



European Education Area Strategic Framework

Working Group on Adult Learning

Findings report PLA on Skills for Life (9-10 March 2022, online)



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Working Group on Adult Learning

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1. Setting the scene

1.1. PLA setting and participation

This report summarises the conclusions of the Peer Learning Activity (PLA) on “Skills for Life: bringing learning closer to vulnerable learners” that took place on 9-10 March 2022 under the auspices of the Working group on Adult Learning.

The PLA brought together 40 attendees, representing 12 countries¹ and nine organisations (representing (adult) education providers, museums, public libraries, European agencies). The PLA consisted of a series of short presentations from all countries and a number of key notes and longer presentations from AONTAS, National Adult Learning Organisation (Ireland); the European Association for Education of Adults (EAEA); Public Libraries 2030; the Network of European Museum Organisations; the Institute for the Development of Education (Croatia); and finally Dr Balázs Németh, president of the European university Continuing Education Network (EUCEN), presenting the concept of Learning Cities. Also shorter reflection notes were provided by EUCEN, EUA and All Digital.

1.2. Introducing Skills for Life

The European Skills Agenda² emphasises the role of non-formal adult education for the benefit of individuals, the society and the economy. Action 8 ‘Skills for Life’ is particularly devoted to this issue, receiving additional momentum from the European Pillar of Social Rights (lifelong learning as a right)³. This is reflected in the EU headline target, endorsed by EU Heads of state and government in the Porto Declaration of May 2021⁴: at least 60 per cent of adults should participate in training every year by 2030.

With Skills for Life, the focus is on a broad set of skills, competences, attitudes individuals might need to counter the current and future challenges in navigating life. The intention is not to define yet another new list of skills, as there are already many lists available, but to discuss and analyse structures in place in the Member States that facilitate the acquisition of these skills. It is nevertheless useful to recall some existing concepts, framing the essence of Skills for Life.

The **Key Competences for lifelong learning** identify eight key competences essential to citizens for employability, social inclusion, active citizenship, a healthy and sustainable lifestyle and personal fulfilment.⁵

¹ AT, BE/FL, FI, DE, IE, LV, LT, MT, RO, SI, ES, TK.

² European Commission, *European Skills Agenda for Sustainable Competitiveness, Social Fairness and Resilience*, 2020.

³ European Commission, *European Pillar of Social Rights*. (LU: Publications Office, 2017), <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2792/95934>.

⁴ European Commission, ‘The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan | Porto Social Summit’, EU 2021, 2021, <https://www.2021portugal.eu/en/porto-social-summit/action-plan/>.

⁵ [Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning, OJ 189, 4.6.2018, p. 1-13](#) .

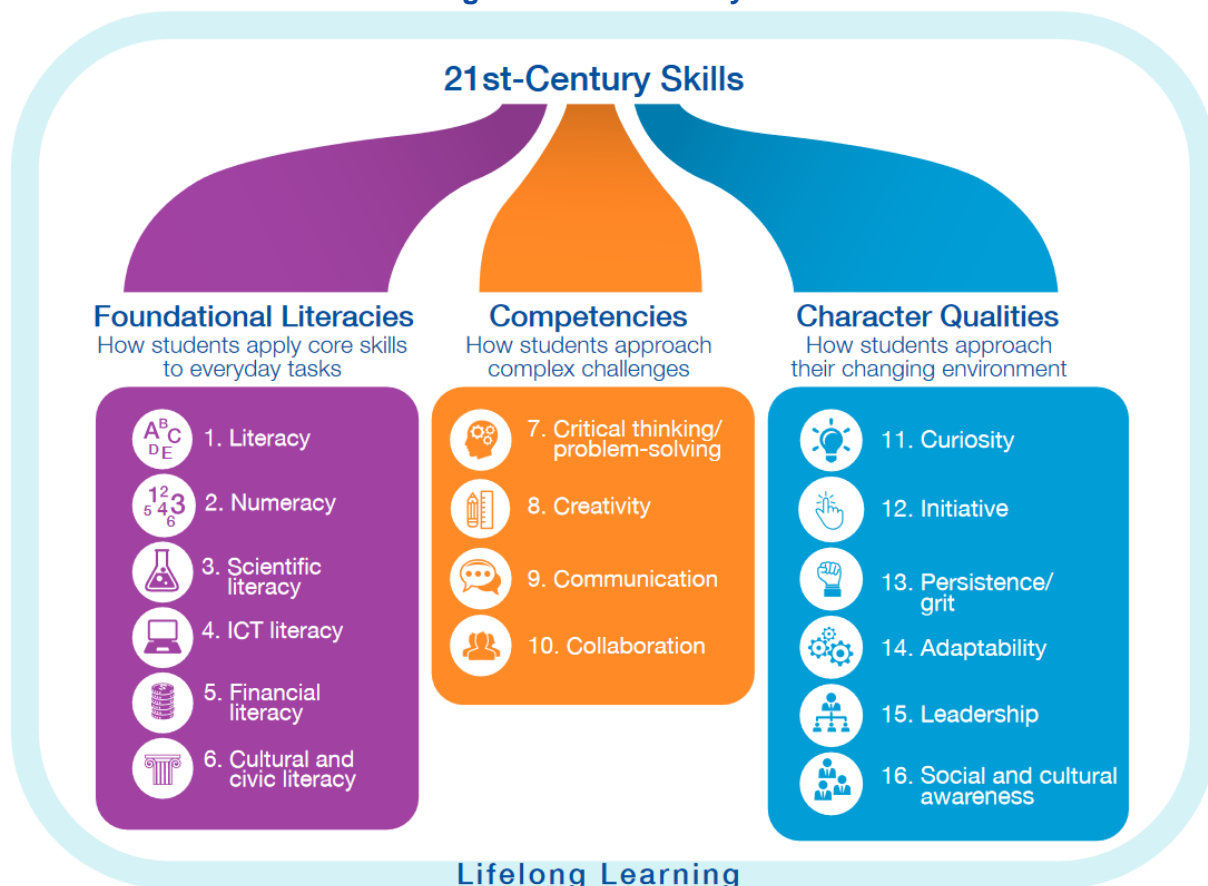
Box 1: Eight Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (2018)

- Literacy competence
- Multilingual competence
- Mathematical competence and competence in science, technology and engineering
- Digital competence
- Personal, social and learning to learn competence
- Citizenship competence
- Entrepreneurship competence
- Cultural awareness and expression competence

Another well-known set of essential life skills concern the “21st-Century Skills”. While there is not a fixed set of **21st-Century skills**, all approaches emphasise that responding to technological, demographic and socio-economic changes replies not only on cognition but also on the relationships between cognitive, social, and emotional characteristics. The list of 16 skills as presented by the World Economic Forum 2015 report ‘New Vision for Education: Unlocking the Potential of Technology’ serves as an example (see **Error! Reference source not found.**).⁶

⁶ WEF, *New Vision for Education: Unlocking the Potential of Technology*, 2015, https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEFUSA_NewVisionforEducation_Report2015.pdf.

