

For the European level, our Russian members want more opportunities for international projects but overall they are very happy with the support provided by EAEA.

SERBIA

Recent developments

Serbia is yet another country struggling to overcome the many difficulties brought on by the economic crisis – and so new reforms cut across all areas of society, including adult education. Currently, Serbia is negotiating a possible future within the European Union.

2013 saw the adoption of a new law for adult education and marks the official recognition of adult education as an integral part of the education system. A year before that, in 2012, the Serbian Strategy for the Development of Education from 2012 to 2020 was launched with the aim to develop a system for lifelong education. The strategy includes adult education – even dictating that providers of higher education organise shorter courses for adults – and puts a strong focus on equality – providing learning opportunities for all, according to our survey answers.

Simultaneously, EU-supported “second chance”-project for elementary education runs through the country, hosted by 80 schools. The method of Elementary Functional Education for Adults runs on a three-year cycle and includes both vocational training and general courses.

EAEA member Adult Education Society is working to implement the Swiss training system for trainers and teachers in further education, including recognition of prior learning and experiences. This is viewed as vital in our survey responses – as quality insurance is important for the continued development of adult education in Serbia.

Serbia is still only a candidate country for EU membership but EU developments already play an important role. The country does not, however, directly apply measures based on the European Agenda for Adult Learning.

Future focus

Implementing and understanding the new law is key for 2014 and 2015. At the same time, adult education providers in Serbia face a steep challenge in raising participation – as the country suffers from one of the lowest participation rates in Europe. Of those participating, employed and well-educated men in their twenties and thirties dominate. EAEA members believe adult education could be an important tool for promoting intercultural exchange, diversity, human rights, anti-discrimination, women rights and LGBTI-rights. Our members say it is crucial to bring educational opportunities to marginalised groups.

A continuation of professionalization efforts within the adult education field is also important for the future, according to our survey answers. Currently, practitioners come from many different fields, and so implementing standards for training and professional development is a key challenge. A National Quality Framework is in development making accreditation of institutions and adult education providers easier, in accordance with international standards. Recognition, validation and accreditation of non-formal and informal learning will be regulated in the new law mentioned at the beginning of this report.

The Impact of PIAAC

Serbia did not participate in the PIAAC survey but the results have been discussed on the professional level within the educational field. It is strongly felt, according to our survey that Serbia should participate in the next PIAAC round.

Member outlook

EAEA members say funding is a constant source of concern in Serbia, but the new law, complete with annual plans for adult education, should make advocating for funding easier. However, support and cooperation with European and international partners are still key for NGOs working with adult education in the country. There is growing support from the private sector, with companies engaged in educational opportunities for their employees. Our members say these actions need to be integrated in the overarching quality insurance efforts currently being implemented.

Overall, EAEA members say a sustainable system for adult education is dependent on strong regional collaboration, a wider understanding of the needs of adult learners and the further training of trainers for quality insurance and standards. Besides an increased unemployment rate in Serbia – and the importance of developing the VET system – the significance of civic and democratic education needs to be emphasised.

For the European level, our survey calls upon EAEA and similar organisations to further highlight the situation in non-EU countries. EU support for candidate countries are key for achieving the goals needed for full membership. European interest organisations working with education can help highlight that fact. Serbia needs to be included in the Erasmus+ program and further efforts are needed to bring key recommendations from the European Institutions into the Serbian context, to be used as advocacy tools.

SLOVAKIA

Recent developments

The prerequisites for adult education in Slovakia are changing. The Ministry of Education, with their subsidiary “National Life-long Learning institute”, have set out to create a new system for continuing education and counselling for adults, funded by the European Social Fund and with the aim of raising the quality of adult education. EAEA members say that early indications point towards more funding opportunities staying within the departmental institutions of the ministries: In the first months of 2013 fourteen national projects worth 238 million euros were launched. The Ministry of Education reserved these projects for different project opportunities – several directly related to non-formal adult education. They will surely influence the shape of adult education in Slovakia. EAEA member AIVD sent out a survey to its members, asking about the awareness of the new initiatives and 62 % learned about the changes through the information provided in the actual survey material.

Future focus

Our survey answers tell us that there is a worry, among adult education providers that too much focus is put on foreign funding like the European Social Fund. One respondent says that it is as if everything starts again from scratch, whenever there is new funding coming in. The new strategy (the system for continuing education and counselling for adults) with funding will last until 2015. What happens then? There is a need to advocate for a more coherent and long-term approach for adult education policy – to do that, adult education stakeholders must be brought together in a more organised way. Furthermore, the public’s views on non-formal education as well as recognition of non-formal learning are also areas that need future attention.

