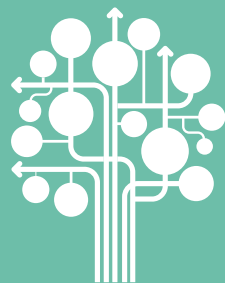


ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE MEETS ADULT LEARNING

Fostering Innovation, Strengthening Skills



EPALE

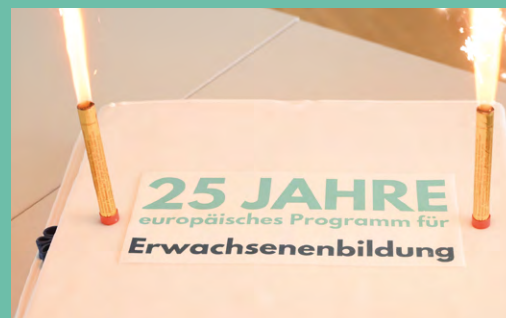
Austria



ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE MEETS ADULT LEARNING

Fostering Innovation, Strengthening Skills

SEEING THE BIGGER PICTURE
EPALE and Erasmus+ Adult Education 2025



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On 9 April 2025, the EPALE and Erasmus+ Conference “Artificial Intelligence Meets Adult Learning: Fostering Innovation, Strengthening Skills” took place at the Wiener Urania.

At the heart of the event was the question of what role adult education plays in dealing with developments in the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI). At the same time, the conference offered the opportunity to celebrate two significant anniversaries: 10 years of EPALE and 25 years of the European Programme for adult education.

Through keynote presentations and interactive workshops, experts from practice, research, and policy provided insights into current AI developments and discussed how these technologies are transforming learning processes – for example, through personalized learning opportunities, automated writing assistance, or new forms of communication.

More than 90 participants from Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, and other countries used the occasion to network, exchange ideas, and reflect on the role of adult learning in a technology-driven society.

This conference publication summarizes the key takeaways and presents a variety of perspectives on how to approach AI in adult education. It also offers information on the opportunities provided by the Erasmus+ Programme – particularly in the areas of learning mobilities and partnerships – as well as the EPALE platform for supporting project work and professional development in the sector.

As the national agency for Erasmus+, OeAD coordinates EPALE in Austria and would like to thank all speakers, authors, and participants who contributed to this publication.

We wish you an inspiring and insightful read.
Your OeAD Team

With the rapid development of so-called Artificial Intelligence (AI), adult education faces multiple challenges: as institutions that can benefit from new technological possibilities and are subject to relevant regulations such as the AI Act, but above all as providers of learning opportunities that equip adults with the competences needed for the conscious, purposeful and controlled use of Artificial Intelligence. In this context, adult education plays a key role.

With the theme “Artificial Intelligence Meets Adult Education”, one of the most defining developments of our time takes central stage. Artificial Intelligence holds enormous potential, but at the same time raises uncertainties and pressing questions: Will existing educational inequalities deepen? Can new, innovative methods of teaching be explored and individual learning processes be better supported? Especially considering the latest PIAAC results, which show that around 1.7 million adults in Austria have difficulty understanding even simple texts in German¹, it becomes increasingly urgent to explore the contribution that technological innovation can make to strengthening basic skills and supporting continuous learning in adulthood – and to develop this potential in a responsible way. Digital tools must be used in ways that benefit as many

people as possible – leaving no one behind. At the same time, the conscious and critical use of different forms of Artificial Intelligence represents a key area of competence that adult education is called upon to address. This conference publication presents contributions that offer a diverse and multifaceted insight into this important and evolving field of action in adult education.

The Federal Ministry for Women, Science and Research is placing a particular emphasis on providing adult education professionals with opportunities to (further) develop their competences in working with Artificial Intelligence. The DigiProf section of the Adult Education Portal (Erwachsenenbildung.at) offers a wide range of information on digital tools, webinars, and a MOOC focused on the targeted and responsible use of AI functionalities. [The Federal Institute for Adult Education](#) (bifeb) also provides a diverse range of training and continuing education opportunities covering various dimensions of AI in adult learning – including a comprehensive AI training program.

This conference publication also highlights another important focus that continues to shape adult learning: the tenth anniversary of EPALE – the Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe – and the 25th anniversary of the European Programme for adult education.

Both milestones are closely linked to a vision laid out in the European Commission’s [Memorandum on Lifelong Learning](#) from the year 2000. To this day, the memorandum

provides a key framework for our work: it underlines the importance of basic skills for social participation, emphasizes the need for innovative and learner-centered teaching and learning methods, and places holistic guidance and strong regional structures at the heart of lifelong learning. Even then, the role of information and communication technologies in promoting access to education was recognized – a topic that continues to accompany us today.

The promotion of mobility and exchange among adult learners has become an indispensable part of European education programmes. Through these opportunities, millions of people across Europe have been empowered and guided onto new educational pathways. For the past decade, the EPALE platform has provided the adult learning sector with a vibrant hub for networking and exchange – and this conference publication is very much created in that same spirit: learning from one another and shaping innovation together.

I would like to extend my special thanks to the EPALE Coordination Office, which – with the conference theme “Artificial Intelligence Meets Adult Education” – has once again addressed a highly topical issue. For ten years now, EPALE has been enabling European exchange in the field of adult learning. The Coordination Office plays a key role in fostering international cooperation and ensuring that European funding instruments can have their greatest possible impact.



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www.bmfwf.gv.at

¹ Statistik Austria (2024): PIAAC 2022/23: Grundkompetenzen von Erwachsenen. Nationaler Ergebnisbericht – Band 1, <https://www.statistik.at/services/tools/services/publikationen/detail/2045> [abgerufen am 14.07.2025]



CONTRIBUTIONS



Highlights and Anniversaries: Ten Years of EPALE, Twenty-Five Years of European Programmes for Adult Learning

Ten years ago, EPALE was established as a European online platform for adult learning. Its aim was to foster networking and cooperation across Europe and to strengthen collaboration within the field. It was a visionary project that was officially launched in Austria in the summer of 2015 with a major event. Many stakeholders, as well as members of the European Parliament, took part in the launch.

The EPALE Advisory Board

In Austria, a national EPALE Advisory Board was established to accompany the implementation of the network from the very beginning. This body brings together representatives of the Conference of Adult Education (KEBÖ), the social partners, OeAD as the national coordination unit, and the relevant supervising ministry. Together, these members work on the continuous development of EPALE: What does the network need to make an impact and remain relevant for the community? Who are the key stakeholders for EPALE? To this day, the EPALE Advisory Board has been successfully supporting the growth of the network. The board meets twice a year but there is also lively exchange beyond these meetings. The national coordination unit receives strong support from its board members in implementing the themes and priorities of European adult education.

A Successful Start and Continuous Growth

After EPALE was launched in the summer of 2015, more than 200 contributions were already online by the end of that year. Today, ten years later, the platform counts over 165,000 users across Europe (according to web statistics, 2nd quarter of 2025). In Austria, there are currently approximately 2,000 users who regularly engage with the



platform. We also receive active feedback and numerous contributions. From the very beginning, it was important to us to feature high-quality and inspiring content on EPALE. We are pleased that, with the support of the Austrian adult learning community, we have succeeded in achieving this goal.

EPALE Meets European Funding Programmes

From the very beginning, EPALE was closely interlinked with the Erasmus+ Adult Education programme, in line with the original vision of the European Commission. Today, this linkage has become a central requirement of the Commission for all national support services. Austria is often highlighted by the European Commission as a best-practice example, as many aspects have worked particularly

well. We actively follow and promote the various themes launched by EPALE, regularly disseminate Erasmus+ project results on the platform, and make full use of the synergies between EPALE and Erasmus+.