Figure 1: 21st Century Skills

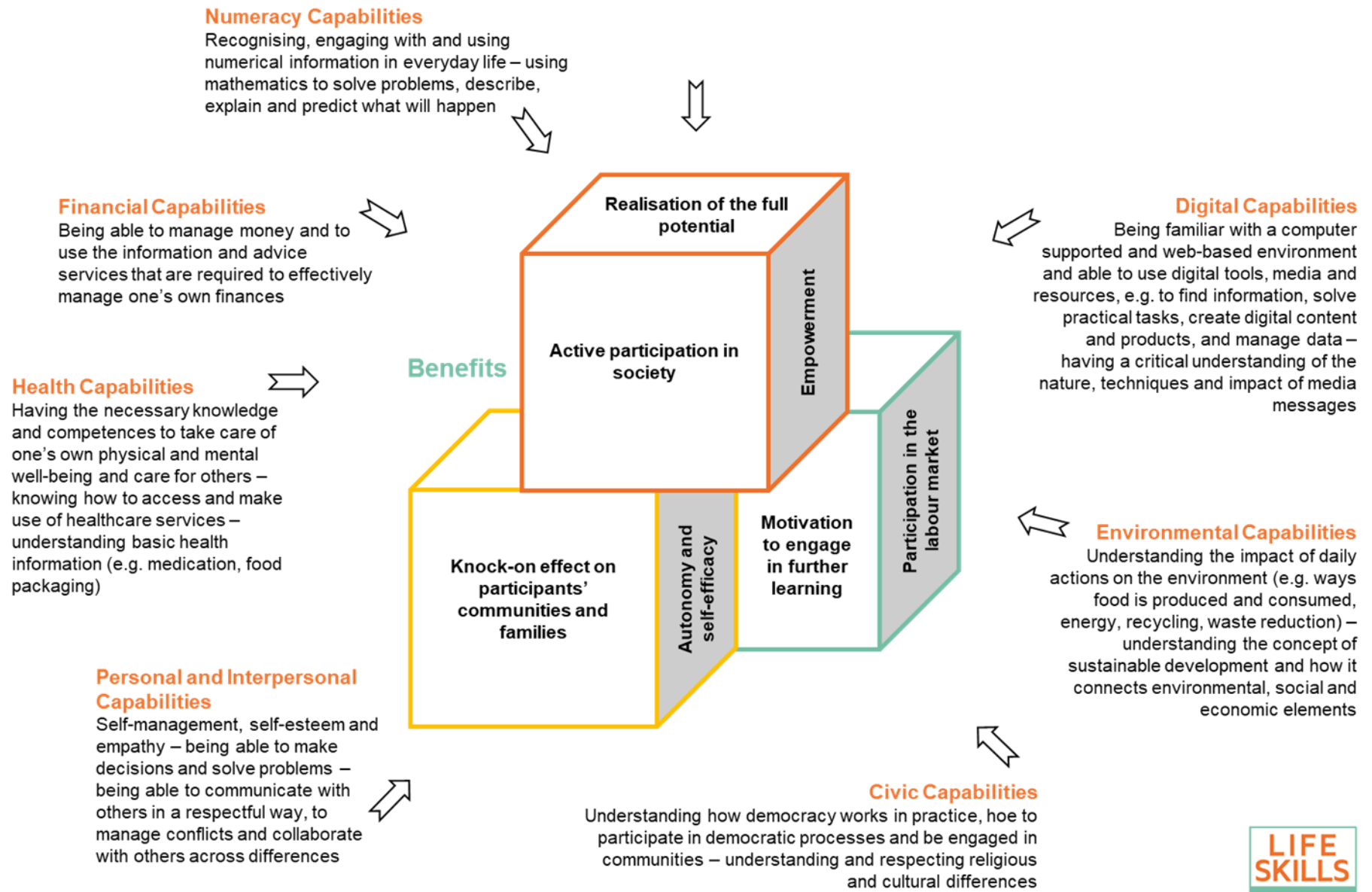


Source: WEF, *New Vision for Education: Unlocking the Potential of Technology*, 2015.

In addition, in the context of an Erasmus+ project on Life Skills in Europe, Life Skills were defined as “a constituent part of capabilities for life and work in a particular social, cultural and environmental context. The types of life skills emerge as a response to the needs of the individual in real life situations.”⁷ The project defined eight Life Skills (see **Error! Reference source not found.**).

⁷ EAEA, ‘Life Skills for Europe (LSE)’, European Association for the Education of Adults, 2018, <https://eaea.org/project/life-skills-for-europe-lse/>.

Figure 2: Life Skills for Europe



Source: LSE leaflet. (2017)

Source: 'Life Skills for Europe (LSE)', European Association for the Education of Adults, 2018.



Besides these, there are many other lists that indicate what skills, competences, attitudes, literacies are needed to cope with the challenges of everyday life, especially in turbulent times. In general, these lists are reflections on **what topics are considered important for policy makers** to act upon. During the financial crisis in 2008 for instance, the attention to financial literacy increased; due to the COVID-19 pandemic, health literacy came to the fore as an important area of policy intervention and awareness raising. Furthermore, each identified competence is subject to further study, exploration and definition into more detailed competence frameworks. See for example financial competence⁸, health literacy⁹, digital competence¹⁰, personal, social and learning to learn competence (LifeComp)¹¹.

For the purpose of the Working Group on Adult Learning and the PLA, the interest is in **how Skills for Life are offered to adults and what infrastructures are put in place** to engage vulnerable groups of adults in learning skills to better navigate life, currently and in the future. For the current report, the scope of Skills for Life, as inspired by the above frameworks and policy interests, is the following (while not exclusively focusing on only those):

- **Resilience, empowerment and confidence building** to cope with change, especially in times of crisis;
- **Digital skills** to keep pace with ICT developments, avoid digital divide and access vital government and personal services, etc.;
- **Media literacy and critical thinking, civic skills** to help citizens navigate among “fake news” or cyber fraud, increase the quality of democratic life by understanding how it works;
- **Consumer and financial literacy** to help citizens protect themselves against bad financial moves and poverty, to help them manage their household;
- **Environmental literacy** to sensitize citizens to environmental sustainability development;
- **Dietary and health literacy**: to raise citizens’ awareness about the importance of a healthy lifestyle;
- **Social and emotional literacy**: develop self-confidence but also empathy, tolerance and non-violent communication with others, fight xenophobia and racism to better live together.

1.3. Objective and aims

The main interest of the PLA was to map and analyse *how* vulnerable adults¹² are supported in their Skills for Life development and how they are re-engaged into learning. The PLA specifically oriented its attention to concrete **approaches to bring learning closer to citizens**; aiming to re-establish trust and empower them to learn and continue learning. The

⁸ European Commission and OECD, *Financial Competence Framework for Adults in the European Union, 2022*, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/business_economy_euro/banking_and_finance/documents/220111-financial-competence-framework-adults_en.pdf.

⁹ European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control., *A Rapid Evidence Review of Interventions for Improving Health Literacy: Insights into Health Communication..* (LU: Publications Office, 2012), <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2900/20189>.

¹⁰ Carretero, S., Vuorikari, R., and Punie, Y., ‘DigComp 2.1 - The Digital Competence Framework for Citizens with Eight Proficiency Levels and Examples of Use’, in *EUR 28558 EN*, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.2760/38842>.

¹¹ European Commission. Joint Research Centre., *LifeComp: The European Framework for Personal, Social and Learning to Learn Key Competence*. (LU: Publications Office, 2020), <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/302967>.

¹² Vulnerable adults are those persons that are in vulnerable life situations as a result of a skills deficit. This can relate to for instance adults with a migration background; adults in precarious work situations; adults at risk of social exclusion.

emphasis was therefore not so much on public awareness raising campaigns from governments on specific Skills for Life (such as healthy life-styles, or awareness of financial risks), but on localised outreach **strategies to re-engage vulnerable adults in learning, through innovative learning spaces and other means**, to support them in the skills acquisition needed to better navigate life, currently and in the future. There is not a one-size-fits all approach in re-engaging vulnerable adults and hence the PLA explored different approaches that all might serve a purpose for a specific group in a specific context. By analysing the existing practices, the PLA **identified what works in specific contexts**, in order to

- Inspire national authorities to design measures to improve their support to vulnerable groups of adults, in order to achieve good quality results;
- Inspire organisations to focus more on this topic with their activities and members;
- Inspire further ideas to support implementation at EU, national/regional/local level and at the level of the organisations.

The PLA's main objective was to **facilitate peer-learning of the participants**, including by identifying **conditions under which specific initiatives are successful**, looking at (for instance) outreach strategies, different types of Skills for Life development, the space where learning takes place, sustainability and continuation of learning, financing initiatives, partnerships, and supporting/ facilitating policies.

This report provides an overview of **identified Skills for Life approaches** (Chapter 2) and discusses **factors for success** (Chapter 3) and **enabling conditions** that can be offered by policies (Chapter 4). This can be useful guidance for Member States to plan their support measures and improve their outreach to specific vulnerable groups of adults, to make them aware of the benefits of learning and to enable them to take charge of their learning activities.