The Impact of PIAAC

EAEA members say they’ve put the PIAAC results to good use in campaigns and as advocacy tools. They were also presented during the annual lifelong learning week.

Member outlook

Our members say that Slovakia needs reliable, stable funding opportunities – both for adult education providers and adult education participants – creating new possibilities for learning. If this does not happen, our members foresee the gap between the highly skilled and those with insufficient competences increasing. There is a need to move from a reliance on initial education towards fostering lifelong, skills-oriented learning. Public investment in infrastructure for adult education should be adequate, our members say.

SLOVENIA

Recent developments

In Slovenia, the Adult Education Master Plan (AEMP) is now in effect. Having been passed by parliament, the strategy sets up benchmarks to be achieved up and until the year 2020, also determining the framework for funding. A new programme for the initial integration of immigrants was also launched, with areas linking to services provided by adult education organisations. Additionally, a conceptual framework for new quality assessment and quality assurance for adult education is being introduced, with approaches for internal and external quality assurance. There is also a new competence-based framework for the training of adult educators.

As is evident from above then, there have been a number of steps taken in Slovenia in order to nurture the development of adult education in the country, with initiatives that our members say are closely linked to the European Agenda for Lifelong learning. Of course, there are also many initiatives and activities coming from various adult education providers, providing new opportunities for learning and cooperation across the country. The Slovenian Lifelong Learning Week was organised to spread the word about adult education, the annual Adult Education Conference was held with over 300 stakeholders attending and “The learning parade” created a number of efforts to attract participants from vulnerable groups.

Our survey answers contain several good examples of local adult education initiatives. For example, cultural mediators are being introduced at Slovenian museums, hospitals, botanical gardens and so on. The aim is to engage the elderly in new roles where they actively take part in society by interacting with others and helping both themselves and people around them.

Future focus

As is often the case, funding remains a critical issue for all future adult education initiatives. Our survey answers indicate that future efforts will be focused primarily on raising the participation rates for vulnerable groups and allowing more people to acquire basic competencies by providing supporting activities (counselling, career guidance, recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning and so on). Additionally, maintaining and developing the quality of adult education is also high on the agenda, with efforts planned to strengthen in-service trainings of adult educators. Finally, advocacy work and networking is needed to involve various ministries and social partners in the development of adult education.

Our survey tells us that adult education providers in Slovenia hope to help in creating new jobs for and with young people – and get skilled youngsters to stay in the country. Adult education providers want to create intergenerational meetings and get younger people to interact with older people.

The Impact of PIAAC

Slovenia joined the second round of PIAAC research in 2013 and is expecting the results in May of 2016. Our survey answers say that our respondents are expecting to use the results for the development of national indicators for skills and to help in creating new targeted initiatives to reach vulnerable groups, among other things.

Member outlook

EAEA members say adult education providers want to create a public network – as well as updating the legal basis for adult education – to strengthen the cooperation of different stakeholders at national and regional level. Our members say the European Social Fund is especially important for catering to the needs of vulnerable target groups and it is high time to start planning for the upcoming period.

Additionally, for the European level, our members say that strategic directions and recommendations are important for national policy. Adult education providers in Slovenia depend on up-to-date information on the latest policy developments. Our members also believe we need more mutual European activities to increase the visibility for adult education benefits. We need to advocate for increased financial opportunities for adult education initiatives as part of Erasmus+. EAEA and others should continue to create opportunities for meetings across regions and for interaction between different countries – to discuss specific adult education topics. It is important to be able to share good practices across borders. Slovenian members say we should use our networks for mutual advocacy work. Finally, our Slovenian members support the idea of a European Year of Adult Learning, even expanding it to become an annual day of adult education across the continent.

SPAIN

Recent developments

Education is organised in a local context in Spain, maintained by autonomous community governments. Adult education falls under this framework as well, creating difficulties for adult education providers to see beyond their own local realities. Perhaps as a way to circumvent this, the Lifelong Learning Department of the Ministry of Education set up a specific intranet designed to ease the sharing of information between the ministry and different organisations and adult education providers. There is no direct link to the European Agenda for Adult learning, according to our survey responses.

Future focus

There is not enough coordination between the national level, the local level and various organisations and adult education providers – and so development is limited to the local context. EAEA members feel a strong need for a new institute, dedicated solely to adult education and tasked with coordinating adult education activities and undertakings.

The Impact of PIAAC

The results have created discussion, but some adult education professionals feel that the outcome is not reliable and does not reflect local and national realities, according to our survey answers.

