



# MANIFESTO

**Help practitioners to succeed in achieving inclusive adult education**



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## INTRODUCTION

Access to inclusive education for all learners at all ages is a fundamental human right enshrined in the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, United Nations, 2006).

State Parties have an obligation to remove legal, physical and organisational barriers that could prevent persons with disabilities accessing education and lifelong learning. This includes adequate adaptation of school infrastructure, curricula and teaching methods, but it also means supporting teachers and educational institutions so they can deliver truly inclusive education for all.

The **ultimate vision for inclusive education systems is to ensure that all learners of any age are provided with meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities** in their local community, together with their friends and peers. To make this vision a reality, all teachers must be effectively prepared to support all learners to participate in all educational opportunities. This requires policy makers to take appropriate measures to employ teachers, including teachers with disabilities, who are qualified in using inclusive teaching resources, and to train professionals and staff who work at all levels of education. Such training should incorporate disability awareness and the use of appropriate augmentative and alternative models, means and formats of communication, educational techniques and materials to support persons with disabilities (Article 24.4).

Despite the provisions of the UN CRPD, the meaningful participation in mainstream adult education and lifelong learning programmes is still far from being the reality for many learners with disabilities. The **lack of adequate training for education practitioners** as well as the **lack of adequate, flexible and individualized educational resources** are the **key barriers in enabling greater access of learners with a disability to adult education**.

The **ALL IN! INcredible Practitioners to empower adults with disABILITIES through Education, Employment & Social Entrepreneurship** project aims at addressing these challenges, by producing innovative inclusive tools and resources for practitioners supporting persons with disabilities in adult education as well as transitioning to employment.

This document and the recommendations proposed are the result of the ALL IN! project's research on the state-of-play regarding adult education practitioners supporting persons with disabilities in Romania, Greece and Spain and in partnership with key stakeholders working in the field of education.



## ***What is adult learning?***

**Adult learning** is a key phase in the continuum of lifelong learning and refers to the participation of adults[1] in lifelong learning. Adult learning usually refers to learning activities after the end of initial education and is a vital component of the EU's lifelong learning policy. It covers any learning activity (whether informal, non-formal or formal).

In the current societal context, good basic skills are a necessity, whether for employment, inclusion, citizenship or social cohesion. Individuals with poor basic skills are increasingly shut out of the labour market and are less likely to be socially or politically engaged. At the national level, low skills lead to greater social spending and poorer, less dynamic economies[2]. Adult learning brings considerable benefits for learners, for employers and for the wider community: it can reduce social inequality, increase inclusion, cohesion and active citizenship; and improve mental and physical health[3].

Despite its benefits, participation of adults in learning is generally low and varies greatly between European countries: overall, the numbers are stagnating and go from 1.4% to 31.6% (2012 figures). Participation rates are especially disappointing for low-skilled, older adults and persons with disabilities. In the EU-28 countries, almost one disabled person out of 10 aged 15-64 participated in education and training (formal and non-formal); this was two times less compared to non-disabled persons.[4]

## ***Adult education for persons with disabilities***

Adult learning is the most diverse of the sectors of lifelong learning; national adult learning systems are complex and heterogeneous and vary significantly from one country to another.

In terms of adult learning for persons with disabilities, this can be delivered in mainstream education programmes or via programmes targeting specifically persons with disabilities offered by public, private or non-for-profit sector providers or by employers. This can include vocational training centres, lifelong learning centres, public agencies, employment centres or different training programmes through EU and national funded projects, etc.



[1] Eurostat statistics

[2] EC, Education and Training 2020: Improving Policy and Provision for Adult Learning in Europe, Report of the Education and Training 2020 Working Group on Adult Learning 2014 - 2015

[3] European Commission (2015). An in-depth analysis of adult learning policies and their effectiveness in Europe - Final Report. Brussels: Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

[4] Eurostat statistics

### ***Adult education practitioners***

The ALL IN! project recognizes **the role of practitioners in adult education as key actors in delivering quality programmes and support to persons with disabilities throughout their learning journey.**

**Adult education practitioners supporting for persons with disabilities** include a range of professionals involved in the educational, guidance and support processes, such as: trainers, teacher (including support teachers and teaching assistants), psychologists, social workers, occupational therapists, mentors, job coaches, etc. Cooperation amongst multi-disciplinary teams of practitioners is essential to provide support to adult learners with special education needs. It can involve providing different educational and lifelong learning services with the aim to support the wellbeing of the persons with disabilities, promote their independent living, facilitate and encourage their integration into society and enhance access to employment.