Turning Point and New Impetus

The second major anniversary we are celebrating this year is the 25th anniversary of EU programmes for adult education. I would like to symbolically use the strong term “turning point”: even before the turn of the millennium, there were already adult education projects – namely centrally managed projects under the EU programme Socrates. However, with the launch of Grundtvig in 2005, a programme was introduced that gave adult education as a sector an entirely new sense of identity and confidence.

There was a strong spirit of new beginnings at the European level. From the outset, the programme was extremely well received, both across Europe and in Austria. It offered a wide range of initiatives and funding opportunities for adult education. One figure from the early years is particularly striking: in 2006, one central Grundtvig action received 47 applications, seven of which came from Austria. This represents a high proportion, considering the competition from across Europe. It clearly shows that the focus on quality – which is so important to us – has been a defining feature of adult education in Austria right from the start.

Adult Education as a Central Part of Erasmus+

Adult education is now a central and essential sector within the Erasmus+ program. Over the years, its share of the overall budget has steadily increased. This clearly shows that adult education has become an integral and indispensable part of the EU program. As for the implementation in Austria, we are on a very promising path. For several years now, it has been possible to send adult learners abroad. A substantial part of the funding has been allocated for this purpose, and Austria is making increasingly effective use of these resources – with mobility numbers rising significantly. This also marks a paradigm shift, as such opportunities were not available for many years. In terms of cooperation projects, Austria continues to see an exceptionally high number of applications each year. Many of these are outstanding projects, and the demand for funding remains strong. Over time, key adult education themes such as participation and inclusion have become embedded in the priorities of the EU program. Additionally, overarching priorities like **Green Erasmus+** and the **Digital Transition** have gained momentum. All these topics, which have been essential to adult education from the very

beginning, are now receiving increased attention across the entire programme – a very positive development.

A Look Ahead to the New Programme

The European Commission is expected to present its first proposal for the new EU programme generation in the summer of this year. Regarding Erasmus+, the different strands of the programme – cooperation projects and mobility actions – have proven their value. As far as we know at present, no major changes are expected in these areas. The programme priorities mentioned above have also been well received and are likely to continue in the future. At the same time, there are considerations to introduce two new major pillars into the EU program: firstly, **European values and participation**, and secondly, the promotion of **skills**. The topic of competences is already of central importance today and will remain so in the future. In line with this, the European Commission launched the “Union of Skills” initiative in March 2025, which we already see as a key forerunner to this central theme in the new EU programme generation.

“Union of Skills”: A European Education Initiative

The “Union of Skills” initiative represents an educational offensive aimed at securing Europe’s innovative strength and competitive future. The focus is on increasing competitiveness while bringing together education, training, and employment across Europe. Two key initiatives are particularly relevant for adult education: the Action Plan for Basic Skills, emphasizing adult learning, and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) as another priority area. A central element of the

“Union of Skills” is the promotion and strengthening of basic competences, as well as the support of lifelong learning. These are all areas where adult education can play a vital role and will continue to make an important contribution. Topics such as **upskilling** and **reskilling** are already being addressed through initiatives that are expected to be further expanded in the coming years.

Your Contribution Matters

Get involved in the Erasmus+ Programme by submitting projects in the field of adult education. The key themes of EPALE – such as those highlighted at the EPALE and Erasmus+ Conference 2025, **Artificial Intelligence** and **Basic Skills** – are also reflected in Erasmus+. On the EPALE platform, we continuously link adult education with the opportunities Erasmus+ provides. Erasmus+ is important for citizens and for Europe. It is not a programme for elites, nor a travel or leisure scheme – it makes a central contribution to the development of a European identity. It stands for cohesion and for European citizenship. At the end of the day, what matters is your participation: carry out Erasmus+ projects, publish contributions on EPALE, and share your insights and project results through the online platform. Participation is the key – and it is this participation that we look forward to in the coming years and decades, both in the EU Programmes for adult education and on EPALE.

Thank you for your commitment!



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Not Just Another Tool: Why Adult Education Needs a Clear Stance on AI

Since early 2023, the widespread use of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) – particularly text generators – has triggered a profound cultural shift. With the rise of ChatGPT and similar tools, chatbot usage has become deeply embedded in creative and writing processes. Their integration is transforming established work routines, the way we engage with language, our expectations around information, and, consequently, the epistemic and cultural foundations of education.

AI – More Than Just a New Tool

The new culture of writing shaped by the proliferation of AI chatbots is characterized by a lowered threshold for text production. Writing is increasingly being replaced by curating and editing, while the practice of “thinking through writing” is receding into the background. AI chatbots encourage a smooth, algorithmically optimized use of language. AI now generates emails, social media posts, and chat messages – reshaping trust in digital communication. At the same time, AI chatbots are setting new standards for service orientation, perceived “friendliness,” and “patience.” But AI also influences published content. Text generators operate on probabilities, which can cause information to lose its authoritative character. They make implicit selections and define relevance – unless explicitly steered through careful prompting. Moreover, AI models are increasingly trained on AI-generated content, reinforcing existing errors and biases over time.

Konsequenzen für die Bildung

A 2025² study found that by the end of 2024, approximately 24% of all press releases were written using AI. Barbara Geyer, professor and programme director at the University of Applied Sciences Burgenland, noted on LinkedIn: “We are currently educating for a world that no longer exists. In professional practice, AI tools are already standard.”

A Europe-wide study conducted by the Vodafone Foundation³: in 2024 revealed that two-thirds of students consider access to AI essential for academic success – and that they are mostly learning these skills from their peers.

AI usage among university students is even more widespread. A 2025 study by the University of Darmstadt found that nearly 92% of students in Germany use tools like ChatGPT for text analysis and production, research, and clarifying questions.

However, this does not mean that educational practices are aligned with the realities of the modern workforce. AI use remains error-prone and is often carried out without sufficient guidance or critical reflection.

(Perhaps) the Most Important AI Competence

Given the rise of AI chatbots as text generators, perhaps the most essential AI competence today is the ability to use them purposefully and in accordance with their function. The simulation <https://moebio.com/mind> illustrates this well by showing how ChatGPT completes a sentence like “Intelligence is...” in countless ways – each continuation unique and semantically distinct. The results highlight the variability and contextual sensitivity of AI-generated language.

When knowledge-based questions are asked in this way, reliable answers cannot be expected. AI tools like ChatGPT can deliver convincingly worded responses even to non-sensical prompts – for example, “Explain the term pedagogical double burger” or “Is the pedagogical double burger a synonym for the pedagogical hot dog?” Such replies may sound plausible but lack factual grounding, highlighting the need for critical evaluation of AI-generated content.

The key competence lies in knowing when it is sufficient to generate content – for example, for inspiration or brainstorming – and when proper research is required to obtain fact-based, reliable information. In such cases, AI-assisted search tools like Perplexity or chatbots with web access – where original sources are provided and can be critically evaluated – offer a more responsible use of AI. This kind of awareness must become a core element of basic digital education on a broad scale. The AI Act, with its emphasis on competence development, reinforces this imperative.

What the AI Act Demands from Adult Education

The **AI Act** came into force in August 2024, with various provisions being implemented gradually over the following years. Since February 2025, the provision on AI competence has been in effect. It reads as follows:

“Providers and deployers of AI systems shall take measures to ensure, to the best of their ability, that their staff and other persons acting on their behalf who are involved in the operation and use of AI systems possess an adequate level of AI competence, taking into account their technical knowledge, experience, education and training, the context in which the AI systems are to be used, and the persons or groups on whom the AI systems will be used.”⁴

This requirement applies to all AI systems – regardless of their risk level. Under the AI Act, a “deployer” is defined as any individual or organization that uses an AI system under their own responsibility. This means that if an educational institution decides to integrate tools like Microsoft Copilot, ChatGPT, or Mistral into its courses, it qualifies as a deployer and is therefore responsible for ensuring that its staff possesses the necessary level of AI competence.