Member outlook

EAEA members feel that policy makers should put a higher value on adult education. There are too few politicians who seem to recognise the potential of non-formal learning, especially linked to skills-upgrading and long-term solutions for fighting unemployment.

For the European level, EAEA members in Spain feel a strong need to ensure that recommendations from the European Commission reach local, autonomous community governments (not getting stuck at the national level) seeing as they hold the key for future adult education initiatives and funding.

SWEDEN

Recent developments

In the first major overhaul in eight years, the Swedish government introduced a new bill on non-formal adult education this March. The overall aims and objectives – as well as the freedom for adult education providers to interpret the government targets – remain largely the same, with the biggest news being an increased focus on evaluating the effects and results of adult education efforts. Evaluation efforts will be initiated in coming years, performed by different government authorities, with different areas of focus. How exactly this will play out – what effects the increased evaluation might have – remains to be seen.

In a parallel development, the main umbrella-organisations of Swedish non-formal adult education adopted a mutual policy, strategy and vision document this spring, laying out a common direction and intent for the future. The document deals with the role and tasks of Swedish study associations and folk high-schools in society. The main target group for the document is local and national government and the Swedish Parliament. In brief, the document proclaims a shared focus on the following areas:

- Enlightenment and context
- Accessibility and inclusion
- Citizens and civil society
- Working life and life-long learning
- Culture and creativity

Other recent developments include new by-laws for Folkbildningsrådet, the non-formal adult education umbrella organisation tasked with the distribution of national grants to folk high schools and study associations, granting the organisation strengthened autonomy. For the ten study associations of Sweden, the biggest change for the foreseeable future will be the merge of Bilda and Sensus, two associations specialising in matters of faith and beliefs.

Regarding the European Agenda for Adult learning, EAEA members say there is already a comparatively strong national policy on adult education in Sweden – and so the European Agenda is not commonly addressed. The same can be said for the country recommendations.

Future focus

For the next couple of years, Swedish EAEA members say that maintaining the current level of subsidies from the state will be important, as well as trying to raise subsidies from municipalities. Overall, the foreseeable future will be about implementing the new policy document described above, monitoring the effects of the new government bill and the forthcoming evaluation efforts, and avocation for the views and values of the adult education providers.

The Impact of PIAAC

The PISA results, where Sweden underperformed, caught most of the media attention and led to a lot of discussion – leaving the PIAAC-results somewhat without attention. Within the adult education community, however, PIAAC was discussed, with a focus on how non-formal adult education can attract school drop outs back to some form of education. The discussion resulted in special activities including for that very goal – including cooperation with the Employment Agency (Arbetsförmedlingen). Overall, the challenge for non-formal adult education is to reach out to new target groups that are not presently in any kind of education, a fact that is reflected in the new government bill – particularly for the study associations who will need to demonstrate how they reach target groups with special needs.

Member outlook

Despite the newfound collaboration with the Employment Agency of Sweden, EAEA members feel that the adult education providers of Sweden need to be allowed better insight into training and education for the unemployed, perhaps also in planning the activities and linking them to other opportunities – especially for younger people. With the new policy document however, the Swedish EAEA members feel that they are well equipped for future advocacy work towards showing the importance of non-formal adult education.

For the European level, the Swedish members say that it is important to be in constant contact with the European parliament and the European commission. Furthermore, EAEA is needed to create a living infrastructure where adult education providers across Europe can build towards a common goal and share ideas and solutions for issues that affect us all. Topics such as validation, EQF/NQF, digital inclusion and pedagogy are in need of mutual strategies and a common framework. EAEA can monitor and influence such development.

SWITZERLAND

Recent developments

In Switzerland, there are quite a number of interesting recent developments affecting adult education. First off, the very first law specifically about adult learning is now being finalised for a planned introduction in 2015. And effective now, nationwide measures for fighting illiteracy are being implemented. Simultaneously, previous initiatives towards promoting and strengthening basic skills are moving into a second phase, with training concepts, professionalization of staff and providers and target group-specific materials. This initiative is expected to be regulated further in the previously mentioned law, meaning that basic skills will be legislated for the very first time.

A new curriculum for adult education professionals has been green-lit by the national authorities, making a nation-wide framework a reality in the near future. Measures have also been taken for improving the “quality label” eduQwa, developed specifically for adult education providers in Switzerland.

Similarly, work continues on the National Qualification Framework, with full implementation expected later this year. The current version does not include non-formal learning but EAEA members and others are advocating for its inclusion.

EAEA members say they see some relation to recent proceedings and the European Agenda for Adult learning.