A highly professional adult teaching workforce requires quality initial teacher education followed by ongoing professional development. Practitioners in the field of adult education should hold **expertise in their teaching field**, have knowledge of **adult-specific teaching methods**, and make use of **high-quality curricula** centred on practical and real-world aspects rather than subject-centred learning [5]. In the educational context of learners with disabilities, an **additional layer of expertise** is required for practitioners **to provide inclusive education and deal with diversity in the classroom.**

### ***Barriers faced by adult education practitioners in achieving inclusive support***

The project research carried out in three European countries - Romania, Greece and Spain - looked at the national contexts for adult education practitioners supporting persons with disabilities to establish the challenges and needs faced by these professionals in achieving inclusive support.

**One of the key challenges is the absence of a coherent training path and standards of teaching in inclusive adult education.**

The professional development of the practitioners working in adult learning is a vital determinant of the quality of adult learning. EU research shows that adult education practitioners generally lack specific qualifications in adult-focused teaching methods. They also tend to lack theoretical understanding of the cognitive processes involved in adult literacy development[6]. Looking specifically at practitioners supporting persons with disabilities, the project research shows these professionals do not have the adequate skills and competences, including ICT skills for teaching apart from those with training in special education.

Acquiring inclusive education competences is, in most cases, not part of the training curriculum of adult educators. Competences to support persons with disabilities in adult education are not obligatory or a prerequisite for a practitioner to be officially recognised, certified and registered as adult trainer. At the same time, there is no organised framework for the provision of ongoing training on such issues.



[5] Idem 2

[6] Idem 2



There are many educational and professional routes to becoming an adult learning practitioner and the profession is not always recognised within formal career structures. Compared with other educational subsystems, adult learning is characterised by high percentages of part-time staff (and people working on a voluntary basis), who may have few career prospects and are frequently hourly-paid.

***Adequate teaching and support materials are not widely available to provide individualized and flexible person-centered support to learners with disabilities.***

**Flexible curricula and teaching methods** are needed to respond to the diverse abilities and needs of all learners. A major obstacle for adult education practitioners in mainstream education settings is the lack of widely available adequate teaching resources, learning and working methods, including flexible assessment and evaluation systems targeting the needs of diverse learners.

Where curricula and teaching methods are rigid and there is a lack of appropriate teaching materials (for instance, in easy-to-read or Braille) adults with disabilities are at increased risk of exclusion. Assessment and evaluation systems are often focused on academic performance rather than individual progress and therefore can also be restrictive for people with special education needs. Without such resources, the real inclusion of persons with disabilities in life-long learning programmes is vastly restricted or can lead to dropouts.

There is also a general lack of funds in terms of acquiring assistive or person-centred technologies which may enhance the learning process of learners with disabilities. Many assistive technologies are produced by different companies in order to market them for profit. Adult education organizations do not have access to such resources due to lack of funds.

***There is lack of coordination between stakeholders involved in the adult education and support process of persons with disabilities to respond to the current societal needs***

Programmes and initiatives for the adult education and lifelong learning of persons with disabilities are fragmented and not systematic. Specialized resources aimed to support adult learners with disabilities exist, mostly produced by non-for-profit associations and organisations through specific projects, however, are not sufficient to cover the existing gaps at national levels. At the same time, without partnerships between mainstream education systems and civil society organisations, such resources are not properly transferred, upscaled and made widely available.

Training programmes are not evolving and are not constantly updated or enriched, and there is generally no interconnection between the programmes and the social context in which persons with disabilities belong or engage.

**Strategic partnerships** should be established between education providers, public authorities, social providers and employers to determine the skills gap and job opportunities available on the market. These could lead to designing tailor-made programmes that could benefit both adult with disabilities seeking for employment and employers in need of trained employees. Innovative learning methods should be used, such as on-job trainings with the support of specialized practitioners, such as vocational counsellor, mentors, job coaches, etc.

## Together we can do more for adult education practitioners

A multi-disciplinary team of well-qualified adult education practitioners is required to provide effective and efficient support to persons with disabilities throughout the learning process and facilitate the transition to meaningful employment. To achieve this, adult education practitioners should have the tools and autonomy to develop inclusive learning environments and fully support the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Practitioners supporting persons with disabilities in adult education need facilitating frameworks and opportunities to cope with the challenges that they currently face in their work.

Below are our recommendations for European policy makers, national and regional policy makers, education providers, support services and employers of the actions they can take to design policy frameworks to support adult education practitioners in achieving the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

## Recommendations for European policy makers:

### Key message 1: A clear EU vision and commitment is needed to improve policies that impact adult education practitioners

- Develop clear and coherent adult learning policies in co-operation with persons with special needs, families, mainstream and special education providers and other stakeholders based on a long-term strategic vision. These policies should be responsive to societal challenges and tackle issues such as long-term unemployment of persons with disabilities with low skills
- Develop a framework approach for observing and comparing inclusive adult learning policies and their effectiveness and efficiency across European Union Member States. This can be done by comparing the level of access of adult persons with disabilities to lifelong learning opportunities, including the employment rates following such trainings, through comprehensive disaggregated data collection in the framework of the European Semester country analysis
- Ensure that EU funding programmes such as Erasmus, ESF+ and InvestEU contribute to the achievement of inclusive adult education systems and, specifically, to improving the skills and competences of adult education practitioners.