The AI Act defines **AI competence** as follows: *“The abilities, knowledge, and understanding that enable providers, deployers, and affected individuals, considering their respective rights and obligations under this Regulation, to use AI systems knowledgeably and to be aware of the opportunities, risks, and potential harm they may cause.”*

At its core, AI competence is about informed and responsible use – recognizing opportunities and risks, and preventing harm

In practice, inadequate or improper use of AI can lead to liability claims or administrative penalties for non-compliance with the AI Act or the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

In each case, *“the context in which the AI systems are to be used, as well as the individuals or groups they are intended for, must be taken into account”*. This means that AI competence in adult education differs from that in a PR agency, a law firm, or a manufacturing company – and AI competence must be specifically defined for adult education, with a focus on informed application and risk awareness. It is clear that adult education is called upon to take an active stance – especially at the level of individual institutions. Possible approaches include targeted training for staff, as well as written guidelines or collectively shared minimum standards for the use of AI. However, as of early 2025, a large proportion of providers have yet to address this challenge in a systematic way.

Recommendations for a Proactive Approach in Adult Education

with chatbots. The know-how required to do this effectively must be actively integrated into educational programmes and course design. This includes not only technical handling but also critical reflection on the strengths and limitations of AI-supported learning.

At the same time, it is essential to create spaces for discourse that allow us to reflect on this cultural shift – so that the transformation brought about by AI can be consciously acknowledged, discussed, and actively shaped. In addition, entirely new applications with transformative potential for educational practice are emerging at a rapid pace. Just to name a few: agent-based systems, multi-lingual avatars, computer vision integrated into AI chatbots, and the rise of audio-based chatbot interactions. These innovations need to be piloted, researched, and – where appropriate – scaled up. A crucial starting point is the development of targeted professional learning opportunities for adult education practitioners.

A simple yet important contribution within courses is to avoid mystifying AI – by not presenting it as a subject with human-like qualities or illustrating it with typical anthropomorphic images. This applies both to visual materials and to the language used when talking about AI. Normalising AI as a tool, rather than a being, helps foster critical distance and informed engagement.

Competence-oriented didactics involving AI are equally important. A well-designed AI-related learning task should require human intelligence. For instance, educators can ask learners to guide a chatbot in addressing a specific subject-related question. This not only fosters logical thinking and

prompting skills but also deepens engagement with the actual content – bridging technological and subject-matter competence.

An AI strategy is essential

Ideally, all of these activities should be embedded at the institutional level within a provider-specific AI strategy. While the development of such a strategy must ultimately be carried out by each institution or association individually, there are key principles derived from the AI Act that apply across the board. Establishing such strategies is not optional—it is essential for ensuring responsible, competent, and future-oriented use of AI in adult education. These are included in the [AI guidelines for SMEs published by the Austrian Economic Chamber \(WKO\)](#).

For educational providers, it is also essential to define their position on AI based on their own mission statement and to formulate AI-specific goals – both internally and for their educational programmes. At the heart of any such AI strategy lie minimum standards for the use of AI in teaching and learning processes. These standards provide clarity, ensure responsible implementation, and support a shared understanding among staff and learners.

These minimum standards are aimed at educators and should ideally be accompanied by informational materials and professional development opportunities. Finally, a comprehensive AI strategy should also include appropriate measures for personnel development or recruitment, supported by clear guidelines tailored to the different professional roles within the institution.

A learning path for developing an AI strategy is offered by the [EBmooc 2025](#), which will be published starting

in September 2025. The course supports the creation of provider-specific guidelines through structured reflection questions and ready-to-use materials – helping institutions take practical, well-informed steps toward AI readiness in adult education.



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Team | Institut CONEDU

- 2 Liang/Zhang/ Codreanu/Wang/Cao/Zou (2025): The Widespread Adoption of Large Language Model-Assisted Writing Across Society. Available online: <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2502.09747> (18.04.2025)
- 3 www.vodafone-stiftung.de/europaeische-schuelerstudie-kuenstliche-intelligenz
- 4 AI-Act see https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/DE/TXT/HTML/?uri=OJ:L_202401689#d1e39-1-1

Augmenting Learning, Not Replacing It: KI, UDL⁵ and the Future of Adult Education

We're living in a moment of significant digital transformation, and it is having an impact at all levels of society. The emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a mainstream tool has not only redefined how learners access information but also how educators teach and support learning. In adult education, especially within rural and underserved areas of Ireland, this shift brings both opportunity and challenge.

While fears of AI replacing educators, spreading misinformation, or entrenching bias are understandable, we mustn't overlook a crucial truth: AI is already part of the human landscape and it is being used not just by educators but also extensively by learners, whether as part of formal study or informal online engagement. From chatbots to translation tools, internet searches to customer service queries, AI already underpins many digital interactions adults navigate daily. Its influence is embedded and growing, often invisibly, in the everyday experience of accessing knowledge and communication.

The widespread and embedded use of AI highlights a critical pivot point for educators. While AI is already present in many aspects of education and daily life, its impact in learning environments, particularly in adult education, can be shaped most profoundly by how educators choose to engage with it. This does not mean that AI should be front and centre in every classroom or be part of every learning experience. AI does not need, nor should it, take the spotlight, it can be just as an effective when working behind the scenes, assisting educators in curating content, simplifying texts, or simulating real-world scenarios that resonate with learners.

5 Universal Design for Learning



This essay argues that AI's true potential lies in its capacity to augment the deeply human work of adult education – not replace it. Educators remain central, using their empathy, experience, judgment and creativity to guide learners. AI, used ethically and creatively, can help address modern educational challenges like digital literacy gaps, misinformation, and engagement barriers. The key is it being a critical, educator-led integration that enhances, not diminishes, the relational core of teaching.

The Role of AI in Adult Education

Ireland's national Adult Literacy for Life Strategy highlights access to technology and digital competency as core priorities. It emphasises that if adults are not engaged with AI, they are excluded from influencing how it is shaped and used. Coupled with the EU AI Act's focus on ethical, transparent AI use, these frameworks support educator-led adoption that promotes equity and inclusion.

While Artificial Intelligence in education often conjures images of robots and automation, it's more about software capable of multiple functions. Freely available tools like ChatGPT, Google Gemini, or Microsoft Copilot are capable

of rapidly creating, drafting or simplifying texts, creating audio and images, coding, or to simulate conversations. As AI tools have become more and more accessible, its uptake in education has also been growing fast. A 2024 survey across 16 countries found that 86% of students already use AI in their studies. Yet, the growing reliance on AI also raises concerns – chiefly around accuracy, over-dependence, and the risk of accepting outputs uncritically.

Within this evolving context, educators are still finding practical, thoughtful ways to use AI without exposing learners to these risks. As an example, a learning activity around navigating public transport uses AI to generate a live, learner prompted, verbal dialogue of booking a transport ticket with a 'customer service agent', all tailored to a local Irish context. Learners practiced with the AI and also got a text transcript of their interactions. They then corrected both their own queries and the AI responses, together with the tutor. This extended their vocabulary into related reading and speech tasks while also promoted checking the validity of information. The authenticity of the scenario made the lesson both accessible and engaging. AI can also streamline preparation and help in designing a lesson on virtually any topic. AI can be used to sketch out a

lesson structure, complete with vocabulary, knowledge and extension suggestions and warm-up tasks. But rather than replacing teacher input, this simply accelerates the planning phase and frees up time for further customisation. For example, AI can enable differentiated instruction by producing multiple versions of the same material, plain language, simplified summaries, visual supports, or more complexity for more advanced learners, all without excessive additional workload. The educator still has control over what they choose to present to the learners and can exercise their own judgement in regards to bias and accuracy.