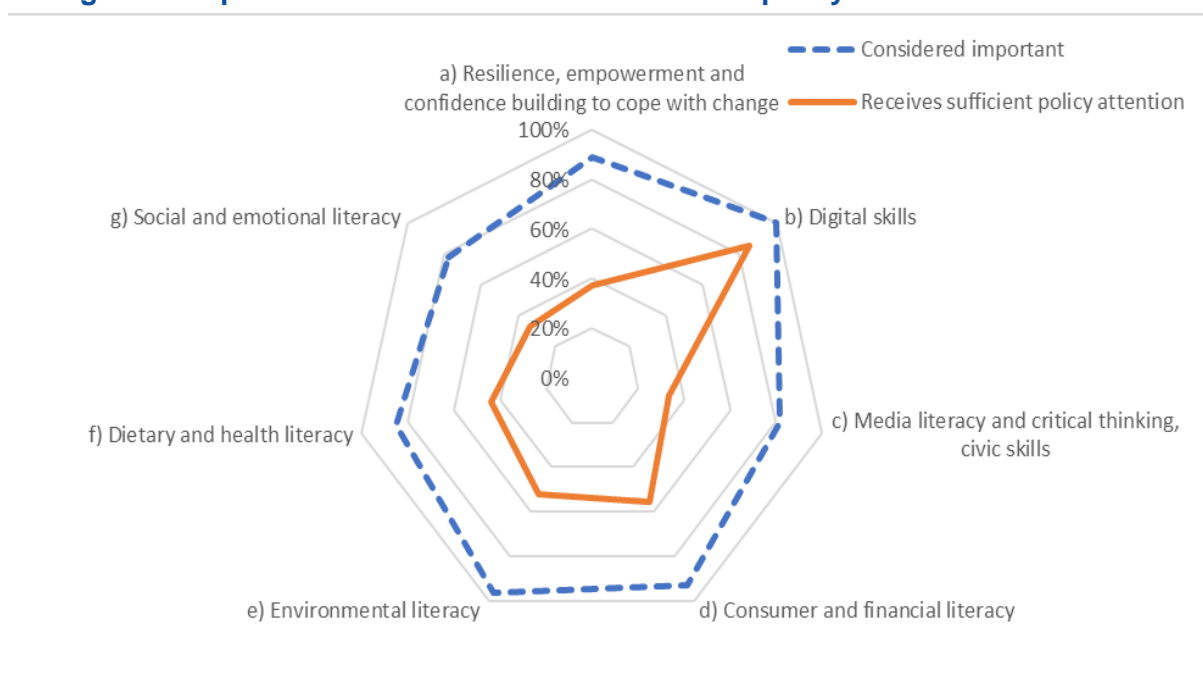


2. Approaches to Skills for Life development

2.1. Policy attention to Skills for Life

A 2022 country-specific mapping undertaken by a network of experts on adult learning, on behalf of the European Commission, confirms that in three-quarter (74%) of the Member States policy attention to Skills for Life is increasing. In five Member States (19%) the policy attention remains constant and in two Member States (7%) a decrease of policy attention can be noted. In line with this general policy attention, various specific Skills for Life are considered important. As can be seen in Figure 3, digital skills, environmental literacy, and consumer and financial literacy are considered important in nearly all Member States. While overall all Skills for Life are considered important, not all skills receive equal policy attention. Figure 3 shows that digital skills receive particularly high policy attention, while media literacy, critical thinking and civic skills and social and emotional literacy seem to be taken up to a smaller extent and require more policy attention to match their indicated importance. Social and emotional literacy is mentioned as important in the least number of Member States (important in just over three-quarter of the countries).

Figure 3: Importance of Skills for Life and whether policy efforts are sufficient

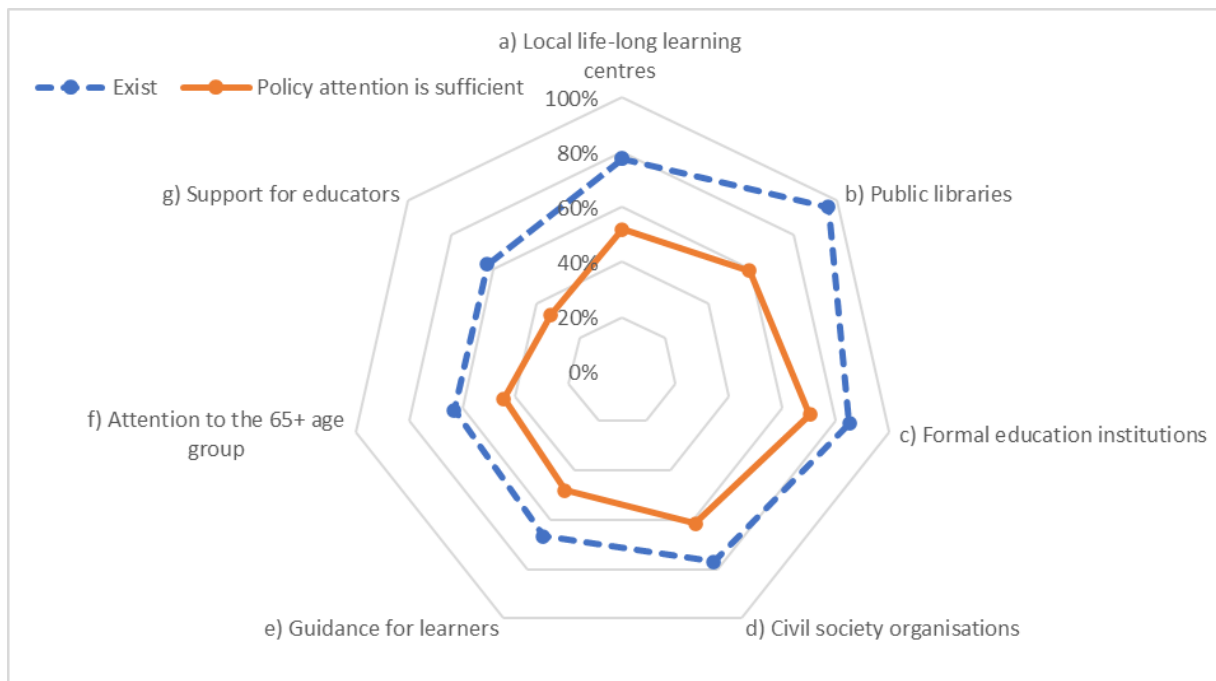


Source: Adult Learning Network consultation on Skills for Life, question: 4) How important are the following domains of Skills for Life in your country, and to what extent are existing policy efforts sufficient (N=27)? Calculated 'sufficient' by summing up 'somewhat agree' and 'fully agree'.

Besides asking about importance and policy attention the network of experts on adult learning were also asked to reflect on the existence of policy approaches to strengthen the development of Skills for Life and whether the institutions involved receive sufficient policy attention. As can be seen in Figure 4, in most Member States public libraries and formal education institutions facilitate the approach to providing Skills for Life (respectively 96% and 85% of Member States). Approaches to pay specific attention to the 65+ age group and approaches to specifically provide support for educators are less available in the countries (both in 63% of the Member States). Furthermore, the policy attention towards specific approaches also differs and is highest for formal education institutions (70%), civil society organisations (62%) and public libraries (59%).

Figure 4: Approaches to Skills for Life development and policy attention

Source: Adult Learning Network consultation on Skills for Life, question: 5) Which policy approaches to strengthen Skills for Life in your country exist, and to what extent do they receive sufficient policy attention (N=27)? Calculated 'sufficient' by summing up 'somewhat agree' and 'fully agree'.



2.2. Types of providers of Skills for Life

Skills for Life can be acquired in many different ways. They can be obtained through informal learning (not intentional from a learners' point of view); through non-formal learning (intentional from a learners' point of view, but outside formal learning environments); or through formal learning, which takes place in formal learning environments and leads to a qualification. The PLA focused on approaches based on community learning and learning networks as a way to reach out to adults in different situations and re-engage them in learning. In preparation of the PLA, the following broad types were identified:

- **Non-formal adult learning providers (adult learning institutions, cultural organisations, non-governmental organisations, municipalities):** There are many larger and smaller NGO's, foundations and private initiatives that facilitate learning of adults related to the Skills for Life. Besides museums and NGOs, in some European Member States there is a rich infrastructure in place at local levels where municipalities are the main providers of non-formal adult learning.
- **Web-based learning initiatives:** There are many web-based learning initiatives that target vulnerable adults and focus on basic skills and Skills for Life. These initiatives can be supported by governments, developed by formal education providers, or privately funded (e.g. a foundation).
- **Formal vocational education and training (VET) or higher education providers that also offer non-formal and informal learning:** Formal education providers in VET and higher education can have a specific mandate to also deliver courses for the development of basic and transversal skills to adults, or they can organise own projects and approaches for community engagement.
- **Employer-related initiatives:** The workplace is an important learning space, especially for vulnerable adults, where "not only job-related skills are developed, but

also basic and transversal competences that make people more resilient to changes in their career and life.”¹³

These broad types of providers do not necessarily need to be different organisations or work separately from each other. Often institutions combine these types and work in networks to reach out to adults in different situations and to re-engage them in learning at local level¹⁴. Besides these different types of providers, the local and regional level in general is an important dimension in which Skills for Life development takes place, as at local level more tailored approaches can be designed and implemented able to better reach the target groups and respond to their specific needs. Here, comprehensive infrastructures have been put in place for learning. This can be done, for example, in the context of Learning Cities¹⁵, where different ways of Skills for Life development have been combined on the local level. The box below provides a description of the concept of Learning Cities.

Box 2: UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning description of Learning Cities

A Learning City” is a city which effectively mobilizes its resources in every sector to

- promote inclusive learning from basic to higher education;
- revitalize learning in families and communities;
- facilitate learning for and in the workplace;
- extend the use of modern learning technologies;
- enhance quality and excellence in learning; and
- foster a culture of learning throughout life.

