



Envision 4.7

Policy Paper: Lifelong Learning



What is lifelong learning and how does it link to SDG 4.7?

Learning plays a central role in achieving the 2030 Agenda and must be recognized as an important force to transform society towards a sustainable development model. Learning can take place in a variety of contexts and during all life phases, from pre-school to post-retirement; the concept of lifelong learning refers to learning as a process that occurs at all times in all places and covers the whole spectrum of formal, non-formal and informal learning. Crucially, lifelong learning is a process of continuous learning that is directed towards not only providing for individual needs, but also those of the community. The validation and recognition of skills and competences acquired in non-formal and informal ways, such as volunteering, provides an important incentive to promote global citizenship education.

The Envision 4.7 Roadmap stresses the need to equally value all forms of education and support lifelong learning opportunities to achieve the 2030 Agenda vision and its principle of leaving no one behind. As most of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) focus on formal and youth education, the inclusion of a comprehensive understanding of adult education, with a particular focus on citizenship education and sustainable culture – in addition to new capacities and capabilities – is crucial. Lifelong learning and education therefore play an essential role in furthering equal opportunities, social inclusion and social cohesion, as well securing a sustainable future; as such they directly promote the SDG Target 4.7 and all other SDGs.



TARGET 4.7

By 2030 ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development (ESD) and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship (GCED), and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development

How can the EU promote lifelong learning?

Bridge 47 views the adoption of lifelong learning as an overarching approach to promoting learning in societies as key to promoting the objectives of sustainable development in the EU. While education remains an area primarily controlled by national governments, the importance of lifelong learning has been recognised by the EU and its member states in a number of key policy documents, such as the Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning.¹ The recommendation supports initiatives to further develop and promote education for sustainable development in relation to SDG 4 – it covers a wide range of education, training and learning settings (formal, non-formal and informal) in a lifelong learning perspective.

The November 2019 Council Resolution on further developing the European Education Area to support future-oriented education and training systems² recognised the importance of lifelong learning in

promoting the EU's strategic agenda. In particular, it stressed that efforts towards a green transition need to 'involve all levels and all forms of education and training and all stages of life, enabling activities initiated at local and regional level and in cooperation with civil society, with the aim of moving forward towards the implementation of the relevant SDGs.' It added that 'the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning should be respected at every stage of life, from early childhood to older age, and at all levels and forms of education and training'.

¹Council Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning, 22 May 2018.

²Council Resolution on further developing the European Education Area to support future-oriented education and training systems, 18 November 2019.



A European Green Deal

For the EU to successfully transform itself from a high- to low-carbon economy, while improving people's quality of life, it will be fundamental to ensure all individuals build capacities to jointly create systemic change. The Green Deal aims to engage the 'wider community' for a successful transition, in line with the above-mentioned Council 2019 Resolution. Lifelong learning is crucial for promoting this level of engagement.



A Europe fit for the digital age

EU's commitment to ensure that the digital transformation serves people and the environment, in full respect for the principles of sustainable development, requires developing new capacities and capabilities among people of all ages and within different settings, including the informal and non-formal ones. The Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition,³ which aims at improving the digital skills of the broad population through multi-sectorial cooperation, offers a step towards reaching this ambition. If no one is to be left behind in this process, the principle of lifelong learning must be mainstreamed throughout these initiatives.



An Economy that works for the people

For all Europeans to have the same opportunities to thrive, everyone should have 'the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning' – this is the first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights. Lifelong learning, especially when connected to Target 4.7, also addresses other principles of the pillar (e.g. work-life balance, social protection) by focusing on the needs of the learner. The Erasmus+ programme guide supports mobility projects for staff in higher education and vocational education and training (VET) as well as staff in school education and adult education, in line with the principles of lifelong learning. The new European Skills Agenda⁴ presents targets for education and integrates the SDGs into most of its actions to ensure that the right to training and lifelong learning becomes a reality all across Europe.



A stronger Europe in the World

With the new European Consensus on Development,⁵ the EU committed to 'support inclusive lifelong learning and equitable quality education, particularly during early childhood and primary years.' A lifelong learning approach is essential to ensuring the promotion of the goals of Agenda 2030 as well as the EU's own development objectives beyond its borders.



Promoting our European Way of Life

The EU is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities (Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union), which should be promoted throughout the lifetime, including in adult education in formal, non-formal and informal settings. The EU has committed to investing in lifelong learning to deliver on the promotion of these values and to implement the SDGs through initiatives such as the European Education Area.



A new push for European Democracy

The EU recognises that citizens need a stronger role in the EU decision-making process and priority-setting – this realisation is central to the discussions on the Future of Europe. For this process to result in meaningful engagement, citizens must be willing to participate as active players. Lifelong learning is crucial to ensure such agency, as it furnishes all European citizens – whatever their age – with the competences to think critically and be well-informed.

³The Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition, from 2016.

⁴European Commission, [European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience](#), 2020.

⁵The New European Consensus on Development 'Our World, Our Dignity, our Future', 2017.

Recommendations

For the EU to successfully implement the SDGs while advancing its priorities, and in line with the recommendations of the Envision 4.7 Roadmap, **Bridge 47 calls on all actors to:**

1. Create a pan-European overarching strategy for Target 4.7, which includes lifelong learning, adult education and non-formal and informal learning to be defined and implemented at all levels.
2. Raise awareness around how adult learning is defined, how it contributes to achieving the SDGs and how it is linked to existing policy areas among EU member states, EU political leadership and services.
3. Commit to meaningful partnerships with formal, non-formal and informal education providers at regional, national and European level. This includes relevant civil society organisations and representative associations as partners in policy development processes and increasing civil society's innovative capacities to foster coherent lifelong learning approaches through the provision of adequate resources and essential infrastructure.
4. Embed the principle of lifelong learning into other public policies and programmes (e.g. sustainability, health, employment, migration). Particularly European, national and sub-national educational policies should take into consideration the need for formal, non-formal and informal education to have a coherent and inclusive approach emphasizing intergenerational and intercultural learning across all levels of education.

Bridge 47 further calls on EU member states to:

5. Design and implement legislation, develop structures and ensure finances for, in particular, adult education and non-formal and informal learning in a lifelong perspective.

Bridge 47 further calls on the European Commission to:

6. Include or build on existing processes and programmes to include the principle of lifelong learning, comprising adult education and non-formal and informal learning, in inter-service consultations, in all guidance documents for joint frameworks and relevant funding decisions, in order to ensure continuity of policies and respective implementation.

Bridge 47 further calls on the European Parliament to:

7. Monitor and promote the implementation of the principles of lifelong learning, comprising adult education and non-formal and informal learning, across EU policy.



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