Fundamentally, the value of AI lies in how it is prompted and shaped, or in other words, what the educator tells the AI to do. Effective use requires imagination and critical thinking, what some now call “prompt literacy.” This emerging skill involves crafting precise queries to get useful, accurate, and appropriate responses so that AI becomes a flexible co-designer. AI tools do not work isolation but rather with educators validating content, ensuring appropriateness, and linking it all to learning goals. AI can draft, simulate, or translate – but it is the educator who ensures relevance, builds confidence, and builds the space for learners to explore, as they have always done. That human guidance is irreplaceable.

Ironically, and encouragingly, this new technology doesn’t require a ‘clear the decks’ revolution. While some fear AI will replace traditional methods, it actually works best when it draws on the experience and knowledge of educators. When this professional insight is crafted into a prompt, the resulting output is not only more relevant and tailored but also more pedagogically sound. In this way, educational experience doesn’t become obsolete, it becomes the very ingredient that makes AI in education more effective.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and AI

Ireland has been championing Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in further education with the Irish Government launching UDL guidelines for FET practitioners to promote inclusive teaching strategies across the sector. UDL is a framework that recognises the variability of learners and promotes inclusive education through three core principles: multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression. For adult educators, UDL offers a structured way to reach learners who differ in language, experience, ability, and confidence. The convergence of UDL and AI is promising and AI can significantly enhance UDL practices by helping educators adapt materials and interactions to suit a wide range of learners.

Engagement can be supported through AI-generated scenarios that reflect learners’ lives. Whether simulating a public transport exchange, composing an email to a landlord, or generating a script for a community noticeboard, AI allows the creation of real-world, relevant content. AI can make abstract language, mathematical concepts or digital skills more tangible and relatable.

For representation, AI can adjust reading levels of texts or provide visual, audio, or multilingual outputs. For instance, a workplace safety manual might be rewritten in plain language or translated into a learner’s first language. This allows equitable access for learners to the same content. Expression is broadened through tools that support varied outputs. Learners might choose to respond in writing, through recorded speech, or by collaborating on visual presentations. One group of learners used AI to co-write a story for publication and even created an audio version, an activity that layered digital, literacy, and creative skills. In each case, AI functions not as the lead actor but as

a support. The educator chooses the level, format, and timing of AI use, ensuring that materials and tasks align with the learner group's readiness and interests. This keeps the learning experience inclusive, relevant, and grounded in pedagogical care.

Applying AI through the lens of UDL is not just a method – it's a mindset. It places learner diversity at the centre and treats technology as a tool to address real, everyday barriers to participation. Without a UDL lens, AI risks becoming a one-size-fits-all solution, reinforcing rather than reducing exclusion. With UDL, educators can harness AI to offer flexible, equitable access to learning that recognises and values each learner's unique context. Through this lens, AI can be a powerful enabler of UDL principles, offering flexible paths to mastery, varied means of representation, and authentic engagement.

Digital Literacy and AI Readiness

Digital literacy is the foundation of meaningful AI use. Yet, in Ireland, around 55% of adults report low digital skills. These challenges are often more acute in rural areas where broadband access, device availability, and confidence with technology remain persistent barriers.

For adult education to benefit from AI, learners need basic skills in using digital tools, typing, searching, navigating websites and also new competencies like evaluating online sources, understanding data privacy, and prompting AI systems themselves. In this sense, AI literacy is now a vital subset of digital literacy. Critically, educators must model and mediate this process. A key risk is learners accepting AI responses without question. Teaching how to frame queries, verify output, and think critically about digital information is essential. These are not just technical skills

– they are foundational to active citizenship and lifelong learning.

Professional development for educators is equally important. Many adult educators are already experimenting with AI for planning and resource creation but may lack confidence in guiding learners. Peer learning, CPD workshops, and communities of practice can provide the support needed to ensure AI tools are used both effectively and ethically.

But there's a deeper imperative, too. If educators are not engaging with AI, or at least building a working understanding of its capabilities and limitations, they risk missing a vital opportunity. Many adult learners are already encountering AI in their daily lives: through social media, navigating public services, or interpreting information online. Whether learners are aware of it or not, AI is influencing how they access and process information. By becoming more AI-literate themselves, educators can better support learners in interpreting, questioning, and making informed decisions about the tools they use. Engagement with AI is not about adopting the latest trend – it's about meeting learners where they are, and ensuring they are not left navigating this new terrain alone.

By investing in both learner readiness and educator confidence, we can ensure AI acts as a bridge, not a barrier, to equitable, empowering education.

Engagement, Motivation, and AI

Learner engagement can be a casualty of an education system stretched by time, resources, or relevance. AI, if thoughtfully applied, can offer a fresh way to re-ignite interest, particularly through personalization, novelty, and interactivity.



And here's something that makes AI not just clever but quietly revolutionary. For the first time, educators in under-resourced programmes can create tailored, high-quality learning materials without reaching into already over-stretched budgets. Unlike commercial education packages, which often come with hefty licensing fees and fixed content, AI can generate custom resources that speak directly to a group's language level, local context, or learning needs – on demand, and at no extra cost. This levels the playing field. It means small, rural, or community-based programmes can offer learning experiences just as rich and responsive as those in well-funded institutions.

AI can simulate lifelike scenarios that feel immediately useful: practicing a job interview, ordering food, or navigating a healthcare appointment. These are more than language exercises, they are acts of self-efficacy and such interactions can also support autonomy. When learners use AI tools to generate content – from writing sample emails to creating

image-based storyboards – they gain a degree of control over their learning. This agency is not just motivational; it's foundational to adult learning theory.

Humour and cultural relevance also matter. AI can generate scenarios based on local slang, news, or community events. In a rural classroom, AI was prompted to create a dialogue involving a local sporting match. The differences with what the AI generated and what some of the learners actually witnessed as they were present at the local match was hotly debated with much merriment in class. Learners were not only relaxed in their engagement, they were utilising language in a familiar way. More importantly, they responded with laughter, a powerful sign of engagement.

For second-language learners or those with limited literacy, AI offers support beyond simple translation. Educators can use AI to help learners not only understand the meaning of complex letters – such as those from government

departments or healthcare providers – but also to extract the most important information: what actions are required, when appointments are scheduled, or whether costs are involved. This transforms AI from a passive tool into an active interpreter, enhancing learner autonomy and reducing the anxiety associated with unclear official communication.

However, engagement must be tempered with guidance. AI outputs can be dull, inaccurate, or biased. Educators must model curiosity, criticality, and ethical use. They must also mediate learner expectations: AI is a support, not a substitute for real-world conversation or peer feedback.

Used well, AI does not just motivate, it invites learners into the heart of the learning process, transforming them from passive recipients into active co-creators.

Praktische KI-Integration für Lehrkräfte

While learners benefit from AI-enhanced engagement and personalization, educators need support to integrate these tools effectively. The good news is that many adult educators are already using AI behind the scenes, to brainstorm lessons, generate plain-language summaries, or create vocabulary lists. What matters now is recognising and refining these practices.

AI can significantly reduce preparation time. With a well-crafted prompt, a tutor can create a draft lesson plan, suggest reading comprehension questions, or generate example emails tailored to a specific learner group. Tools like ChatGPT, Gemini, or Microsoft Copilot allow educators to test out different prompts and iterate quickly.