A “Learning City” can create and reinforce individual empowerment and social cohesion, economic and cultural prosperity, and sustainable development.

Source: UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), *Key Features of Learning Cities | UIL, 2016*, <https://uil.unesco.org/lifelong-learning/learning-cities/key-features-learning-cities>.

¹³ European Commission, *ET2020 Working Group on Adult Learning, Promoting Adult Learning in the Workplace: Final Report of the ET2020 Working Group 2016 – 2018 on Adult Learning*, 2018, 4, <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/3064b20b-7b47-11e8-ac6a-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

¹⁴ This so-called local learning centre/partnership can be understood as an “organisational entity that initiates, develops and delivers training or educational services or activities to promote adult learning in the broadest sense of the word. Local learning centres/partnerships could include anything ranging from initiatives focusing on academic performance, to work competence, personal development, group development, societal/civic participation; covering any area from technical to artistic, from culture to agriculture to economics. Centres/partnerships may be the only contributors to the adult learning processes or have a part in it together with other educational or societal partners. Centres/ partnerships may have a tangible accommodation and location or be of a more virtual kind (IT-based). They may be of an informal, a non-formal or a formal nature, meaning that they may be a private initiative, or part of an organisational structure (but not of an educational one), or they may be established within an educational institute or structure.” See: Research voor Beleid, *Developing Local Learning Centres and Learning Partnerships as Part of Member States’ Targets for Reaching the Lisbon Goals in the Field of Education and Training: A Study of the Current Situation*, 2005, 41, https://www.academia.edu/166896/Developing_local_learning_centres_and_learning_partnerships_as_part_of_Member_States_targets_for_reaching_the_Lisbon_goals_in_the_field_of_education_and_training_A_study_of_the_current_situation.

¹⁵ UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), *Key Features of Learning Cities | UIL, 2016*, <https://uil.unesco.org/lifelong-learning/learning-cities/key-features-learning-cities>.

2.3. Focus of the PLA on non-formal providers and the role of formal education providers

During the PLA a number of approaches were presented and discussed. These approaches were loosely grouped in two clusters, one focusing more on non-formal providers; a second more on the role of formal education providers. The box below briefly mentions the presented approaches, additional examples can be found in annex 1 and annex 2.

Box 3: Approaches to Skills for Life development as presented during the PLA

Presented approaches during the PLA

Approaches put in place by non-formal adult learning providers:

- Community education in Ireland
- “Life Skills for Europe” project (European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA¹⁶))
- Public Libraries initiatives related to Skills for Life development
- Museums developing Skills for Life (Network of European Museum Organisations (NEMO¹⁷))
- Study circles initiative in Slovenia
- Aula Mentor initiative, Spain
- Education concerning family values in Turkey
- Initiative for Adult Education in Austria
- National Decade of Literacy and Basic Education 2016 – 2026 in Germany

Approaches put in place by formal education and training institutions:

- Community engagement in higher education and Skills for Life (Towards a European Framework for Community Engagement in Higher Education / Steering Higher Education for Community Engagement¹⁸ projects and further examples by European University Association (EUA¹⁹))
- Higher education supporting adults in Skills for Life (European University Continuing Education Network (EUCEN²⁰))
- Online learning platform ‘LU open minded’ of the University of Latvia
- Digital Competence Development System project (ALL DIGITAL²¹)
- Parliamentary reform of continuous learning in Finland and its implementation by a local consortium for education
- Lifelong Learning Strategy 2015-2020 (continued. 2021-2028) in Romania and its approaches to reach out to vulnerable adults

¹⁶ EAEA: <https://eaea.org/>

¹⁷ NEMO: <https://www.ne-mo.org/>

¹⁸ TEFCE/SHEFCE: <https://community-engagement.eu>

¹⁹ EUA: <https://eua.eu/>

²⁰ EUCEN: <http://www.eucen.eu/>

²¹ ALL DIGITAL: <https://all-digital.org/>

- Empowering low-literate adults in Belgium (Flanders)
- Developing Adult Learning through Learning Cities and Regions: Perspectives and Barriers

Source: PLA on Skills for Life, 9-10 March 2022



3. Success factors for effective Skills for Life approaches

The presentations of the different Skills for Life approaches and subsequent discussions revealed a number of challenges and success factors in stimulating Skills for Life development and reaching out to specific groups of learners, in different national and local contexts. This section provides a summary of the key success factors identified during the PLA.

1. Consider learning takes place in different trusted learning environments and work with 'trusted and innovative learning spaces'

Exploring different, innovative learning spaces can attract learners who are the most reluctant to engage in learning. Such innovative learning spaces are more trusted than the usual classrooms and make people feel more at ease to learn. Trusted spaces and locations are familiar to the learners through their everyday activities or hobbies, lower the threshold of engaging in learning activities, create a better learning experience, and increase the visibility of initiatives.

The PLA discussed a few examples of such special approaches to engage learners, such as offering learning in museums and in libraries, online skills development, local learning centres:

- Ligo-Antwerp's²² (**Belgium, Flanders**) approach is to offer different learning pathways on location providing learning in realistic and real-life situations. It offers learning at the children's school, a training floor, a workplace, an apartment building, the neighbourhood, but also in a residential care centre; a theatre or in community gardens (see picture below).
- Other examples were provided by **EAEA** such as 'Taking Root' through Gardening (**Germany**); the Folkuniversität Dachau²³ (**Germany**) – Biopoly Wurzelgarten (gardening and learning together).
- Also Museums (**NEMO**) offer specific trusted spaces such as offering language learning in museums using the collection as learning resource.

All this is obviously only possible in cooperation with other organisations that manage to reach out to the target group. "Innovative learning spaces" were considered as an area where further exploration and exchange of inspiring practice is needed. This could support successful policy measures in reaching out to those who are currently the furthest away from learning.

²² Ligo Antwerpen: <https://www.ligo.be/antwerpen>

²³ Volkshochschule Dachau: <https://vhs-dachau.de/>

Figure 5: Learning in community gardens in Belgium-Flanders

Source: Ligo Antwerp

2. Build broad partnerships

Skills for Life approaches are most successful if they are based on broad partnerships. These can build on the strengths of different types of organisations, including those not primarily involved in education and training. Such partnerships are able to reach out to the target groups, offer innovative learning spaces and engage different types of stakeholders. Furthermore, it allows smaller initiatives (e.g. affinity groups, civic society organisations, NGOs) to benefit from the organisational capacity of larger entities, such as municipalities and education institutions (e.g. VET schools or higher education institutions).

- The **Slovenian** study circles, for instance, build their learning offer in partnership with organisations in finance, health, environment and culture. They can mobilise expertise through their partnerships and this expertise can be brought into the study circles. The study circles bring together groups of adults to learn in a collaborative and experiential manner.
- In **Ireland**, a joint framework for collaboration is developed for Community Education, firmly establishing links with statutory education providers, emphasising that the relationship is one of being partners, not competitors (see figure below).
- The museum sector (**NEMO**) highlighted its partnership approaches with service providers, community groups, municipalities.
- In **Finland** the Tavastia local consortium showcases a partnership format at local level. The consortium consists of general upper secondary schools in the area; and an adult educational centre. The consortium works in partnership with public employment services, municipalities, NGOs, and the national service centre for continuous learning and employment²⁴.
- The community engagement frameworks developed for higher education institutions provide interesting insights in setting up, steering and monitoring partnerships with local communities and employers.²⁵ An example of higher education engagement and partnership is the collaboration in Lille (**France**) between the university library

²⁴ Service centre for continuous learning and employment: <https://okm.fi/en/service-centre-for-continuous-learning-and-employment> ; <https://jotpa.fi/>

²⁵ See for instance: <https://community-engagement.eu>

and community libraries to offer free access and the partnership between the university and municipality to support volunteering and training activities.

In addition to these examples, the Learning Cities concept strongly emphasises the partnership approach to build conducive learning environments for all. Learning Cities promote wide partnerships covering amongst others education providers, social services, local government organisations, employment organisations, employers, health care organisations and volunteering and civic organisations.

Figure 6: Community Education Framework in Ireland



Source: AONTAS Community Education Network

3. Maintain a learner-centred perspective in offering tailored skills development

The form of Skills for Life development needs to adapt to the specific needs and situations of the learners, who often have had bad experiences with learning or schooling or other barriers towards this. A too formal learning environment, resembling the school system that reminds that of bad experiences with learning, might scare them off.²⁶ This hence requires rethinking what pedagogical approach might work best, what learning format could best be applied and where the learning should take place. The use of **trusted and innovative**

²⁶ Downes, P. (2011), Community Based Lifelong Learning Centres: Developing a European Strategy Informed by International Evidence and Research. Research Paper for NESET (June 2011).

learning spaces can support the learner-centredness of the learning offered²⁷. Reflecting the needs of learners and the (local) community in tailoring the learning offer was a common thread through most of the examples presented. This ensures the relevance of the learning offer and engages the learners.