## Recommendations for national, regional and local competent authorities & education providers

### Key message 2: A skilled adult education workforce is needed to provide high-quality education and further support adult learners with disabilities

- Ensure that training in inclusive education is a compulsory component of teacher training, both in initial and ongoing training of educators
- Provide practitioners with attractive career pathways and appropriate employment conditions, including adequate remuneration with similar status and pay to teachers in other sectors
- Establish a quality control framework for adult education programmes using programme and institutional assessment and evaluation
- Develop national/regional/local programmes to ensure the on-going training of practitioners in the field of adult education, including providing opportunities for practitioners to exchange experiences and models of good practice through school visits, job-shadowing, conferences, seminars or informal meetings
- Ensure adequate funding is available for training providers, in particular for train-the-trainer programmes in inclusive adult education
- Develop andragogic [training in how to teach adults] curricula for teacher training in adult education to provide competences for educators on a variety of teaching methods and strategies suitable for diverse lower-skilled adult learners, including for teaching persons with intellectual disabilities. These should focus on the acquisition of cognitive skills (e.g. literacy, numeracy and digital skills)
- Promote co-production in the design, development and delivery of training programmes for teaching inclusive adult education specialists, by including meaningfully persons with disabilities, families, organisations representing persons with disabilities, service providers, mainstream education stakeholders, special education educators in the process
- Develop and mainstream training for specializations needed to complement the learning process and progression towards employment of adult learners with disabilities. This requires the need of officially recognizing professions in terms of vocational assessment, guidance and counselling, and job coaching for persons with disabilities as well as trainers in these fields. The roles of such practitioners are key in facilitating community inclusion and transition to employment of persons with disabilities
- Consider introducing an "Inclusion Label" for training and adults education providers which have well-qualified practitioners able to develop inclusive education programmes.



## Recommendations for national, regional and local competent authorities & education providers

### Key message 3: Adult education practitioners need adequate materials and flexible education environments to support persons with disabilities throughout their learning journey

- Develop person-centred support learning materials adapted to different types of disabilities (easy-to-read curricula, Braille teaching materials, assistive learning technologies, special educational software, etc.)
- Develop quality curricula and learning materials for adult basic skills programmes based on learning outcomes. These should include authentic materials from everyday life. Acknowledge the community as a key formal and informal resource contributing to the learning and teaching activities
- Develop practical toolkits, guides and relevant training for practitioners to know how to make use of flexible learning methodologies for learners with different types of disabilities
- Ensure flexible assessment of learners with disabilities (including self-assessment) that support motivation and learning
- Promote innovative teaching strategies and empower non-formal innovative methods and methodologies through creativity and the use of ICT
- Promote innovation in the delivery of learning outside of the traditional classroom. Design appropriate and flexible delivery arrangements, e.g. distance learning, online learning, peer-learning (such as the buddy-system), workplace delivery, part-time courses
- Funding should be made available for adult education centres to use person-centred technologies and assistive technologies to raise participation and improve the quality of teaching and inclusion of learners with disabilities
- Create open-access resource portals for inclusive adult education practitioners and other relevant stakeholders (including employment agencies, service providers, employers, etc.) providing adapted education materials, assistive technology software, models of good practice and other relevant information





## Recommendations for national, regional and local competent authorities, education providers, service providers and employers

### Key message 4: Collaboration and co-production amongst a wide range of stakeholders and practitioners is needed to achieve effective training programmes and facilitate the employment of persons with disabilities

- Improve multi-sector collaboration and multilateral fund coordination to ensure funds are being used effectively. This, combined with regular monitoring and a robust financial reporting system can ensure cost-effectiveness when allocating resources for adult education training programmes
- Deliver learning that is relevant to employers and learners. This can be done by establishing partnerships among education providers (VET providers, lifelong learning centres), public authorities (employment agencies), service providers, organisations representing persons with disabilities and employers to develop tailor-made programmes which align local provision of learning with needs of local employers
- Increase the number and scope of workplace basic skills programmes and foster workplace learning in line with the current needs of employers. To facilitate this, specialised practitioners such as trainers and job coaches are key in providing support to persons with disabilities in the learning/employment process
- Employ persons with disabilities within training programmes for adult learners as trainers or mentors, including as instructors for teacher-training in inclusive education





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For more information about the project, please visit: <https://all-in-erasmus-project.com/>

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