Prompt literacy is emerging as a professional skill in its own right. Educators must learn not only how to use AI, but how to ask the right questions, specifying level, context,

language style, or content structure. This skill enables more precise and relevant outputs, saving time while enhancing the quality of learning materials. But prompt literacy is not just for educators. For learners, especially those with lower digital confidence, it is a foundational AI skill. Teaching learners how to frame questions clearly, evaluate responses, and iterate on queries fosters critical thinking, independence, and digital resilience. Just as digital literacy became essential in the 1990s, prompt literacy is now a key competency for navigating the AI-supported world of the 2020s.

Importantly, AI should not be a shortcut to remove teacher input, but a co-pilot that supports creative and responsive teaching. When educators understand how to frame AI-generated content around their learners' goals and identities, they can design truly personalised, inclusive materials. Framing AI through UDL ensures the technology is used to expand options, not restrict them. It shifts the focus from delivering uniform content to creating adaptive pathways that reflect learner strengths, preferences, and needs. This alignment means AI doesn't just help educators do things faster, it helps them do things fairer.

One of the more exciting aspects of AI in education is that it gives educators access to skills they might not personally have – like speaking another language, drawing, or coding. A tutor may not know how to program a website from scratch, but with AI's help, they can generate the code for a realistic practice interface. In one example, a tutor with only copy-and-paste knowledge used AI to build a mock accommodation booking website. This allowed learners to safely practise online booking in a realistic setting, without risking personal information or money. It opened up a lesson that involved not just digital skills, but literacy, numeracy, and confidence-building, all without needing



to become a web developer, or having to pay for some 'educational' version.

Professional development is vital here. Continual Professional Development sessions, peer-led workshops, and on-line communities of practice can provide safe, low-pressure spaces for educators to explore AI, test ideas, and share what works. Across Ireland, many ETBs and adult education providers are starting to embed these opportunities. By investing in educator capacity and promoting a mindset of curiosity and experimentation, we create a culture where AI is not feared but shaped and steered by those who know learners best.

The Human Core of Teaching

Despite AI's growing presence and potential in adult education, it is essential to reaffirm a simple truth: the heart of effective learning is human. AI may enhance, support, and scaffold, but it cannot replace the educator's role in building trust, fostering curiosity, and creating a safe and inclusive learning environment.

Adult education is inherently relational. Many learners return to education after years away from formal learning. They bring complex life stories, anxieties, and aspirations. The presence of a supportive educator – someone who can listen, encourage, and adapt in real-time, remains irreplaceable. No chatbot can fully replicate the empathy, cultural understanding, or personal encouragement that human educators offer.

AI lacks intuition. It cannot sense when a learner is struggling emotionally or losing confidence. It does not understand the subtle dynamics of a classroom, nor can it model the social and emotional skills essential for civic life. It cannot improvise in the face of an unexpected learning moment or mediate a conflict with care and nuance.

Moreover, the ethical and pedagogical judgement that educators apply daily, deciding what to teach, how to sequence learning, when to challenge and when to support, remains a fundamentally human domain. These decisions are shaped not just by curriculum but by relationships, experience, and reflection.

Used well, AI can free educators to do more of this vital work. It can reduce time spent on repetitive tasks, offer differentiated materials, and support learners' independent practice. But its integration must be guided by a vision of education as more than content delivery. Education is about connection, empowerment, and transformation. In this light, the future of adult education with AI is not about replacing teachers. It is about recognising and reinforcing their unique role and using technology to support them in reaching every learner, in every context, with compassion and creativity.

Conclusion

As we navigate the opportunities and challenges of AI in adult education, one principle stands clear: technology should serve pedagogy, not the other way around. AI can be a powerful tool, but only when guided by the insight, ethics, and care of professional educators. By integrating AI through the lens of Universal Design for Learning, investing in digital and prompt literacy, and fostering inclusive, responsive classrooms, we can ensure that AI enhances rather than erodes the human core of education. UDL offers a tested, ethical, and inclusive approach to steer AI integration, ensuring that flexibility, representation, and learner empowerment remain at the heart of digital transformation.

Adult learners deserve not just access to knowledge, but connection, meaning, and support. In the hands of thoughtful educators, AI can help deliver all three. The task now is not to resist the technology, nor to surrender to it, but to lead its use, intelligently, ethically, and humanely.



Living in Ireland and working in Adult Education, **Scott Wilson** has over 20 years' experience across the private, public, and community education sectors. Bringing learning opportunities to students from as young as 3, up to a current student who is 94 years old, Scott is passionate about lifelong learning. Scott describes teaching as a team activity and enjoys most the opportunity to learn from his students and his colleagues.

AI.D Project: Developing Critical AI Literacy in Education

Digital transformations constantly change our daily lives, with (new) technologies having different functions. They reshape daily life in complex ways, influencing how we communicate, work, learn, and participate in society.

Despite these changes, the discrepancy between the pace of technological developments and civil society's knowledge development about them is problematic. Especially when Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies are used in several areas of life, impacting citizens' privacy while also reinforcing systemic discrimination and social inequalities through algorithmic bias (e.g. in the job market) and unequal access to resources (e.g. access to a computer and/or reliable internet connection). Yet, AI is used in crucial areas for democracies, ranging from information, electoral processes and education.

In the Artificial Intelligence and the Shaping of Democracy (AI.D) project, seven EU-based organisations are working to address these issues. I am involved in this project for the Democracy Centre Vienna. AI.D is an Erasmus+ co-funded project that started in 2024 and will last until 2026. It is a project for education professionals focusing on Civic and Citizenship Education, and it aims to create resources like videos, webinars, and teaching materials. The project seeks to contribute to the development of advanced digital skills, the promotion of full participation in digital democratic processes and the strengthening of critical AI literacy.

Critical AI Literacy means understanding AI features and how they fit the contexts in which AI is used – that is, the



compatibility between what the technology can do and what users use it for⁶. Let's clarify this with an example in the context of adult education.

An adult education provider includes an AI Tutor as part of their services. Including this service with Critical AI Literacy in mind means:

- **Understanding AI features** – such as how and on what data the AI Tutor is trained on, whether it integrates national policies and eventual curricula, records students' learning patterns, and uses them for their learning.
- **Understanding its compatibility with its usages** – such as whether the AI Tutor fits the students' and teachers' goals, the diversity of students' profiles, their background and learning abilities, whether it contributes to reinforcing inequalities or removes barriers to learning.

Exploring AI in adult education also means equipping educators and learners with critical AI literacy and digital competencies frameworks.

In the conference “Artificial intelligence meets adult education: Promoting innovation, strengthening competences” hosted by EPALE in April 2025, the AI.D project was presented to a group of adult educators during a workshop. The workshop was centred on critical AI literacy and was developed using a participant-centred strategy. It aimed to present which aspects of democracy are relevant in AI discussions and present the project's first results and how they can be leveraged for educational purposes.



The workshop had three main components:

- An **interactive game** to assess which work practices, if any, exist in the usage of AI.
- A **Q&A** based on the [AI.D Videos](#).
- **Group Work** based on the following questions:
 1. What skills and knowledge do adult educators need to integrate AI into their work?
 2. What, from your perspective, are the main challenges and obstacles to using AI in adult education?
 3. What can adult educators do to help learners critically

engage with AI? Consider the problems mentioned in the videos, e.g. biased training data, data protection, and environmental problems.

The results of the discussions highlighted the following aspects:

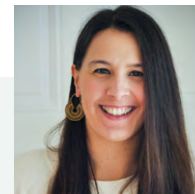
- Training education professionals means developing technical skills and knowledge (understanding AI tools, key terms, and how they generate their answers) and other skills (like critical thinking, data privacy awareness,

awareness of risks and opportunities, and pedagogical knowledge and skills).