- One of the key success factors of the learning of the **Austrian** Initiative for Adult Education is that it takes place in small learning groups. It is individualised and accompanied by counselling and coaching to allow tailoring to individual needs.
- Also the **Slovenian** study circles emphasise that the learning is designed with active participation of learners. Involving them directly in identifying their learning needs and developing a programme to facilitate the learning according to their needs. Furthermore, the individual input from the learners in the learning of their peers is essential.
- In **Ireland**, programmes were swiftly adapted to the COVID-19 situation, increasing the amount of non-accredited learning offer focused on social inclusion, mental health, “learning to learn” skills.

The PLA also discussed examples of tailored and flexible online learning opportunities such as Aula Mentor²⁸ in **Spain**. In this initiative, adults can follow a variety of courses in an online environment, supported by individual tutors. Initiatives such as Aula Mentor show that online learning can also offer tailored skills development and individualised approaches, instead of only offering a massive one-size-fits-all approach.

4. Focus on the human: foster individual well-being, hospitality, empathy, engagement and sense of belonging

Skills for Life development needs to focus on the learner and foster an environment that is welcoming and trusted. A specificity of Skills for Life development is that next to acquiring specific skills and competences, the learning process leads to further general benefits for the learners. They can improve their personal well-being, develop a more positive self-image, can re-engage with others and the community. Skills for Life development needs to acknowledge that learning only occurs where the socio-emotional context is favourable and that learning can only take place when trust is being built. The methodology therefore has to – from the onset - focus on hospitality, empathy and personalised approaches to the adult learners to create engagement, sense of belonging and personal well-being. A simple tip is to start the sessions with a coffee and a conversation!

- The **Irish** local, self-managed, independent community education organisations are built around lowering thresholds and letting people feel welcome to increase the engagement of adult learners and those who have had negative experiences of education. Before speaking about learning and programmes, people need to feel valued and respected.

5. Professionalise staff and acknowledge that working in this context requires additional skills, mindsets and experience

Skills for Life development needs educators, trainers and coaches that are professional and experienced in working with learners from different and disadvantaged backgrounds. Quality training and professional development opportunities for adult learning professionals are essential to improve the development of Skills for Life. As stated by a participant in an Irish community education course, “soft skills are the hardest to get”. This also impacts the professionalisation of those working with the learners. Developing Skills for Life requires a

²⁷ As discussed under success factor 1: Consider learning takes place in different trusted learning environments and work with ‘trusted and innovative learning spaces’

²⁸ <http://www.aulamentor.es/>

specific mindset, expertise and skills set from the teaching staff and that they fully engage with the learners and support their learning pathway. Furthermore, having tutors and mentors who come from a similar background as the learners or had comparable experience before, helps making better connection with the learners. These persons can motivate the learners to engage in learning and to embark on a further learning pathway.

Volunteers often support learners in developing Skills for Life. They need to be accompanied by professional staff in dealing with learners from a vulnerable and disadvantaged background.

- In **Ireland**, there is a specific qualification to work in further education and community education²⁹, but the community education sector also works with tutors that share the same background as the intended learners and that do not have a specific qualification to work in further education and community education.
- In **Slovenia**, the study circles work with motivated and well-trained mentors that also have access to professional development.

The EAEA also indicated that many of the associated organisations make use of ambassadors from the targeted groups of adults to support reaching out to them.

6. Prioritise guidance and counselling to continue engaging target groups with learning

Skills for Life development needs to be accompanied by guidance and counselling systems to put learners on a continuous learning and development pathway. Solving the lack of specific life skills through learning should not be the end of a learning experience, but the start of a continuous engagement with learning and development. Furthermore, often adults that lack a specific skill for life, might face skills-related challenges in other areas as well. Tailoring the learning offer in such a way that it support adults to face more of these overarching challenges, requires prioritising guidance and counselling. These personalised approaches can also help to connect with vulnerable adults. This guidance and counselling could support adults' motivation to learn, but also orient them towards new opportunities to learn, to develop and to engage with society and work (e.g. through volunteering, or work placements).

- The **Finnish** National Service Centre for Continuous Learning and Employment for instance develops information, advisory and guidance services and offers those in cooperation with local and regional stakeholders.
- Also the **Spanish** Aula Mentor, as online learning platform offers personalised tutoring to support learners in the choice of learning programme, but also to support them in throughout the learning programme. This tutoring feature is considered an essential part of the Aula Mentor system as it increases the engagement of learners with the programmes.

7. Secure long-term and sustainable funding and avoid project-based one-off funding

Skills for Life development should not be seen as a cost, but more as a right (in line with the Pillar of Social Rights) or an investment that leads to (economic) benefits for individuals, the economy and society at large (e.g. reduced health care costs, incidents at work, increased societal added value through volunteering). The need for sustainable financing is politically well advocated as shown by the seventh Confintea Framework for Action³⁰ Progress in

²⁹ <https://www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/teacher-education/initial-teacher-education/professional-accreditation-of-programmes/further-education/> and more broadly in community education <https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/adult-and-community-education/postgraduate-programmes>

³⁰ UNESCO UIL (2022), CONFINTEA VII Marrakech Framework for Action Harnessing the transformational power of Adult Learning and Education: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000382306>

reaching out to those who are furthest away from training, needs structural changes in financing mechanisms.

A critical aspect emerging during the PLA was that Skills for Life development is often funded through project-based funding, pilot projects, small-scale funding of interesting initiatives. This while the participants also concluded that this type of learning offer is most effective and best reaching out to the target groups in need when there is a long-term commitment of organisations to work with communities and when the relationship between providers and community is based on trust. This does not connect well with a project-based funding mechanism. The approaches discussed during the PLA highlighted the challenges associated with the lack of sustainable and long-term funding arrangements.

8. Consider whether quality assurance systems and performance indicators are accustomed to adult learning and working with learners in disadvantaged situations

Adult learning is lacking an assessment framework that recognises its specific identify and societal benefit. Quality assurance and monitoring approaches need to be fit-for-purpose and respect the characteristics and aims of Skills for Life development. The critical aspect of vulnerability of Skills for Life development and adult learning in general, is that it is in many countries assessed as being an education sector like general education, VET or HE, leading to concrete and transparent outcomes (diplomas, qualifications and clearly defined learning outcomes), or that it viewed as a form of active labour market policy leading to employment related outcomes (e.g. ('employment after six months')).

The discussions in the PLA showcased that the benefits of Skills for Life development are much wider and this should better be captured in performance indicators. Or even better, as results in social activation of people and increased self-confidence are difficult to quantify, the support to relevant organisations could be more based on trust and confidence than on performance in relation to quantitative indicators. The approaches discussed during the PLA highlighted that monitoring and quality assurance frameworks are often not aligned with the Skills for Life learning offer. This causes challenges for showing results and proving impact, which is often used as an argument for not providing structural and sustainable funding for Skills for Life development.



4. Enabling conditions that can be offered by policies

While the local level is crucial for effective measures helping adults develop skills for life, national authorities have a crucial role in providing a policy framework for cooperation of different actors at local level, including municipalities, formal education and training institutions, NGOs, enterprises, social partners, public employment services etc. Skills for Life development can only be offered on a structural and sustainable basis when supporting policies are in place. These supporting policies should assure a number of enabling conditions in which specific initiatives can flourish. The PLA identified the following conditions that can be offered by policies at national level:

