

Adult Education: A Strategic Investment in Europe's Resilience

Evidence-based Recommendations from the RIA-AE Network

Policy Paper 2026

Executive Message

Europe's future competitiveness, democratic resilience and social cohesion strongly depend on adults who continue learning throughout their lives.

Evidence collected by the RIA-AE Network across more than twenty European countries demonstrates that Erasmus+ in adult education delivers exactly these outcomes. It strengthens skills, inclusion, democratic participation and organisational innovation while reaching groups that are too often excluded from international cooperation.

For the next Erasmus+ Programme, our call to the European Commission is therefore **to recognise adult education as a strategic pillar of the programme** and to provide programme conditions, scope and resources that reflect its specific contribution and realities.

Why Adult Education Matters

Adult education is uniquely positioned to connect several of Europe's highest political priorities, as set out amongst others in the Union of Skills and the Preparedness Union Strategy.

It contributes to:

- competitiveness by strengthening skills, adaptability and lifelong learning;
- democratic resilience by promoting participation, European values and civic engagement;
- social inclusion by reaching adults with fewer opportunities;
- green and digital transitions by supporting continuous learning throughout life.

A broad understanding of adult education—including non-vocational learning and especially non-formal learning—is therefore not separate from Europe's economic agenda. It is one of its preconditions.

What the Evidence Shows

The second RIA-AE survey 2026 confirms that Erasmus+ creates lasting impact at multiple levels:

For **learners**, participation strengthens confidence, motivation, social participation, European identity, intercultural understanding and key competences. Many participants engage internationally for the first time and experience lasting personal and educational development. Pre- and post-mobility analysis shows that 96% of participants progressed in at least one practical life skill, with more than half improving in every individual impact area measured.

For **organisations**, Erasmus+ acts as a catalyst for innovation, internationalisation and quality improvement. International cooperation increasingly becomes embedded in organisational strategies and contributes to sustainable institutional development. Almost 95% of beneficiary organisations report that Erasmus+ improved their learning offer, while 97% report positive effects on staff competences. Around 71% of organisations continue to use these outputs after project completion.

Beyond individual projects, Erasmus+ strengthens democratic participation: The evidence therefore shows that Erasmus+ is not simply a mobility programme. It is a strategic investment in Europe's human capital. With 73% of beneficiaries addressing democratic participation, common

values and civic engagement, either directly or indirectly, Erasmus+ provides an important European investment in translating this priority into practice.

To realise this potential more fully, however, the programme needs to take greater account of the specific characteristics, needs and realities of adult education.

Key recommendations

Based on the evidence collected by the RIA-AE Network, we call on the European Commission to ensure that the next Erasmus+ Programme:

1. Recognise Adult Education as a Strategic Pillar

Adult education should be recognised as a key contributor to Europe's competitiveness, democratic resilience and social cohesion.

Programme priorities and budget should continue to reflect the broad mission of adult learning.

2. Design Erasmus+ Around the Reality of Adult Learners and Adult Education Organisations

Learners in adult education often require outreach, trust-building, preparation and individual support before mobility becomes possible. These activities should be recognised and funded as integral components of learner mobility. Both sending and host organisations should receive stronger incentives and support.

Mobility formats should enable all learners to take part in Erasmus+, regardless of their potential barriers.

3. Apply Proportionality

Administrative requirements should better reflect project size, organisational capacity and the diversity of adult education providers.

Simpler procedures and reliable digital systems accompanied by targeted guidance would significantly broaden participation, particularly among smaller organisations.

4. Turn Evidence into Policy

Erasmus+ generates valuable evidence on effective adult learning across Europe. Use Erasmus+ as a source of evidence for policymaking by systematically linking programme experience with national and European education strategies.

Conclusion

Europe cannot achieve its ambitions for competitiveness, inclusion and democratic resilience without investing in adult education.

The evidence generated by the RIA-AE Network demonstrates that Erasmus+ already delivers substantial impact. The next programme generation now has the opportunity to unlock even greater benefits by recognising adult education as a strategic investment rather than a marginal sector.

Investing in adult education means investing in Europe's resilience.

About the RIA-AE Network

The *Research-based Impact Analysis of Erasmus+ Adult Education Programmes* (RIA-AE) Network was established in 2022 by the German National Agency at BIBB (DE02) with more than twenty National Agencies across Europe.

The network provides independent, evidence-based research on the implementation and impact of Erasmus+ in adult education. Through comparative studies and European synthesis reports, RIA-AE supports policymakers and programme stakeholders in strengthening the future development of adult learning across Europe. See also [RIA-AE Network](#).