- Addressing inequalities means addressing access to resources, considering age, and choosing not to use AI technologies.
- Considering fighting automation biases (so critically assess the results of Generative AI) and addressing the problem of AI dependence and overreliance.

Conclusion

The workshop helped to understand how to develop critical AI literacy for education professionals. By fostering reflection on biases, data ethics, and the role of AI in shaping learning environments, the AI.D project supports a more inclusive, informed, and participatory use of AI in education. It is an interesting challenge ahead. However, as the project moves forward, its perspectives and collaborative approach will hopefully provide valuable resources for education systems to adapt to the complexities of emerging technologies while preserving democratic values.



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Empowering Adult Learning Through Artificial Intelligence

The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is reshaping every sector of society, and adult education is no exception. As digitalization accelerates, the need for innovative, adaptive, and inclusive learning environments has never been greater.

On April 9, 2025, the EPAL and Erasmus+ Conference in Vienna brought together leading experts, educators, and policymakers to discuss these challenges and opportunities at the workshop “AI4AL: Awareness and Transfer of AI in Adult Education.” Led by Caroline Meier and Claudia Benassi from the Swiss Federation for Adult Learning (SVEB). This session provided a comprehensive roadmap for responsible AI adoption in adult education, focusing on regulatory, ethical, and pedagogical dimensions.

This article presents an in-depth exploration of the workshop’s key themes, outcomes, and the broader context of AI in adult learning across Europe. Drawing from the experiences of SVEB, the AI4AL project, and the collective insights of workshop participants, it offers practical guidance for educators, policymakers, and institutions seeking to harness the transformative power of AI while safeguarding ethical standards and inclusivity.



The Swiss Federation for Adult Learning (SVEB): A Catalyst for Change

SVEB stands as Switzerland's national umbrella organization for adult learning, representing 750 members from both public and private sectors. As a professional association and advocacy group, SVEB plays a pivotal role in shaping the national agenda for adult education. Its responsibilities include overseeing the renowned training-of-trainers system and managing eduQua, Switzerland's quality label for adult education providers. This unique position allows SVEB to drive innovation and ensure that AI-driven strategies are implemented effectively and ethically across the country.

Setting the Context: AI and the Swiss Legal Framework

Switzerland is recognized as a global hub for AI research and innovation. However, the country currently lacks AI-specific legislation. Instead, existing legal structures, such as the Federal Data Protection Act (DPA), are applied to regulate AI use in education. This approach demands ongoing legal adaptation to ensure that fundamental rights are protected as technology evolves.

A central challenge in the Swiss context is harmonizing cantonal regulations. Switzerland's federal structure means that each canton interprets and applies federal laws differently, leading to inconsistencies in AI adoption and data protection practices. SVEB actively advocates for greater inter-cantonal cooperation, facilitating the exchange of best-practices and reducing algorithmic bias in educational technologies. Legislative flexibility and cross-sector



collaboration – between governments, educators, technologists, and researchers – are essential to crafting policies that are both forward-looking and ethically grounded.

From Experimentation to Integration: The State of AI in Swiss Adult Education

Despite growing interest, AI integration in Swiss adult education remains at an early stage. A 2025 SVEB survey reveals that 68% of providers still rely on manual processes for content creation and learner assessment. Only 32% of adult education providers currently use AI, primarily for operational tasks such as content creation and translation. Alarming, just 12% of providers offer AI-related training, even as demand continues to rise. This data underscores a critical challenge: transitioning from isolated experimentation to meaningful, scalable integration of AI. Without adequate training and clear institutional strategies, there is a risk of deepening the digital divide.

This gap stems from three systemic barriers:

- **Skill Deficits:** Only 39% of educators feel confident using AI tools, with many citing insufficient training opportunities
- **Resource Constraints:** Smaller institutions lack the infrastructure to deploy AI systems, widening the digital divide between urban and rural providers.
- **Ethical Concerns:** 45% of administrators express unease about data privacy and algorithmic bias in AI-driven assessments

Recommendations for Institutions:

- Establish AI competency frameworks for staff (e.g., the EU's DigCompEdu framework).
- Partner with tech providers to co-develop affordable, multilingual tools.
- Create ethical review boards to audit AI systems for bias and transparency.

National Strategies and Academic Leadership

Switzerland's emerging National Strategy for AI in Education aims to embed ethical, pedagogical, and legal considerations into the adoption of AI tools. Key priorities include data protection, bias auditing, and the creation of inclusive learning environments. Leading academic institutions such as ETH Zurich and EPFL are at the forefront of these efforts, promoting inter-institutional collaboration, open-source development, and ethical AI research. The establishment of the Swiss National AI Institute (SNAI) further demonstrates Switzerland's commitment to becoming a global leader in responsible AI development.

Swiss National AI Institute (SNAI): A Model for Europe

Launched in 2024, SNAI's EdTech Ethics Charter provides guidelines for:

- **Data Sovereignty:** Learners retain ownership of all data generated during AI interactions.
- **Algorithmic Accountability:** Mandatory third-party audits of AI systems used in public education.
- **Inclusive Design:** Tools must support Switzerland's four national languages and accommodate disabilities

ETH Zurich's Adaptive Learning Lab

Pioneering research includes:

- **Emotion-Aware AI:** Systems that adjust content delivery based on learners' facial expressions and engagement levels.
- **Bias Mitigation Toolkit:** Open-source algorithms that identify and correct demographic disparities in automated assessments.

Matching Tool in Action: Upskilling Migrant Learners in Turin, Italy

Educators used the **AI4AL** platform to:

1. Assess digital literacy levels of 200 refugees using gamified tests.
2. Generate personalized micro-credential pathways aligned with EU job market needs.
3. Connect learners with local employers through AI-curated internship opportunities. Outcome: 62% of participants secured tech-sector employment within six months.

The AI4AL Project: Tools for Empowerment

A highlight of the workshop was the introduction of the AI4AL project (Artificial Intelligence for Adult Learning), a European initiative designed to equip educators with the skills and resources necessary to integrate AI into their teaching practices. The project has produced a comprehensive suite of tools, including:

- **Engagement Kit:** A guide and repository of real-life AI use scenarios to support educators in navigating and adopting AI tools effectively.
- **Matching Tool:** An AI-based platform that matches learners' digital skills assessments with relevant micro-credentials, enabling personalized learning paths and career guidance.
- **Self-Paced Training Path:** A six-module course for educators covering the basics of AI, curriculum alignment, ethical use and data protection, collaboration with AI developers, digital competences, and implementation strategies.

These resources are designed to foster reflection, hands-on exploration, and the development of tailored strategies for AI use in adult education contexts.

Workshop Dynamics: Peer Learning and Collaborative Exchange

The workshop at the Austrian EPALE and Erasmus+ Conference emphasized the urgent need for strategic skill development, facilitation mechanisms, and robust institutional support to guide this transition. The workshop's interactive format encouraged participants to engage in peer learning through four thematic stations:

- Mapping the Current Landscape
- Sharing Best-practices
- Challenges and Opportunities
- Building Trust and Encouraging Adoption

Each group addressed critical questions, such as how organizations identify educators' AI training needs, the main barriers to scaling AI integration, and strategies for addressing mistrust and ethical concerns.

This collaborative exchange enabled participants to learn from each other's experiences and return to their institutions with actionable insights.

A recurring theme throughout the workshop was the importance of trust – not only in AI technology but also in the institutions and processes behind it. Open dialogue among educators, administrators, and developers is essential. Educators must understand AI's capabilities and limitations, while developers must ensure their tools align with educational goals and respect user privacy.