- **Facilitate the local development of innovative and trusted learning spaces for all learners to engage with learning:** The examples showed that engagement is formed through learner-centred approaches, based on an understanding of the background, situation and needs of learners. It further consists of bringing learners to learning spaces (both offline and online) that can be trusted and that are innovative and through this stimulate engagement with learning all throughout life.
- **Develop a common vision to generate understanding that Skills for Life are a concern of most policy departments at national, regional and local level:** Skills for Life – and adult learning more general, is by definition crosscutting many policy areas. It does not only relate to education policies, or social and labour market policies, but it is also linked, among others, to health care policies, cultural policies and housing policies. While it can be seen as a cost in one policy area, it can be perceived as generating benefits (or reducing costs) in another. Skills for Life have wide-ranging benefits for different policy areas and this added value should be well-recognised in the policies being developed, creating synergies between Skills for Life and policies in other areas. Bringing different (policy) perspectives together and engaging different stakeholders in developing a common vision on Skills for Life development is therefore essential for setting a conducive environment. This can build on cooperation formats developed for the development of (equally cross-cutting) basic skills, for instance in response to the “Upskilling Pathways” Council Recommendation.³¹
- **Establish effective collaboration frameworks structured in such a way that partners share a joint responsibility for Skills for Life:** All examples (such as the Learning Cities) showed that successful initiatives are built on partnership. These are even more efficient if they manage to break down barriers between organisations. Public policies should support the establishment of effective collaboration frameworks, where Skills for Life are seen as a joint responsibility.
- **Secure dedicated staff, to promote attention to Skills for Life development throughout in policies, and ensure sustained funding:** Having one or more dedicated policy officers taking responsibility for this topic, ensures a more sustainable approach to the topic of Skills for Life development in administrations and also secures a more long-term perspective on financing. As indicated in the discussion of the approaches presented in the PLA, funding for Skills for Life development is often project-based and lacks sustainability. A root cause for this is that Skills for Life are not systematically addressed in policies and anchored in administrations (at national, regional or local levels). Securing sustainable funding sources that regard the development of Skills for Life as an investment instead of a cost is crucial, as well as putting in place the right incentives so that organisations

³¹ [Council Recommendation of 19 December 2016 on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults.](#)

see benefit in cooperation and joint action. Furthermore, the funding arrangements should stimulate building trust and commitment of organisations involved.

Securing transparency of the learning offer: The cooperation between stakeholders should support maintaining a learner-centred focus, bringing learning close to the learners, and making the Skills for Life offer visible to the target groups, transparent and easily accessible.



Annex 1: Examples of Skills for Life initiatives presented in the PLA

POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN SKILLS FOR LIFE DEVELOPMENT IN PLA COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS

Approaches put in place by non-formal adult learning providers

<p>Ireland: Community education</p>	<p>Community education in Ireland is understood as adult learning which takes place in local, self-managed, independent community education organisations across Ireland. It is learner-centred and responds to the needs of the local community. The supportive environment of community education works to increase the engagement of adult learners and those who have had negative experiences of education. Marginalised learners are the dominant cohort engaging in community education: Unemployed; socio-economically disadvantaged learners; people with a disability; lone parents; migrants; Travellers and Roma communities; people experiencing homelessness; substance misusers; and ex-prisoners. Community education empowers learners in foundational skills to: increase agency, capacity, self-confidence, learning to learn skills. A Community Education Framework is developed to support collaboration between organisations.</p>
<p>EAEA: “Life Skills for Europe” project</p>	<p>As defined in the Life Skills for Europe project, “Life skills are a constituent part of capabilities for life and work in a particular social, cultural and environmental context. The types of life skills emerge as a response to the needs of the individual in real life situations.” In the context of the project different materials and guidelines were prepared to support Skills for Life development. For instance, in order to raise awareness for the difficulties that many adults face when it comes to poor life skills, the project consortium put together an awareness raising kit. In addition the presentation highlighted a number of examples of outreach activities, challenges, successes and recommendations obtained from EAEA members related to Skills for Life.</p>
<p>Public Libraries: Initiatives related to Skills for Life development</p>	<p>The presentation from Public Libraries 2030 (PL2030) highlighted the role public libraries play in facilitating learning and acquisition of Skills for Life. PL2030 particularly focuses on digital skills and AI, sustainability, and citizen engagement. Many examples of how libraries support learning Skills for Life were shared, such as Mobile Fablab in Friesland (the Netherlands), community projects in nature (Portugal), and the Sitra pilot to bring the library home (Finland).</p>
<p>Network of European Museum Organisations: Museums</p>	<p>The Network of European Museum Organisations presentation focused on four core values and provided examples related to values on how museums support Skills for Life. Related to ‘Resilience, empowerment and confidence building’ an example was presented from Manchester Museum (UK) to use volunteering as a route to employment (In Touch programme).</p>

developing Skills for Life	Related to 'Basic skills, Life Skills, Work skills' language learning in museums was highlighted. Concerning 'Social and emotional literacy' partnerships with service providers, community groups and government agencies were highlighted as important success factors.
Slovenia: Study circles initiative	Study circles aim at facilitating joint learning in small groups that meet regularly. Their outcome is local development, critical thinking, social cohesion, heritage transmission and adaptation to changes. Mentors are the key pillar of the study circles. The initiative is in place since 1993. As factors for success, the presentation mentioned the freedom to choose topics of learning, its pace and location; open dialog among participants and mentors, with all of them on equal footing; as well as the training of mentors (both initial training and their continuous professional development). The learning leads to strengthening of the interpersonal relations, higher aspirations and self-confidence and higher quality of life within the local communities and higher social cohesion.
Spain: Aula Mentor initiative	Aula Mentor is an open, free and Internet-based training system promoted by the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training of Spain. The objectives of Aula Mentor are focused on providing an alternative in terms of training to the adult population that does not have the opportunity to attend the face-to-face offer and whose pace of learning and / or dedication requires a flexible system not subject to schedules. The initiative is accompanied by a individual tutoring system.
Turkey: Education concerning family values	The presentation focused on family education which is available in every public education center which are present in every city, every district and even small villages. It is offered free of charge. The main challenge of the programme is that people are not aware of its opportunities.
Austria: Initiative for Adult Education	The Initiative for Adult Education funds skills development for low skilled adults. It is in place since 2012, course attendance is free of charge for all participants and courses are provided by accredited non-profit educational institutions. The budget is increasing over years and currently is 111,5 million Euro for four years. Factors that make it successful concern among others that learning takes place in small learning groups ; it is accompanied by counselling/coaching ; and there is an accreditation process that guarantees quality offers and quality personnel.
Germany: National Decade of Literacy and Basic Education 2016 – 2026	In Germany, the Federal Government has declared a national 'Decade for Literacy 2016-2026' and will spend EUR 180 million on the improvement of adult learners' basic skills over these 10 years; the main targets of which are to improve the employability of adult learners with a lack of basic skills and to

	significantly reduce the overall number of illiterate people in Germany within this decade. ³²
Approaches put in place by formal education and training institutions:	
Community engagement in higher education and Skills for Life (Towards a European Framework for Community Engagement in Higher Education / Steering Higher Education for Community Engagement³³ projects and further examples by European University Association (EUA³⁴) and European University Continuing Education Network (EUCEN³⁵))	<p>From a university perspective community engagement is about how universities address societal needs in partnership with their external communities incl. government, business, civil society, schools, hospitals, cultural organizations, to develop mutually beneficial joint activities. Through community engagement initiatives, higher education institutions could support vulnerable adults in their Skills for Life development and re-engage them into learning. The TEFCE (Towards a European Framework for Community Engagement in Higher Education) and SHEFCE (Steering Higher Education for Community Engagement) projects try to measure community engagement to allow universities to identify community engagement activities; to help them understand how they perform; and to assist them in eventual improvement. The presentation also highlighted some examples such as the University of Rijeka that offers educational programs to all citizens from the region over the age of 55 in an informal way, in cooperation with the City of Rijeka and the City of Opatija..</p> <p>EUA and EUCEN provided information about ongoing higher education projects to bring learning closer to citizens.</p>
Latvia: Online learning platform 'LU open minded' of the University of Latvia	<p>The presentation from Latvia showed that there are adult learning centres in almost all higher education institutions and vocational education and training centres. Besides this, LU open minded is established in cooperation with the University of Latvia, offering through an online platform an opportunity to obtain a certificate of courses' acquisition. The price for the course varies from 15 to 35 Euro and on average consists of four to eighth lectures and a test at the end. While it reached a lot of people (almost 20,000 since 2020), a challenge is that it does not reach vulnerable groups. It mainly reaches highly motivated people that already have a higher education degree.</p>
Digital Competence Development	<p>All Digital presented the Digital Competences Development System³⁷ project, aimed to assess, develop and validate basic digital and transversal skills of adults. The system is linked to DigComp 2.1 and provides a multilingual online assessment</p>

³² "The term basic skills in this context includes competencies in the basic dimensions for an independent cultural and social participation, including literacy, numeracy, digital skills, health education, financial and social competences." General Agreement on the National Decade for Literacy and Basic Skills 2016-2026, p. 3: https://www.bibb.de/dokumente/pdf/EN_General_Agreement_on_the_National_Decade_for_Literacy_and_Basic_Skills.pdf