Future focus

It is clear that Switzerland is on a path towards further quality insurance in adult education. Our members are expecting next year to be heavily dominated by the new law – the national act on adult learning. The implementation of the National Quality Framework will also be in focus, hopefully with the inclusion of non-formal learning. Further professionalization of adult education staff and providers are also expected to make an impact. Finally, our survey shows a strong interest for demand-oriented financing instruments in adult education – as something that needs more development.

The Impact of PIAAC

Switzerland did not participate in the PIAAC survey but some results have been discussed – within the adult education field and by experts – nevertheless.

Member outlook

EAEA members are calling for more funding for non-vocational adult education, better recognition of non-formal certificates, strengthened validation procedures for non-formal and informal competencies, implementation of the National Qualification Framework – including non-formal learning, more research and statistics on adult education activities, further policy to reduce disparity in adult education participation (between people with varying skill-levels).

As for the European dimension, EAEA members from Switzerland report that they are not qualified for the Erasmus+ program, supposedly due to their non-member status. But despite that – adult education providers in Switzerland still need support and cooperation from and with other European organisations and networks.

Our Swizz members also call out for help in showing why non-formal learning should be a part of the National Quality Framework (international cooperation in the development of reference procedures, recommendations and studies).

And finally, our survey calls for new European policies, research and recommendations that help to strengthen non-vocational adult education.

UNITED KINGDOM

Recent developments

EAEA members list several new or recent initiatives, projects and activities in our survey (these activities are still on-going and link to EAEA member NIACE's role as the UK national coordinator for the European Agenda for Adult Learning):

- A community learning trust support programme designed to assist community learning trusts in order to pilot the development of strategic approaches and ways of working that reflect the Government's Community Learning aims and objectives
- A national support programme to support volunteers in community learning
- A European project on outreach, empowerment & diversity, developing outreach strategies to support the inclusion of marginalised groups in adult education with the aim of letting them become active citizens
- The AE-PRO-project, designed to increase the knowledge of staff about adult education in Europe – through the exchange of innovation and the coordinated use of Grundtvig mobilities
- Adult Learners' Week and the festival of learning, created to celebrate lifelong learning and to encourage adults, families and communities to give learning a go and try something new
- Initiatives to track destinations of unemployed learners in order to explore how providers are already tracking learners' destinations, and to try and understand the issues facing providers
- Attempts to measure the economic and social impact of adult education
- Follow up to earlier Literacy, Numeracy and Family Learning Inquiries
- Support for social inclusion through basic skills learning
- Exploration of the role of adult education in Local Democracy Week
- Self-organised Learning and Community Learning Trusts
- Adult participation in workplace learning and its links with learning in the community
- Employability skills for young unemployed adults

Future focus

The British government published its Skills Funding Statement in February, introducing its plans for the funding of further education and skills for the next two years. They include a 19 % cut to the adult skills budget and the scrapping of Further Education loans for apprenticeships. EAEA members say the reduction in core adult skills funding of 19 % over two years will have a major impact on all providers and will reduce learner participation in areas which are not seen as priorities; but the most recent cuts, including the rates for those aged 18 and up, are now beginning to affect core provision. In its response to the funding announcements, NIACE warned that handing on the decisions for cuts to providers could mean that prospective students will face a 'postcode lottery' in terms of their local offer, while students in disadvantaged circumstances could find affordable opportunities to study shrinking further from their grasp. Our survey respondents say this needs to be avoided.

Funding for adult education is an on-going issue, and although the EU has found solutions to tackle the financial crisis adult education remains low on the list of priorities. The Commission has issued six country-specific recommendations to the United Kingdom to help it improve its economic performance. These are in the areas of: public finances; housing market; labour market, education and training; welfare reform and child care; financial sector and network industries.

The Impact of PIAAC

NIACE is driving the charge to create discussion on the PIAAC results, and a number of blog post and opinion-pieces can be found on their webpage.

Member outlook

Our members say it is important to try and improve the range and quality of learning and skills development for work – so that everyone is fully equipped to gain, sustain and progress in employment. Family learning can transform the lives of parents, their children and their communities; it can raise standards in schools. Adult learning strengthens the contribution of volunteers and volunteering. It is also vital to promote new and stronger long-term working partnerships between employers and colleges.

Across the European Union, each country faces a range of economic and social challenges, our UK members say – and in particular, an ageing population and an increasing reliance on a highly skilled workforce while coping with significant skills shortages and skills gaps. Learning is a key solution to these challenges. It is important that, at a European level, this is recognised and on-going support for adult learning should consist of the following – according to our survey respondents:

- Continued promotion and dissemination
- Policy influence
- A unified approach
- Sharing of information from across the EU to learn from each other about what works and what doesn't
- Continued funding of adult learning
- International collaboration (project work etc)



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