Concrete steps discussed included embedding data privacy training in staff development, using transparent and auditable AI tools, and encouraging co-creation between educators and technologists.

As the session concluded, participants left with a strong sense of shared purpose. AI's potential in adult education is vast, offering opportunities for personalized learning, administrative efficiency, and greater inclusion. However, realizing this potential requires thoughtful, inclusive, and ethical approaches. The AI4AL project and SVEB's ongoing efforts provide a valuable blueprint for the future. With the right mix of policy support, educator training, and ethical safeguards, adult education can evolve into a more adaptive, inclusive, and effective system.

Summary of Workshop Results:

Using AI Responses

- Always identify the source of AI-generated information.
- Clearly document how AI responses are used, including any modifications.

Transfer of AI

- Promote dissemination through communities of practice and knowledge exchange.
- Value multiple perspectives to enrich AI use.

Evolution of the Teaching Profession

- Teachers must evaluate AI outputs and shift towards supportive, strategic roles.

Challenges and Opportunities

- Address reluctance and fears about AI adoption.
- Leverage AI tools to enhance content quality and expand teaching possibilities.

Conclusion

The Vienna workshop highlighted the critical need for responsible, transparent, and collaborative approaches to AI integration in adult education. By fostering trust, supporting educator development, and prioritizing ethical standards, the sector can ensure that AI serves as a catalyst for positive change-empowering learners and educators alike.



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The Use of Artificial Intelligence in Adult Education – Insights from the Erasmus+ Project “Artificial Intelligence in Adult Education and Self-Learning”

Artificial Intelligence (AI) plays an increasingly important role in the field of education, offering new opportunities for personalized and adaptive learning processes. Especially in adult education and self-directed learning, AI-powered solutions can significantly contribute to making educational offers more flexible, targeted and tailored to individual needs. It is against this background that the Erasmus+ project “Artificial Intelligence in Adult Education and Self-Learning (AI in ADU)” was initiated.

A Brief Introduction to the Erasmus+ Project

As part of the 2025 EPALE and Erasmus+ Conference in Vienna titled “Artificial Intelligence Meets Adult Education: Fostering Innovation, Strengthening Competences”, we had the opportunity to present the project and engage in a joint discussion on opportunities, challenges and sustainable transfer strategies. Our Erasmus+ project “AI in ADU” is a transnational cooperation aimed at understanding the usage patterns and needs of educators and learners to develop support materials that help select and implement AI-based learning solutions in adult education – with a particular focus on language learning. The project runs for 30 months (from 01 December 2023 to 31 May 2026) and is coordinated by the Centre for Continuing Academic Education at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz. Six additional partner institutions from Italy, Poland, the Czech Republic, Cyprus and Turkey are involved. The partnership brings together universities, social enterprises and educational organizations, enabling an interdisciplinary approach that



integrates both technological and pedagogical perspectives. The project is structured into several work packages (WPs), each led by a different partner: WP2 focuses on needs analysis and user research, WP3 on the development of didactic materials, WP4 addresses the application of AI in the field of language learning, and WP5 covers dissemination activities and strategies for the sustainable use of project results. Regular working meetings, coordination processes and quality assurance measures ensure a structured and goal-oriented implementation.

Initial Project Results

The first project results include summary reports of an online survey conducted among the target groups in the partner countries, a consolidated report on focus group interviews, a literature review, and a structured collection of AI solutions used in adult education. Additional outcomes include podcast recordings with education experts from all partner countries, as well as English-language guidelines for educators and learners. These guidelines focus on key criteria for selecting AI tools and provide recommendations on how to effectively implement them in teaching and learning contexts.



Potential Applications of AI Solutions in Adult Education

At the beginning of the conference, the moderator conducted an online poll among participants regarding their use of AI tools. The results showed that around two-thirds of respondents use AI tools daily or several times a week. In our afternoon workshop, we revisited this topic and expanded on possible areas of application. Together in the plenary session, we gathered and exchanged practical examples: in addition to text translation, AI-powered systems are already being used for text revision, the creation of teaching materials, programming, and administrative tasks – a clear indication of the broad applicability of these technologies.

Opportunities and Challenges of AI Solutions in Adult Education and the Sustainable Use of Project Results

In the next part of our workshop, we invited participants to engage in an in-depth discussion using the World Café format. In small groups, participants explored three central questions:

- What opportunities do AI solutions offer for adult education?
- What challenges are associated with their implementation?
- How can project results be sustainably secured and transferred into practice?

Among the opportunities identified were the potential for greater individualization of learning content – for example, through the automated creation of texts tailored to learners’ interests and language levels – the development of new types of exercises, time savings for both educators and learners, and the fostering of self-reflection and critical thinking.

Regarding the challenges, a wide range of aspects were mentioned: the abundance of available tools can be overwhelming, there is a risk of one-sided dependency, and ethical questions – particularly concerning data protection, transparency, and diversity – remain insufficiently addressed. Furthermore, it was noted that technological development is evolving rapidly, which means that existing solutions may quickly become outdated.

Various suggestions were also collected regarding the question of sustainability: for example, project results could be published on platforms such as EPALE and made accessible as open-source resources. Other meaningful measures included the continuous maintenance of project-related websites, active outreach to relevant target groups, and targeted training for multipliers and trainers.

The aim of the exchange was to encourage participants to critically reflect on both the potential and the challenges of working with AI, to develop their own solution-oriented approaches, and to gain inspiration for practical implementation.



Mark Reinhard, M.A. in Language and Communication, has been working at the Centre for Continuing Education (ZWW) at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz (JGU) since 2017. In addition to coordinating the Erasmus+ project “AI in Adult Education and Self-Learning”, he also organizes an annual summer school at JGU as part of his role at the ZWW. Furthermore, he is a certified counsellor and heads the unit for the Certificate of Advanced Studies “Professionalizing Person-Centered Counselling”.

www.uni-mainz.de



Erasmus+ Adult Education: Learning and Collaborating in Europe

Learning and collaborating across Europe offers educational institutions an excellent opportunity to strengthen and further develop their work. Erasmus+ provides a wealth of opportunities to support this goal. This article explores the possibilities the Erasmus+ Programme 2021–2027 offers for adult education providers.

The Erasmus+ Programme supports **mobility and cooperation** in the fields of education, youth, and sport, and defines four horizontal priorities:

- Inclusion and diversity
- Digital transformation
- Environment and fight against climate change
- Participation in democratic life, common values, and civic engagement

Mobility and cooperation opportunities for adult education

Erasmus+ Adult Education supports cross-border cooperation between adult education institutions. Its aim is to enhance the quality of adult education across Europe.

To achieve this goal, the programme offers two main actions: **learning mobility of individuals** (Key Action 1) and **partnerships for cooperation** (Key Action 2). For both actions, the adult education institution submits the application for Erasmus+ funding. Which option is best will depend on the specific needs of your organization.



Key Action 1 – Learning Mobility of Individuals

Would your adult education institution like to offer training opportunities in and with Europe for staff and learners? Then Key Action 1 is the right choice! It enables your staff to take part in courses across Europe, gain insights into the work of other organizations through job shadowing, or deliver training themselves.

It is also possible for the target groups of your organization to participate in a learning mobility – in other words, the people in Austria who make use of your institution's educational offer. A particular focus is placed on the participation of people with so called fewer opportunities. These adult learners can take part in mobility either as a group or as individuals.

However, the Erasmus+ Programme not only supports individuals travelling from Austria to another European country but also encourages mobility to Austria. For example, you can invite experts to your organization in Austria! This allows professional development to take place on site, benefiting many members of your staff. It is also possible to host trainee adult educators who wish to complete an internship in Austria.