³³ TEFCE/SHEFCE: <https://community-engagement.eu>

³⁴ EUA: <https://eua.eu/>

³⁵ EUCEN: <http://www.eucen.eu/>

³⁷ DCDS: www.dcds.project.eu

<p>System project (ALL DIGITAL³⁶)</p>	<p>and learning environment, including Handbooks for adult education trainers and organisations. The pilot testing of the system demonstrated the growth of skills and self confidence of the target audience.</p>
<p>Finland: Parliamentary reform of continuous learning and its implementation by a local consortium for education</p>	<p>The presentation discussed the reform of continuous learning , which started in 2020, to respond to people’s lifelong need for upskilling and reskilling. The reform is lead by the vision that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • everyone has the knowledge, skills and competence required for the world of work and a meaningful life; • everyone develops their skills and competence during their working lives; • competence renews the world of work and the world of work renews competence. <p>The newly established Service Centre for Continuous Learning and Employment has been tasked with analysis of labour market needs, financing education and training, the development and implementation of guidance services and supporting regional level cooperation. The presentation also highlighted a specific example of supporting adult learners with low basic skills. The Tavastia Education Consortium is built on a firm partnership approach of schools, municipalities, Public Employment Services, guidance services, offering people individual learning pathways. Common vision, broad-based partnership approach, good coordination, local autonomy and strong cooperation of stakeholders are indicated as success factors.</p>
<p>Romania: Lifelong Learning Strategy 2015-2020 (continued. 2021-2028) and its approaches to reach out to vulnerable adults</p>	<p>The presentation discussed the main challenges and identified need for Skills for Life development, mainly to reduce poverty and unemployment. Specific groups in need of training concern in Romania people with disabilities, Roma people, people living on the guaranteed minimum income, people who left school early and rural adults. The Strategy for Lifelong Learning, 2015-2020 resulted in institutional development (community centres); provides capacity development for these centres and the trainers; and supports the development of training programmes. The activities are continued under the 2021 – 2027 lifelong learning strategy. As success factor, the presentation mentioned the need for integrated services for vulnerable groups with the aim to reduce poverty and early school leaving rate.</p>
<p>Belgium (Flanders): Empowering low-literate adults</p>	<p>The presentation showcased the experience of Ligo Antwerp (centre for adult education) with the mission to create an empowering context so that people can take their place in society as full citizens. It provides learning mostly on the location where the learners are and it collaborates with organisations that come into contact with the learners. Examples are: providing literacy support in vocational training courses, a course ‘know your neighbourhood’, volunteering in a residential care center, athletic assistant trainer course, theater</p>

³⁶ ALL DIGITAL: <https://all-digital.org/>

	<p>group, gardening together, course at the children's school in function of parental participation. The courses result in increased job opportunities; larger social network of the participants; increased participation in society; bringing to the surface of talents of students; reduced dropout in the courses; higher level of Dutch and improved social skills.</p>
<p>Developing Adult Learning through Learning Cities and Regions: Perspectives and Barriers</p>	<p>The presentation focused on</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Roles of Learning Cities in building the learning culture/infrastructure to develop Skills for Life; 2) The use of the organisational capacity of higher education institutions and VET organisations to capacitate and strengthen smaller organisations working with communities, volunteers, etc. 3) How is cooperation and partnership within a Learning City fostered between municipalities, formal educational institutions, civic learning organisations, companies, other types of non-learning organisations? 4) What can policy makers do to stimulate a more joint approach to learning within a region/cities to acquire Skills for Life? <p>The presentation showed many examples of Learning Cities, for instance from Espoo (FI), Wolverhampton (UK), Cork (IE), Pécs (HU), Zwolle, Groningen, and Den Bosch (NL).</p>

Annex 2: Examples of Skills for Life initiatives from additional literature review

In preparing the PLA, a background report was drafted. In this background report a number of initiatives were identified that relate to Skills for Life development in the Member States. The initiatives are clustered in four broad types:

- Non-formal adult learning providers: adult learning institutes, cultural organisations, non-governmental organisations, municipalities;
- Web-based learning initiatives;
- Formal vocational education and training organisations or higher education institutions that also offer non-formal and informal learning; and,
- Employer-related initiatives.

Non-formal adult learning providers: adult learning institutions, cultural organisations, NGO's, municipalities

There are many larger and smaller NGOs, foundations, private initiatives that facilitate learning of adults related to the Skills for Life. These can be small local initiatives, but also national-wide organisations with a social purpose. In Denmark, the Dansk Folkeoplysnings Samråd (DFS) represents 35 national-wide organisations all oriented to providing information and adult learning related to their specific interest topic. This can range from Cooperative movement organisations to folk high schools, and cultural organisations.³⁸

Also Museums are engaged in adult learning. For instance NEMO (Network of European Museum Organizations) has a Working Group (LEM - The Learning Museum) that explores topics relating to the fields of museum education, audience development, intercultural dialogue and lifelong learning.³⁹

Furthermore, in some European Member States a rich infrastructure is in place at local levels, where **municipalities** are the main providers of non-formal adult learning.

Some of the adult learning providers offering non-formal and informal learning are represented by European Associations, such as the EAEA.⁴⁰

The following examples can be mentioned including adult learning institutions, cultural institutions, libraries and NGOs:

- The Slovenian Institute for Adult Education (SIAE) (Slovenia) runs various adult learning programmes such as:
 - **Learning for Successful Life** addressing vulnerable & marginalized groups (mostly unemployed people) and refers to literacy, numeracy and digital capabilities.⁴¹

³⁸ DFS: [Members and associates \(dfs.dk\)](#)

³⁹ The [WG LEM](#) started out as a continuation of a network project by the same name funded by the EU Lifelong Learning Grundtvig Programme and carried out between 2010 and 2013, in which NEMO was a partner. Collecting the legacy of LEM, the Working Group today supports the exchange of information and learning among museum professionals in Europe, through various study visits to different museums in Europe, as well as through studies and reports.

⁴⁰ <https://eaea.org/>

⁴¹ [European Association for the Education of Adults » Good practice: Learning for Successful Life \(eaea.org\)](#)

- **Study Circles** are a form of cooperative learning (experiencing, summarizing) with a typical group structure (heterogeneous in form and homogeneous in interest) in which a positive symbiosis between responsible individuals is established and cooperative skills are developed.⁴²
- **Lifelong Learning Centers (Greece)**⁴³: Lifelong Learning Centres at Municipalities of the regions of Central Greece and South Aegean. The programme focuses on the Lifelong Learning and Education of individuals, irrespective of age. It aims to promote a positive attitude to learning, ensure equal access to education, develop the ability of adult citizens to adapt to the cognitive demands of a constantly evolving socio-economic environment, use the leisure time in a creative way and finally, integrate or re-integrate into the education process any adult, who for any reason has not completed the compulsory education cycle. Lifelong Learning Centres (K.Δ.B.M.) can be established and function at municipalities of the regions of Central Greece and South Aegean upon request, with educational programmes of general adult education, as well as activities at national and local level.
- The **Provincial Centres for Adult Education (CPIA)** (Italy) offer courses, among others, in digital skills and languages. These centres are housed within the secondary state schools and provide courses in the evenings.
- **Adult education centres** (Finland)⁴⁴ are educational establishments that welcome all prospective learners and offer opportunities for a wide variety of recreational activities and study. Learning is largely self-motivated and, as a rule, not aimed at achieving a formal qualification. Every year, more than one in ten Finns, a total of over 600,000 people, attend a course at an adult education centre. Course fees remain relatively low, as they are subsidised by central government and local authorities.
- **Ligo (previously Centre for Basic Education, CBE)**⁴⁵ (Belgium - Flanders) offers courses in relation to literacy, numeracy and ICT skills. Additionally, Dutch as a second language is an important part of the Ligo offer.
- **Network of the Open Learning Centres in Hungary (NYITOK)** (Hungary)⁴⁶: The NYITOK Network was established in 2010, supported by VOX Norway, in nine different communities. The centres provide opportunities for learning and competence development, addressing local and micro regional needs, especially for the development of basic skills (ICT, languages, literacy and numeracy). Based on the very positive results from 2013, the network of the Open Learning Centres has been extended to 50 centres in the frame of a national project. The direct target group of the programme is working-age adults (16-64 years), whose social and labour market integration, job retention and career development are hampered by a low level of basic skills and key competences and who do not have equal access to appropriate learning and competence development opportunities.
- A **chitalishte** (Bulgaria) is a public (cultural) institution that fulfils several functions at once, such as a community centre, library, and a theatre. It is also used as an educational institution, where people of all ages can enrol in foreign language, dance, music and other courses.

