

# ESF+ Community of Practice on Employment, Education and Skills – Briefing Note

Peer Review on Outreach to Adults in Need of Basic Skills  
Supporting the online event on 12 June 2023

## Background

According to a recent Cedefop report, the number of adults in the EU-28 (+Norway and Island) with potential for upskilling and reskilling is a shocking 128 million (Cedefop 2020). This estimate includes adults that are either low educated, have low digital or low cognitive skills, or are medium-to-high educated but work in elementary occupations. There are 60 million low-educated adults in the EU (i.e. lower secondary education as their highest educational attainment), although low-educated doesn't mean low-skilled. However, the percentage of adults aged 25 to 64 that have low literacy or numeracy skills ranges from 35% of in Greece, Spain and Italy to at least more than 15% in Finland, Norway or Slovakia (according to PIAAC data). Being unemployed, inactive, above 50 years old or having a migrant background increases the likeliness to fall into one of the above groups.

## EU targets

The European Pillar of Social Rights, established in 2017 also affirms the importance of education and training for every European citizen stating that: 'Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions to the labour market'. Education and lifelong learning (LLL) play an important role in achieving the economic, employment and social goals of both Member States and the EU.

The COVID-19 pandemic has set back already slow progress in adult education. However, the pandemic has given new impetus to adult education as a policy goal. The new EU-level target foresees that at least 60 % of adults should be participating in training every year by 2030 (slightly more than 40% when last measured in 2016); and a minimum of 80 % of all people in the EU aged 16 to 74 should have at least basic overall digital skills by 2023 (only 54% had so in 2021).

## Challenges and national initiatives

These figures are somewhat abstract for those who have been fighting for more support in basic education for years. On the one hand, there is the difficulty of funding enough training places where there is already a strong demand, and on the other hand, there is often a lack of funds to expand guidance and awareness campaigns to reach out to those who are per se more difficult to reach and convince of the benefits of education and training.

Nevertheless, in the last decade Member States, co-funded by the ESF, have clearly increased their efforts to improve the provision of basic education, for example: The "Austrian Adult Education Initiative" was introduced in 2012 to enable adults who lack basic skills and those who never graduated from a lower secondary school to continue and finish their education, free of charge.

The French government has made the fight against illiteracy a priority and declared it a “grande cause nationale” in 2013. In Poland, the project “A Chance. New Opportunities for Adults” established in 2018 has aimed at supporting adults with a low level of skills, knowledge and competences who are not eligible for support under the Youth Guarantee (compare details in EAEA 2021). In Ireland, the last decade saw significant progress in government policy on adult literacy and numeracy education. In 2014, the Government launched the first ever strategy for further education and training (FET) including an emphasis on adult literacy and awareness campaigns for adult literacy strategy (NALA 2021).

### **Good Practices from Ireland, Austria and Finland**

From the above list of examples which could be easily continued we have selected three cases to present different challenges and programmes related for the online peer learning event. A national awareness campaign in Ireland, a regional awareness and outreach activity in Vienna, Austria, and another urban outreach project in Helsinki, Finland:

**Ireland**, as part of its Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy, has funded national campaigns to raise adult awareness of literacy and numeracy over the past decade. The campaigns, managed by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), included radio advertising, video and digital advertising, outdoor advertising, posters, leaflets and public relations activity. A new ten-year adult literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy strategy is now in place.

**Austria’s** biggest outreach event, “The Vienna Weeks” for career and continuing education” have been introduced in 2015 targeting adults with low levels of formal qualifications and young adults in transition from school to work or not in education or employment. Year by year, the “Vienna Weeks” organise a broad variety of roughly one hundred outreach activities, ranging from small activities with only a few people attending to large events with hundreds of visitors.

In **Finland**, Helsinki Education Division’s KYKY projects addressed stay-at-home parents who typically do not get in touch with authorities such as Somali, Kurdish and Arabic speaking migrants. Outreach takes place with the help of municipalities, NGOs, language-learning groups, but also by approaching individuals in food shops that are frequented by immigrants. Many of the ideas of the temporary ESF project were transformed into a permanent offer of the city.

The presentations will highlight how these practices are different from the methods and tools that have been previously applied to address the challenges, what the strengths and weaknesses are and why these practices are particularly useful.

The discussion in the break-out rooms will be an opportunity to reflect on the transferability of these practices and also to compare them to practices in other countries.

**References and further Reading:**

Cedefop (2020). [\*Empowering adults through upskilling and reskilling pathways. Volume 1: adult population with potential for upskilling and reskilling\*](#). Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union

EAEA - European Association for the Education of Adults (2021). [\*State of Play. Basic Skills Development in selected European Countries\*](#).

European Commission (2022). [\*New Opportunities for Adults. Study supporting the evaluation of the Council Recommendation of 19 December 2016 on Upskilling Pathways\*](#). Publications Office of the European Union.

NALA - National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), [\*NALA 1980 – 2020. A Living History\*](#).