The sending institution receives a grant for each mobility participant. The amount of the grant depends on the type of activity, the host country, and the duration of the stay. Additional funds can be requested for participants with fewer opportunities.

These mobility opportunities can be applied for either as a **short-term project**⁷ or through **Erasmus accreditation**⁸.

Short term projects are an entry level option for organizations wishing to gain initial experience with Erasmus+ or to carry out mobilities only occasionally. They are limited in both duration and the number of mobilities and can be implemented only three times within five consecutive years.

Erasmus accreditation, on the other hand, is ideal for organizations that wish to participate on a regular basis. Once accreditation has been successfully obtained – either as an individual organization or as the coordinator of an Austrian mobility consortium – you gain simplified access to the annual budget. This provides financial planning security and a long term perspective. Accreditation is flexible and grows with the ambitions of the institution, allowing each organization to set its own pace in European cooperation.



Key Action 2 – Partnerships for Cooperation

Are you interested in making your organization more visible across Europe? In increasing the quality and relevance of your activities and building networks? Do you want to take your organization's work to an international level and apply innovative approaches? Would you like to collaborate with institutions from different countries on a topic that matters to you? If so, Partnerships for Cooperation are the perfect choice for you!

Each project must address at least one of the four horizontal Erasmus+ priorities or a specific priority for adult education (see Programme Guide, Part B, Key Action 2). Within Erasmus+, a distinction is made between **Cooperation Partnerships**⁹ and **Small-scale Partnerships**¹⁰. These projects are funded through lump sum grants. The applicant organization and its partners define their activities and objectives, estimate the total cost of the proposed project,

and select the lump sum amount that best matches the needs of the partnership. The higher the budget, the greater the requirements.

Cooperation Partnerships are particularly suitable for experienced organizations and for large scale projects. They focus primarily on developing new methods, expanding networks, and internationalizing activities. The projects are expected to produce results and learning outcomes that are reusable and transferable, and that can be applied beyond the project itself and the organizations directly involved.

Project partnerships consist of at least three organizations from a minimum of three EU Member States and/or third countries associated with the programme and run for a duration of 12 to 36 months. Activities are funded through one of three possible lump sum amounts: € 120,000, € 250,000, or € 400,000 per project.

Small scale Partnerships are primarily aimed at less experienced organizations and newcomers to the Erasmus+ program. Their main purpose is to make it easier for smaller actors and hard to reach target groups to access Erasmus+ and to enable initial cooperation at a transnational level.

Small scale Partnerships involve cooperation between at least two organizations from at least two different EU Member States and/or third countries associated with the program. Compared to Cooperation Partnerships, the funding amounts are lower (€ 30,000 or € 60,000 per project), the project duration is shorter (6 to 24 months), and the administrative burden is reduced.

Application Deadlines, Advice and Information

The application deadlines for Key Action 1 and Key Action 2 are published on our website:

<https://erasmusplus.at/de/erwachsenenbildung>



The Adult Education team at OeAD |

National Agency for Erasmus+ also offers information events, webinars, and individual consultations. Contact us at: erwachsenenbildung@oead.at

If you would like to be automatically informed about new application deadlines and events related to the EU Programme Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps, sign up for the newsletter "**OeAD Erasmus+ Europa bewegt**" here: <https://oead.at/en/the-oead/communication-and-publications/newsletters>



Links

- 7 <https://erasmusplus.at/de/erwachsenenbildung/mobilitaet-kurzfristige-projekte/antragstellung>
- 8 <https://erasmusplus.at/de/erwachsenenbildung/mobilitaet-akkreditierung/antragstellung>
- 9 <https://erasmusplus.at/de/erwachsenenbildung/kooperationspartnerschaften>
- 10 <https://erasmusplus.at/de/erwachsenenbildung/kleinere-partnerschaften>



Christoph Sackl, BA, is a project officer for Key Action 1 and Key Action 2 in the field of adult education. Prior to this role, he was actively involved in the implementation of European education projects under the predecessor Lifelong Learning Programme. He also has extensive experience in the social sector, particularly in the inclusion of people with disabilities. Having lived for many years in the United Kingdom, where he also successfully completed his studies, he greatly values the benefits and impact of international mobility gained through his long term experience abroad.



Mag. Sabine Wagner is a project officer for Key Action 2 in the field of adult education at OeAD. She studied International Business Administration at the University of Vienna and has been working at OeAD for many years. She has extensive experience in the European education area, particularly in adult education, vocational education and training, as well as in cross sectoral fields, where she has focused on topics such as sustainable impact and the dissemination of project results.



News From EPALE

Shape the future of adult learning with us – become part of the EPALE community and register on the platform!

EPALE, the e-Platform for Adult Learning in Europe, is a multilingual virtual meeting place for everyone involved in adult education. Since its launch by the European Commission under the Erasmus+ program, it has grown into a key platform for quality, exchange, and innovation in adult education. Today, more than 165,000 registered members are connecting, sharing, and collaborating on EPALE – and the number is rising every day.

Why join?

As a registered member on EPALE, you can actively participate in current policy discussions, publish your own articles, announce events, and keep up to date with developments in adult education at European level. EPALE is also the ideal place to find suitable project partners, exchange experiences, and gather inspiration for your educational work.

By registering, you open the door to a vibrant community where ideas, experiences, and inspiration flow freely – and where together we can shape the future of adult education.



Register via the following link:
<https://epale.ec.europa.eu/de/contribute>

Thematic priorities for 2025

Each year, the European Commission sets new thematic priorities for EPALE, reflecting key societal developments and their relevance to adult learning.

In 2025, the focus is on three core challenges that are central to both digital and social transformation:

Artificial Intelligence: Exploring how AI is changing the way we teach and learn, the opportunities and risks it brings, and the pedagogical and ethical considerations that come with it.

Basic Skills: Strengthening literacy, numeracy, and digital skills as essential foundations for active participation in society and for living an autonomous life. EPALE fosters the exchange of effective approaches in diverse contexts.



Future-oriented Skills Development: Identifying the competencies adults need to thrive in a fast-changing world of work and life. Critical thinking, problem-solving, and digital autonomy take center stage here.

Through these focus areas, EPALÉ aims to inspire fresh thinking, connect knowledge across Europe, and strengthen the impact of adult education in practice and policy. Read more about EPALÉ's thematic priorities for 2025 here:



10 years of EPALÉ – and counting

For a decade, EPALÉ has been building connections between people and institutions dedicated to adult learning. This anniversary is both a moment to celebrate and an invitation to keep moving forward together.

To everyone who has contributed to EPALÉ's success over the past ten years – thank you. Here's to the next decade of cooperation, innovation, and a strong adult education community in Europe.





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | **Editor & publisher:** OeAD-GmbH | Ebendorferstraße 7 | 1010 Wien/Vienna | Headquarters: Vienna | FN 320219 k | Commercial Court Vienna | ATU 64808925 | **Managing director:** Jakob Calice, PhD
Editor: Mag. Eva Baloch-Kaloianov | epale@oead.at | Translation of all contributions from German into English by LanguageLink Sprachendienste GmbH | **Photos:** OeAD/APA-Fotoservice/Hörmandinger (p. 2, 4, 7, 8, 11, 13, 16, 17, 19, 22, 25, 27, 29, 30, 33, 34, 37, 39, 40, 41, 43, 44, 45, 47 right), Alessandra Santoianni/private (p. 31), EPALE (p. 46, 47 left)
Graphic design: Alexandra Reidinger, reidinger-grafik.at | **Vienna, Oktober 2025**

This publication has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

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