⁴² [European Association for the Education of Adults » Good practice: Study Circles \(eaea.org\)](#)

⁴³ [Lifelong Learning Centres at Municipalities of the regions of Central Greece and South Aegean | Youth and Lifelong Learning Foundation - INEDIVIM](#)

⁴⁴ <https://kansalaisopistot.fi/kielet/english/>

⁴⁵ [Basiseducatie - voor cursisten \(vlaanderen.be\)](#)

⁴⁶ [About \(nyitok.hu\)](#)

- **Libraries** (the Netherlands): In the Netherlands, the public libraries (supported by the Royal Library), play an important role in offering basic skills training and learning opportunities to adults. The libraries offer content on language, digital, e-government, civic integration, work and income, math and financial competences, health, traffic, and finally sustainable employment.⁴⁷ Many of these programmes are digitally available and the libraries have the licences and support staff to help adults access the programmes. In the libraries, 'language houses' are established (in the context of the programme 'Count on Skills') that provide a one-stop-shop for adult learning.
- **Local Knowledge and Education Centres** (Lokalne Ośrodki Wiedzy i Edukacji (LOWE) (Poland)⁴⁸: The Local Knowledge and Education Centre is an additional function adopted voluntarily by a school, engaging the community to improve the skills of its adult population. Schools are one of the widest existing networks of social services. The task of the centre is to use this natural position of the school and open access to programmes for adults – especially to people living in small and remote towns and villages or neglected city districts. Schools act as local centres and offer adults an opportunity to develop basic skills and key competences that are foundational to lifelong learning. The offer is based on prior identification of adults' specific needs in the community. The quality of the needs analysis has a direct effect on the social response to the programme.
- **Community Education and Training Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board** (Ireland)⁴⁹: This initiative delivers local training initiatives in partnership with community and voluntary organisations across 300 locations throughout the Limerick and Clare region. The programme is delivered primarily to 18-35 year old unemployed people with no formal qualifications or incomplete secondary level qualifications. Its focus is on adults who wish to return to or continue their education and people who experience disadvantage or have been out of education for some time – including people with disabilities.
- **Aontas Community Education Network** (Ireland)⁵⁰: The Community Education Network (CEN) was established in 2007 by AONTAS. It is a network of over 100 independently managed community education providers who work collaboratively, sharing information and resources, engaging in professional development and working to ensure that community education is valued and resourced.⁵¹

Web-based learning initiatives

There are many web-based learning initiatives that target vulnerable adults and focus on basic skills and Skills for Life. These initiatives can be supported by governments; developed by formal education providers, or privately funded (e.g. a foundation). The following examples can be mentioned:

- <https://oefenen.nl/> (Netherlands): This is an online platform where adults can practice specific basic skills. The programmes mainly target language, maths and digital skills, but are embedded in thematic content on healthy lifestyles, financial literacy, environmental literacy, traffic, societal orientation (on voting, or health care insurance for instance). The programmes of oefenen.nl are available freely for

⁴⁷ <https://www.bibliotheeknetwerk.nl/basisvaardigheden-volwassenen/landelijk-ingekochte-educatieve-content-basisvaardigheden>

⁴⁸ [Poland to establish 100 more Local Knowledge and Education Centres | Eurydice \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁴⁹ [Community Education and Training | Learning and Skills](#)

⁵⁰ [Community Education Network | Aontas](#)

⁵¹ [CE-Charter-with-arial-text-and-branching-elements.png \(842x1191\) \(aontas.com\)](#)

individuals and by organisations (such as libraries) on the basis of a licencing agreement.

- <https://www.steffie.nl/> (Netherlands): This online platform offers explanation in a easy to understand language and in an attractive form of questions many adults are confronted with in daily life. Topics concern for instance computers, health care, money, relationships, Covid-19, food, support, travel.

Formal vocational education and training organisations or higher education institutions that also offer non-formal and informal learning

Formal vocational education and training organisations and higher education institutions can have a specific mandate to also deliver courses for the development of basic skills of adults, or they can organise own projects and approaches for community engagement. Furthermore, HE and VET providers might have specific programmes targeted disadvantaged adults to empower them to access formal education pathways. Examples concern the following:

- In **higher education**, a framework on community engagement development ([TEFCE](#), see annex 1) is developed to build relationships of HEI with stakeholders in the local or regional communities in order to address societal needs.
- In **Ireland**, [CampusEngage](#) supports Irish higher education institutions to embed, scale and promote civic and community engagement across staff and student teaching, learning and research. All seven universities participate in:
 - Community-based Teaching and Learning: accredited experiential community-based learning/ community-based research (service learning).
 - Engaged Research and Innovation for Societal Impact: research that aims to improve, understand or investigate an issue of public interest or concern, advanced with community partners rather than for them.
 - Student Volunteering: scaling student volunteering through our online ‘tech for good’ system [studentvolunteer.ie](#)
 - Planning for Impact: building a national Framework for measuring and evaluating the positive social impact of higher education civic and community engagement.
- In the **Netherlands**, VET providers play a key role in local skills development ecosystems, also catering for learners with learning difficulties and adults in need to basic skills training. Contracted out by the municipalities, VET providers can provide non-formal basic skills training (language and civic integration).

Employer-related initiatives

The workplace is an important area for learning, especially for vulnerable adults. As stated in the report from the Working Group on Adult Learning “As adults spend a large share of their time in the workplace, the workplace is an important learning environment; it is the place to develop not only job-related skills but also basic and transversal competences that make people more resilient to changes in their career and life.”⁵² The following examples

⁵² European Commission (2018), Promoting adult learning in the workplace ET 2020 Working Group 2016 – 2018 on Adult Learning Executive summary, p. 4.

can be mentioned in which the work-place plays a role in supporting the development of Skills for Life:

- **Trainers trained to deliver basic skills training in the workplace** (T ABA: Trainer/innen-Ausbildung für Basisbildung am Arbeitsplatz) (Austria)⁵³
- **Skillnets** (Ireland): Skillnets is a private company fully funded through the Ministry of Education by the employers' levy. The initiative is closely linked to the national skills strategy.⁵⁴
- **Language at work** (Taal op de werkvloer) (Netherlands): The aim of this initiative is to increase language skills among employees with low and medium language skills. It consists of two measures: Language agreements: employers can enter a so-called language agreement, where they must acknowledge the importance of language skills and commit to making efforts to improve the skills of their employees; subsidy arrangements for employers to provide language courses at or outside the workplace.
- **GO-Model – Upskilling at the workplace** (Upskilling am Arbeitsplatz) (Switzerland)⁵⁵: The objective of this programme is to use the workplace as an access point to provide basic skills training for employees with low basic skills. GO intends to increase participation in basic skills learning through using the workplace as a new place of learning and as an alternative to traditional classroom courses.

National initiatives

Some countries have national policies or programmes that target basic skills, including Skills for Life. Examples concern:

- Netherlands: **Count on Skills** (Tel mee met Taal)⁵⁶. The aim of the 2020-2024 programme is to ensure that as many people as possible have sufficient basic skills to participate fully in our society. This is done both by encouraging adults to work on their basic skills and by encouraging children to develop sufficient basic skills.⁵⁷
- Norway: **The National Skills Policy Strategy (2017-2021)**⁵⁸. The National Skills Policy Strategy partners agreed amongst others to strengthen skills among adults with low skills and weak labour market attachment.
- Norway: **Skills Plus**⁵⁹: The main objective of the Skills Plus programme is to ensure that every adult can attain the level of basic competence that enables him/her to meet the increased demands of today's work and everyday life. There are two main target groups: Adults in working life, normally with a low formal education level, who need to improve their basic skills. This can include immigrants, and from 2015 one of the subjects of teaching is improving basic Norwegian skills for foreigners/immigrants; adults recruited through NGOs with no requirement of employment (since 2015, a smaller part of the programme has been earmarked for this target group).

⁵³ <https://erwachsenenbildung.at/aktuell/nachrichten/11346-trainerinnen-fuer-basisbildung-am-arbeitsplatz-ausgebildet.php>

⁵⁴ <https://www.skillnetireland.ie/>

⁵⁵ <https://alice.ch/en/services/go-upskilling-on-the-job/>

⁵⁶ <https://www.telmeemettaal.nl/>

⁵⁷ <https://www.telmeemettaal.nl/over-ons>

⁵⁸ <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/norwegian-strategy-for-skills-policy-2017---2021/id2527271/>

⁵⁹ <https://www.kompetansenorge.no/>

- Portugal: The **Qualifica programme**⁶⁰. The main objectives concern amongst other to increase digital and functional literacy.

Besides these national initiatives, at regional and local level, considerations are given to provide a more comprehensive infrastructure for learning. This can be done in the context of Learning Cities⁶¹.

⁶⁰ <https://www.qualifica.gov.pt/#/>

⁶¹ UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), *Key Features of Learning Cities* | UIL.

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